

# Be Quiet Already!

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“God will fight for you, but you need to be silent”  
(Exodus14:14).

Practicing silence results in trust in God (*The Aleph-Bet Book, Trust A:14*).

“Pharaoh drew near. The Israelites raised their eyes and—Egyptwas coming after them. [The Israelites] were greatly frightened and [they] screamed out to God” (Exodus14:10). After all the miracles they had witnessed, why were the Israelites scared? Yes, the Egyptian army was attaching them from the rear, their way was blocked by the sea in front and the desert to each side, but so what? During the previous year, they had seen from up close that nature was controlled by a greater force—God’s will—and that the Egyptians were just flesh-and-blood human beings, neither gods nor demigods. Why

the fear?

Every day, twice a day, we Jews declare that God is One. This quality of oneness, sometimes called "unity," is therefore something loved by God. The Egyptians who were marching towards the Israelites were thoroughly united (see Rashi) in their desire to reclaim the Israelites for slaves. Our ancestors knew that this trace of Godliness made it more likely that the Egyptians would succeed. Our ancestors also saw that "Egypt," the eponymous guardian angel of their previous owners, was on his way to attack them (see Rashi).

In addition, the Israelites were with a twinge of uncertainty. Maybe, just maybe, all the miracles they had witnessed weren't for their sake, to save them. Maybe they were to punish Pharaoh for his blasphemy, when he said, "Who is God that I should listen to Him?" (Exodus 5:2). Facing such powerful forces, one of them unknown, without seeing any way of escape, coupled with an element of doubt about their own status in God's eyes, our ancestors were terrified. Who wouldn't be?

But the Israelites, being Israelites, did what we Israelites/Jews do: they screamed out in prayer to God (see Rashi). However, there are times when a person's prayer lacks strength to effect the desired change. There are even times when a prayer lacks strength to pray altogether! The classic example is King Chizkiyahu. When the mighty Assyrian army was knocking at Israel's door, Chizkiyahu rolled over in bed and said to God, "I don't have the strength to kill, pursue or pray. I'm going to sleep. You take care of it." God said He would, and He did (*Yalkut Shimoni* #163; II Kings 19:35).

Be careful! The silence Rebbe Nachman refers to is not the silence of depression, when one cannot talk. It is the silence of one who wants to talk, one who wants to ask, "Why me? Why now? What now?" but keeps himself in check. The Tcheriner Rav (a disciple of Reb Noson) suggests two sources for this teaching from *The Aleph-Bet Book*. One is the verse "Be silent

before God and entrust yourself to Him" (Psalms 37:7), and the other is "I silenced my soul like a weaned infant with its mother...Yisrael, hope in God" (ibid., 131:2). We so much seek knowledge because we want and/or need to feel in control. But even the oldest and wisest of us is a baby in God's eyes—and arms.

We have to realize that every crisis we experience is to wean us from thinking that was good enough, but must now be improved. We have to be ready to be un-enslaved from narrow Egyptian consciousness and to accept expanded Jewish consciousness. Our trusting silence leads to the greatest insight: we don't need answers because there are no questions.

It is told: On his return journey from the Land of Israel, Rebbe Nachman and his attendant were aboard a ship that was fast taking on water. Certain that the ship would soon sink, the Rebbe told his attendant to divide their money. Each would take half. "What for?" asked the attendant. "The fish can swallow us without the money!"

The Rebbe replied, "Do as I tell you. The Jews were in the Red Sea and did not drown. We are still on a ship..." (*Shevachey HaRan* #21).