Wisdom as Presence

Minneapolis Jewish Artists Lab: Year of Wisdom Rabbi Debra Rappaport, June 14, 2016

Text 1:Mishnah Pirkei Avot 1:17

שמעון בן גמליאל אומר:

כל ימי גדלתי בין החכמים, ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב משתיקה

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, said, 'All my days I grew up amidst the sages (chachamim, the wise) and I never found anything as beneficial for the body as silence.

Text 2: Mishnah Pirkei Avot 3:13

רבי עקיבא אומר: סייג לחכמה - שתיקה

Rabbi Akiva says: What is the fence for wisdom? Silence.

Text 3: Talmud Berakot 5:1

אין עומדין להתפלל אלא מתוך כובד ראש חסידים הראשונים היו שוהים שעה אחת ומתפללים כדי שיכונו את לבם למקום אפילו המלך שואל בשלומו -- לא ישיבנו

ואפילו נחש כרוך על עקבו -- לא יפסיק less s/he is in a serious frame of

[One] should not stand up to pray unless s/he is in a serious frame of mind. The original pious ones used to wait one hour and then pray, in order to direct their hearts towards the Omnipresent. Even if the king greets them, one should not respond to him, and even if a snake wraps around one's heel, they should not stop/ interrupt.

Questions for Reflection:

- 1. What is silence to you? Is it absence of sound? Absence of talking? Or presence of another sort?
- Typically, silence is in contrast to words, pertaining to the mind. Why does Shimon ben Gamliel say that silence is good for the body?
- 3. How might silence be connected to wisdom? Why is it described as a fence for wisdom?
- 4. How might or might not silence be a gate-keeper to wisdom?
- 5. What is the role of silence in your artistic process?

Text 4: 1 Kings Chapter 19 מַלְכִים א

ד וְהוּא-הָלַדְּ בַּמַדְבָּר, דְּרֶדְּ יוֹם, וַיָּבֹא, וַיַּשָׁב תַּחַת רֹתֶם אחת (אֶחָד); וַיִּשְׁאֵל אֶת-נַפְשׁוֹ, לָמוּת, וַיֹּאמֶר רַב עַתָּה יְהוָה קַח נַפְשִׁי, כִּי-לֹא-טוֹב אַנֹכִי מִאַבֹתִי. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom-tree; and he requested for himself that he might die; and said: 'It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.'

ת וַיִּשְׁכֵּב, וַיִּישַׁן, תַּחַת, רֹתֶם אֶחֶד; וְהִנָּה-זָח מַלְאָדְ נֹגֵעַ בּוֹ, וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ קוּם אכוֹל.

5 And he lay down and slept under a broom-tree; and, behold, an angel touched him, and said unto him: 'Arise and eat.'

וֹ וַיַּבֵּט, וְהִנֵּה מְרַאֲשׁׁתָיו עֻנֶת רְצָפִּים וְצַפַּחֵת מָיִם ; וַיֹּאכֵל וַיִּשְׁתְּ, וַיַּשָׁב וַיִּשִּׁכָב. 6 And he looked, and, behold, there was at his head a cake baked on the hot stones, and a cruse of water. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.

ז וַיָּשָׁב מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה שֵׁנִית וַיַּגַּע-בּוֹ, וַיֹּאמֶר קוּם אֱכֹל: כִּי רַב מִמְּדְּ, הַדְּרַדָּ. 7 And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said: 'Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.'

 ח וַיָּקֶם, וַיֹּאכָל וַיִּשְׁתֶּה; וַיַּלֶדְּ בְּכֹחַ הָאֲכִילָה הַהִיא, אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וַאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה, עַד הַר הָאֱלֹהִים, 8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meal forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

ט וַיָּבֹא-שְׁם אֶל-הַמְּעֶרָה, וַיִּלֶן שְׁם;
וְהַנָּה דְבַר-יְהוָה, אֵלִיו, וַיֹּאמֶר לֹוֹ,
מַה-לַּךְ פֿה אַלִיָּהוֹ.

9 And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said unto him: 'What doest thou here, Elijah?'

י וַיֹּאמֶר קַנֹּא קַנַּאתִי לַיהוָה אֱלֹהַי צְבָּאוֹת, כִּי-עָזְבוּ בְּרִיתְדְּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרְאַל--אֶת-מִזְבְּחֹתֶידְ הַרְסוּ, וְאֶת-נְבִיאֶידְ הָרְגוּ בַּחָרֶב; וָאוַתֵר אֲנִי לְבַדִּי, וַיִּבַקִשׁו אֶת-נִפְשִׁי לְקַחְתָה. 10 And he said: 'I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.'

יא וַיֹּאמֶר, צֵא וְעָמֶדְתָּ בָּהָר לְפְנֵי יְהוָה, וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה עֹבֶר וְרוּחַ גְּדוֹלֶה וְחָזֶק מְפָרַק הָרִים וּמְשַׁבֵּר סְלָעִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, לֹא בָרוּחַ יְהוָה; וְאַחַר הַרוּחַ רְעִשׁ, לֹא בַרְעִשׁ יִהוֹה. 11 And He said: 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD,' And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake;

יב וְאַחַר הָרַעַשׁ אַשׁ, לֹא בָאַשׁ יְהוָה; וְאַחַר הָאֲשׁ, קוֹל דִּמְמָה דַּקָּה. 12 and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.