

SEASON 2



OLAMI MENTORSHIP

SESSION 6: SILENCE

DEAR MENTEE AND MENTOR,

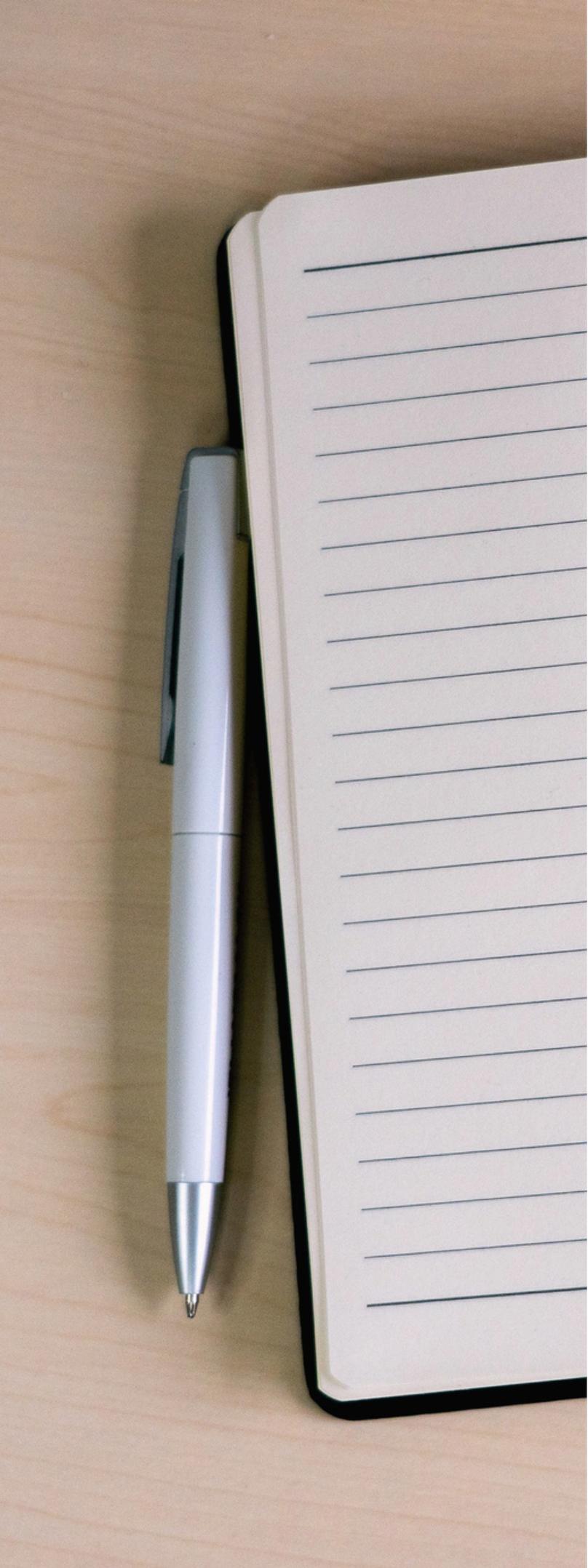
Many years ago British television produced a documentary series, The Long Search, on the world's great religions. When it came to Judaism, the presenter Ronald Eyre seemed surprised by its blooming, buzzing confusion, especially the loud, argumentative voices in the Bet Midrash, the house of study. Remarking on this to Elie Wiesel, he asked, "Is there such a thing as a silence in Judaism?" Wiesel replied: "Judaism is full of silences ... but we don't talk about them."

Silence! It is a concept that is so foreign to so much of modern society. Think about it, do you think that most Americans ever proactively create opportunities for silence? Or at least an opportunity for reflection? Walk through an airport terminal and observe the passengers as they wait to board, you will realize that almost 100% of them are actively involved in some device ie. phone, tablet, laptop.. Sadly, addiction to devices has almost completely eradicated opportunities for silent reflection.

Even as we drive, our cars automatically connect to our phones barraging us with messages, listening options and even driving directions! It's as if society is just not comfortable with silence!

Contrast this with a Torah way of life, Shemoneh Esrai, or the daily silent devotion, automatically, creates moments of reflective silence. Think about Shabbos for a moment, once every seven days Shabbos provides an opportunity to detox us from the noise, distraction, and techno-addiction that constantly surround us!

In this session you will have an opportunity to gain an appreciation for silence, its varied applications, and perhaps most importantly practical advice in using silence as a tool for personal growth and self-awareness.



REMINDERS:

- Check-in: How was your week?
- Journaling: The journal is a space to track progress and growth throughout this journey.
- Set a time for your next meeting.

Intro

"He enters the classroom, sits down, and doesn't say anything. He looks at us, we look at him. At first, there are a few giggles, but Morrie only shrugs, and eventually a deep silence falls and we begin noticing the smallest sounds, the radiator humming in the corner of the room, the nasal breathing of one of the students. Some of us are agitated. When is he going to say something? We squirm, check our watches. A few students look out the window, trying to be above it all. This goes on for a good fifteen minutes, before Morrie breaks in with a whisper. 'What's happening here?' he asks. And slowly a discussion begins -- as Morrie has wanted all along -- about the effect of silence on human relations. Why are we embarrassed by silence? What comfort do we find in all the noise?" from the book "Tuesdays with Morrie" (A description of a lecture from Brandeis University professor, Morrie Schwartz ob"m)





PART 1: UNDERSTANDING SILENCE

1. When you say the word “silence” (yes that does sound like an oxymoron!), what does it trigger ie. context, setting, individual...?
2. Please read this Mishna from Ethics of Our Fathers. It seems like a really strong statement about the importance of silence.

Shimon, his son, used to say: all my days I grew up among the sages, and I have found nothing better for the body than silence.

שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן־אוֹמֵר, כָּל יְמֵי
גִדְלֹתִי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים, וְלֹא
מָצָאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב אֶלָּא
שְׁתִּיקָה.

3. Can you relate? Why do you think that R. Shimon found silence as such a virtue? What is the context for his statement?



4. Midrash Rabbah Shemos 29:9

At the moment that the Torah was given, the world was silent. "The birds did not chirp, the angels stopped their song, the waves of the sea did not crash upon the shore, and no one spoke."

5. Why do you think that silence was a prerequisite for the Almighty to give the Torah?

6. Here is one level of understanding: The Almighty silenced the noise so we could hear the voice within ourselves – the voice that longed for a spiritual connection, the voice that longed for His Torah.



7. Here is a wonderful application of the power of silence from Rabbi Emanuel Feldman, Tales Out of Jerusalem

In the shul that I attend here in Jerusalem, something occurred at the end of Yom Kippur day that was very memorable. Paradoxically, this was not because of the words we uttered, but the words we did not utter. Somehow, the final Neilah service had ended a bit earlier than scheduled. We recited the climactic Shema Yisrael, followed by the sevenfold affirmation that, “God, He is the Lord.” Normally, the shofar is sounded at this point, which marks the return of the Divine Presence to its celestial abode. But it was too early. It was only 5:38, and the shofar could not be sounded until 5:48. Ten minutes to go. What to do? Would there be a brief sermon from the rabbi? Some announcement by the gabbai? A communal recitation of Psalms to fill the void? There was none of the above. Everyone – a congregation of over five hundred people – simply remained in their seats and waited. Some looked into their prayer books, some studied, some closed their eyes and meditated. Whatever it was they did, one fact stood out: no one talked. No one engaged in the most popular activity known to man: conversation, chit-chat, banter. A congregation of five hundred people, sitting close to one another, and no one talked. For ten whole minutes, an unworldly stillness pervaded the air. In some ways this silence equaled in its power and inspiration the entire day of prayer. The congregation was not going to destroy the holiness of the moment by empty prattle and chatter. And then the anticipated moment arrived. The chazan raised the shofar to his lips, the awesome blast enveloped the synagogue. What remains in memory is not only the sound of the shofar, but the sound of the great silence that preceded it. This was a powerful lesson for our cacophonous times that are so inundated by cascading speech.



8. Silence instead of responding: In life, all of us have been in a situation where another person says something hurtful or embarrassing and our natural instinct is to fire back. Keeping quiet in this scenario is an incredibly powerful merit.

9. Can the two of you share any personal incidents in which you were in a humiliating situation? What was your response?

10. Talmud Chullin 89a

The world stands on the merit of those that do not respond and remain silent at a moment of strife.

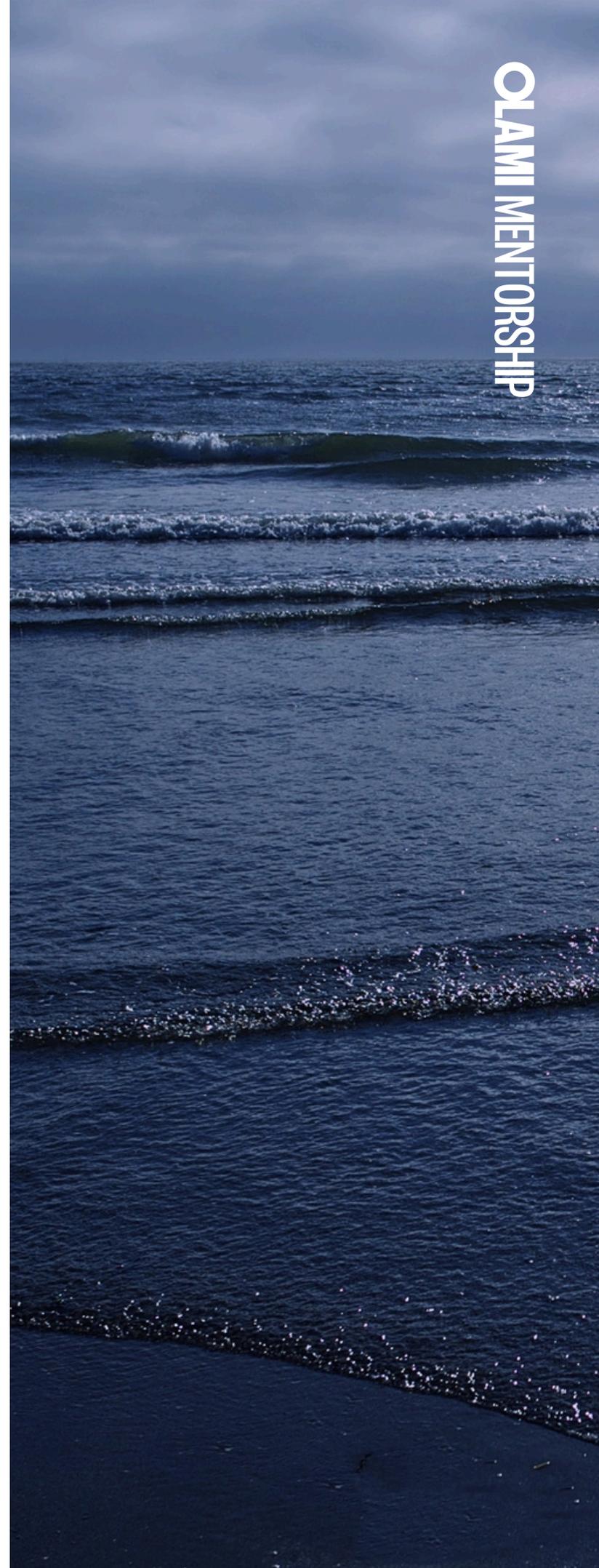
אין העולם מתקיים אלא
בשביל מי שבולם את
עצמו בשעת מריבה

11. The Talmud's statement about the merit of one who remains silent literally sustaining the world is quite powerful. Why do you think that being silent is so powerful? How does it support the world?

PART 2: PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE BENEFITS OF SILENCE INTO OUR LIVES

1. Proactively schedule time for silent reflection into your schedule

- A. Find a super quiet location.
- B. Switch off all of your devices ie. phone, computer, tablet..
- C. Set a timer for the length of your session.
- D. Pre-plan how you will utilize your silent time ie. reflection, meditation, decompression...
- E. Take 2 minutes post silent time to journal your experience.





2. Silence as a way to reconnect spiritually

- A. Create short spaces in your life to talk to the Almighty ie. gratitude, prayer, reconnection
- B. Pray the shemoneh esrai or the silent devotion.
Bonus: Pray the silent devotion in synagogue and focus on the almost instantaneous communal silence when beginning the silent devotion.
- C. Create time to block out the white noises of society and listen to the sounds of nature, sounds created by G-d.



2. Silence instead of a response

- A. As a situation begins to escalate, tell yourself; “I will not respond no matter what!”
 - B. Understand that not responding creates a very auspicious moment for prayer. Pray in your heart rather than firing back!
 - C. Understand that remaining silent vs. responding is the victorious response!
4. Please take a few minutes to discuss the elements of silence that you can personally identify with.
5. Can you walk away with one or two tangible and realistic commitments to make silence a bigger part of your life?

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