



**Parshat Tetzaveh:**  
**Listening, Speaking, and Acting**  
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I once heard a rabbi say: in rabbinical school, I learned how to speak, how to deliver a sermon and teach a class. When I began working as a rabbi, it was then that I learned how to listen, when to remain silent and listen to the needs of individuals as well as hear the needs of our community. Now that I am a little bit older, I am learning how to act.

This trifecta of speaking, silence and acting is in fact how God created the world. God speaks—*vayomer Elokim*—God said, let there be light. And then, *vayar Elokim*—God looks and steps back and silently admires the creation. And of course, God acts, and creates—*Bereishit bara Elokim*.

God's creative process culminates in the clothes that God creates for Adam and Chava. After eating from the tree of knowledge, the Torah says: 3:21

וַיַּעַשׂ יי אֱלֹקִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ, כְּתָנוּת עוֹר--וַיַּלְבְּשֵׁם

“God made for Adam and his wife, *kitonet* (garments of skin), and God clothed them.” God didn't only create humans, but God created the clothes that they wore. A second skin, a skin of *or*, of light. It is clothing that separates out human from beasts, and gives us a cloak of dignity. Therefore, by extension, the clothes that God instructed the Kohen Gadol to wear, in our parsha today, are a continuation of the creative Divine will. The clothing, specifically the *rimonay* and *pa'amonay*, the pomegranates and bells that are attached to the bottom of the Kohen's *m'iyel ha'ephod*- his robe, incorporate the symbols of God's creative process: speaking, silence, and action.

לג ועשית על-שוליו, רמני תכלת וארגמן ותולעת שני--על-שוליו, סביב; ופעמני זהב בתוכם, סביב. לד  
פעמן זהב ורמון, פעמן זהב ורמון, על-שולי המעיל, סביב.

And upon the skirts of it you shall make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the skirts; and bells of gold between them round about: **34** a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the skirts of the robe round about.

The mefarshim offer several formulations on how the bells and the pomegranates interacted with one another. Rashi imagines that the pomegranates were hollow, but the bell had a clapper, and each bell was surrounded by pomegranates on either side.

The Alshich, a 16<sup>th</sup> century biblical scholar living in Sefad, took the image of the pomegranate and bells one step further. For him, the *inbal*, the clapper inside the bell, which causes sound on impact is like the tongue in our mouths. The clapper, the *inbal*, is made of pure gold, as the purity of gold reminds us of the kind of speech the tongue should indulge in. The ringing of the bell then, is connected to speech.

The pomegranate, however, is the hollow bell, that does not make a sound. The image of one bell, one mouth, surrounded by two eyes, or two pomegranates is what the Gemara (Megillah 18a) means when it says, “A word is worth one sela (coin). Silence is worth two.” Perhaps the Gemara alludes to the speak-half-as-much-as-you-know rule that the Alshich finds in the double pomegranates and the two-eyes-one-mouth; for every word you speak, make sure it is accompanied by two measures of silence. Only half of what we think in our heads, should actually be articulated.

So, sometimes, we must be called upon to ring clearly, and make our views known, like a bell. But other times, silence must reign. We must hold back the thoughts that could be potentially hurtful or unhelpful. There is tremendous power in silence.

But there is one more way to read the verses in the Torah. In fact, upon close examination of the pasukim, there is actually no mention of the *inbal*, of the clapper inside the bell. Thus, the sound must come from the clanging of the bells against the pomegranates rubbing together. It is this sound, that the pasuk goes on to tell us: (28:35)

וְהָיָה עַל-אַהֲרֹן, לְשָׁרֵת; וְנִשְׁמַע קוֹלוֹ בָּבֵאוּ אֶל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְפָנָי փ

And it shall be upon Aaron to minister; and the sound thereof shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the LORD,

וְנִשְׁמַע קוֹלוֹ

This phrase is remnant of the earlier usage of the word “v’nishma”—the active verb in future tense-- na’aseh v’nishma, we will do, and we will listen. Listening inspires action. Doing.

From the tension of speaking and silence, emerges action. And as the *rimon* and *pa’amon* rub together, we hope the most effective sound, the *kol*, will be heard, and will inspire action.

This triad of speaking, silence and action is a methodology that we must each employ when advocating for change. For righting wrongs, and bringing justice to our world. When we try to better our world, and continue God's creative work, we must know when to speak out. To make noise, and shed light on any issue. We must know when not to talk, to remain silent, and control the anger, and frustration within us. And then, we must know when to act. To turn the sounds and silences into action.

There is a time to talk out; a time to remain silent; a time to act.



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