

'To you, G-d, silence is praise'

Written by Andrea Jacobs

Wednesday, 28 May 2014 23:26 - Last Updated Friday, 30 May 2014 03:27



I had never heard of the biblical verse, "To You, G-d, silence is praise" prior to this assignment, but it immediately appealed to me. I felt like I stumbled upon a poetic line that simultaneously puzzles and clarifies. I was hooked.

When I began asking people to reflect on this counterintuitive statement, they expressed excitement, even gratitude, for being included. It's hard to turn down a chance to investigate a haunting conundrum.

Although I am a novice at analyzing Biblical ideas, I have studied poetry since high school. This affords insight into how conflicting ideas co-exist.

I adore Robert Frost. He embraces paradoxical concepts inside a singular, sublime sentence. His epitaph — "I had a lover's quarrel with the world" — is a good example.

For decades I analyzed this enigmatic declaration. How can a human being have a lover's quarrel with the world? It didn't make sense. Yet my heart always understood.

Frost loved life intensely, and that very passion exposed him to grievous disappointments. You are vulnerable only to what you love, whether a person, place or thing.

Now I come to the inherent irony of "To You, G-d, silence is praise." First, Jews are forever praising G-d. We praise Him together and alone, three times a day or on Shabbat, in synagogue or walking along the Maine coastline.

I often pray with swaying fervor, completely caught up in G-d's rhythm. But if I'm hurting and cut myself off from G-d, I defiantly shut my lips. To paraphrase Wordsworth, my emotions run too

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deep for tears, or for prayer itself.

The significance of silence depends on the context. A husband might attribute his wife's silence to emotional indifference. Some parents worry that silence suggests asocial behavior or worse in their children.

One day a Sunday school teacher called my mom and asked her whether I was "retarded." Mom exploded. "Why on earth would you think that? My daughter is in the enrichment class at her elementary school."

"She's so quiet," the teacher explained. "She never says anything. So I assumed there's something wrong with her." The truth? I preferred my own mind to the teacher's.

Then there's awe, which so many of our respondents mention. The transcendent moment renders a tongue mute. A philosophy professor once told me that these experiences defy verbal descriptions. Research backs him up.

It's impossible to cage the infinite in finite terms. When I give voice to the ineffable in silence, G-d is praised.

The following pieces are meditations on "To You, G-d, silence is praise."

Perspectives offered by **Ofer Ben-Amots**: Israeli-American composer, Colorado College music professor;

Doris Schwartzberg: educator,

artist, Temple Sinai member;

Marlin Barad

: community leader, student of Torah;

Emily Kohn

: 17, president, Temple Sinai Youth Group;

Elizabeth Sacks

: cantor, Temple Emanuel;

Rabbi Asher Klein

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Alec Zussman

: 17, ?DAT graduate

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