

# Sh'tikah

I am often struck by the sometimes amazing parallels between Christianity and Judaism. Should I be? After all, Christianity was born out of the Hebrew Faith, and for a while, for some, it was initially confined within the Jewish tradition, albeit something new, and dangerous.

There is a Jewish word that explains an important aspect of both our Faith's spirituality, sh'tikah, and it means silence. Jewish scholars have a masterful approach with the language of faith and tradition. So often one word will sum up a whole spiritual environment and induce one to go deeper. You see, sh'tikah can also bring us directly to deepen, cultivate, wisen, and much more.

The periods of lock-down over the past eighteen months appear to brough on a new phenomenon with so many people, unexpected, at first inducing a nervous reaction, but ultimately cultivating a wiser approach to this 'abnormality'. The monk of course knows all about silence: "Go to your cell, and there sit in silence waiting on God." Our Quaker friends are also well aware of its value.

Two verses form Deuteronomy, and reflecting on the first of the Ten Commandments we cannot hear or say without sh'tikah: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength ... and so forth. (Deut 6.4-5). This central statement of faith, for both Faiths, can only be said or heard in silence. Only in that silence, as Job reminds us, is it possible to hear. The one who eventually found the brevity to say to his friends, "shut up."

In silence is wisdom. "There is a time to be silent and a time to speak" wrote King Solomon. Ecclesiastes 3.7. To know what to say and when to say it, when to keep silent, for even a fool is judged wise just because he keeps silent.

In more recent times during lockdowns, a more than vocal element of society has become very rowdy in their attempts, nay demands, to be able to say what they want, and too often without regard for the rest of the community, or even the rule of law. As Christians we should practice the right use of speech because it recognizes that, like any powerful resource, speech can be both creative and healing and dangerous and destructive.

The story goes of the merchant rushing through the town, and in such hurry to maintain his fortune as a well-respected businessman, he bumped into the Rabbi – (you can substitute vicar if you wish)

“Whoa” said the rabbi, “why such a hurry?”

‘I’m going to my place of business, not a moment to lose, a person must have a source of livelihood. A person must have from where to live.’

“I realise that” responded the rabbi, “but a person must also have from where to die.”

The merchant stopped to think. Realising his error, he settled all his affairs, employed a manager to care for his business, and then entered a lengthy retreat of seclusion, two years in fact. All that time he didn’t communicate with the world, except of a little bell and messages slid under his cell door. He prayed, studied Torah, and looked deeply within himself, in silence - a mind released from the chatter of busy-ness, and the busy-ness of chatter to stillness, calm, and loving welfare.

The first step in seeking wisdom, the wisdom of anything, is silence. The second is listening, the third remembering, the fourth practising, and the fifth sharing it with others.

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