

## On Silence and Speech

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### ויקרא פרשת שמיני פרק י פסוק ג וַיִּדְם אֱהָרֹן:

There are many explanations of how Aaron was able to keep silent in a situation that most people would have screamed and cried. But today I would like to look highlight the greatness of this silence by contrasting it to the greatness of speech itself.

The Gem in San 65b talks about a golem:

**חברותא סנהדרין דף סה עמוד ב**  
רבא ברא גברא על ידי ספר יצירה. שדריה שלחו לקמיה דרבי זירא.  
הוה קא משתעי בהדיה, מדבר אליו, ולא הוה קא מהדר ליה, ולא היה עונה לו, כי לו היה  
לו את כח הדיבור.  
אמר ליה רבי זירא: מן חבריא את, אתה הוא אחד מן הנבראים על ידי ה"חברים", הדר  
לעפריך! חזור לעפרך.

What exactly did R. Zeira see in this Gavra that he decided to eliminate it? I mean, he certainly didn't go around killing mute or deaf people! The Ramban discusses this Gemara in his commentary on the verse in Gen 2:7:

**בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק ב פסוק ז - ח**  
(ז) וַיִּצְרָךְ יְקֹנֶךָ אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֶפְרָךְ מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפֵּי נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם  
לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

He brings Onkelos who translates the words Nefesh Hayim to be Ruah Memalela – Speaking Spirit. That is to say, that our divine soul is what gives us the power to speak.

**רמב"ן בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק ב פסוק ז**  
אבל **אונקלוס אמר "והות באדם לרוח ממללא"**. נראה שדעתו כדברי האומרים שהם נפשות שונות  
וזאת הנפש המשכלת אשר נפחה השם באפיו היתה בו לנפש מדברת. וכן נראה לי מדעת רבותינו,  
ממה שאמרו (סנהדרין סה ב) רבא ברא גברא שדריה לקמיה דרבי זירא הוה מישתעיה ליה ולא  
אישתעי, אמר דמן דחבריא את טוב לעפרך.

And indeed, this too is the explanation of the Maharsha on this Gemara: speech is the from the soul (neshama):

**מהרש"א חידושי אגדות**  
לפי **שכח הנשמה שהוא הדבור** לא היה יכול לברוא ולפי שאין בו הנשמה שהוא הרוח העולה  
למעלה רק רוח החיוני שהיא ג"כ בבהמה היורדת למטה אי"ל הדר לעפרך.

So it is the power of speech which gives expression to our soul, something which is unique to humans as opposed to animals or, in this case, golems.

But what about mute people, we know that they too are very much human and have a soul! So the answer is that the power of speech is not only the power to speak externally but the power to speak internally – that is, the ability to process ideas in language. This is what the Onkelos, and others meant. And indeed this is what is known to science:

“Anthropologist Margret Mead once observed that sophisticated language is a prerequisite for sophisticated thinking, a *a fortiori* for expressing such thinking” (TUM 2000, p195).

Again, the ability to process ideas in language internally – colloquially, to speak to oneself – is a power that distinguishes man from beast.

“A growing numbers of researchers (e.g., Briscoe, 2002; Carruthers, 1998; Dennett, 1991; Morin, 2005; Stamenov, 2003; Steels, 2003) maintain that more complex types of self-awareness necessitate language, and more specifically, **inner speech**. (A. Morin, “Consciousness and Cognition” 15, p368).

So clearly it is speech that is the great power of man over beast. And clearly it is this power that R. Zeira found lacking in the Gavra Raba sent him. But, again, how did R. Zeira know that he was not talking to a mute? The Radzyner Rebbi writes that mute people have the power of speech but not the capacity to make it external (exactly as we mentioned).

#### **סידרי טהרות, אוהלות ה, רדזינר רבי**

... כי אך שגם באדם ממש נמצא חרש שאינו מדבר היינו רק משום דפומיה הוא דכאיב ליה אבל כח הדיבור יש לו אבל בזה ראה רבי זירא שאין בו כח הדיבור כלל שזה עיקר שלימות האדם על כל הנבראים כדכתיב "ויהי האדם לנפש חיה" ומתריגמין "והות באדם לרוח ממללא" ולזה אמר ליה "מחבריא את הדר לעפריך" דמאחר שאינו אדם כשלימות חשוב רק כבהמה בצורת אדם ומותר להרגו כן נראה נכון ביאור הסוגיא בעזהש"י.

It was this power of speech itself that R. Zeira found lacking in Rava's Gavra. How? That is apparently the greatness of R. Zeira which remains a secret of his alone.

So, let us return to the greatness of Aaron. As we have seen, speech is the great power of man over beast. It is not just the mouthing of words but the capacity to express one's very soul, his inner being. But there are times when the greatest expression of one's soul is to remain silent, to not speak. This is not easy at all, indeed, there are times when it is be more difficult for man to remain silent that to speak. It is at times like this that man gives the greatest expression of his soul. Apropos, it is told of a circumcision of the Klausenberger-Zanz Hassidim in Brooklyn, New York, where the Klausenberger Rebbe rose to speak:

"My dear brothers and sisters, at every circumcision ceremony we recite the verse from Prophet Yehezkel, 'I see you are rooted in your blood (damayich), and I say unto you that by your blood you shall live, by your blood you shall live.' I would like to suggest another interpretation. The Hebrew damayich does not come from blood, dam, but rather from silence, dom, as in vayidom Aharon. There were many reasons for us to scream out in protest during and after the Holocaust. Had we done so, we may very well have severed our entire relationship with our G-d and our history. We chose to remain silent and to continue planting, building and preserving. Indeed, by our silence do we live."

Perhaps we could say that while the ability to speak distinguishes man from beast, but the ability to remain silent distinguishes the saint from man.

May we ever know how to express ourselves appropriately, and may we only hear of good news. Besorot Tovot, Yeshuot VeNechamot.

## EXTRA

[GScholem](#): “Man can assemble the forces of nature-identified by him as the basic forces of material creation—and combine them into a semblance of the human pattern. But there is one thing he cannot give to his product: speech, which to the Biblical mind is identical with reason and intuition.” ... “And as for speech, and all that it implies—I mean the spontaneity of intelligence...” Similarly Descartes (*Discourse on Method* Part V) held the diff between people and animals as well as people and machines was speech/words & intelligence. Interestingly he also describes these 2 distinctions in a letter of 1619 (see [descartes1619\\_2.pdf](#) in FINISHED READING, p68 wherein he describes an AI machine/automaton and how a man would recognize it!!). So it would seem that R. Zeira MAY just be giving expression to a long held belief (ie., all the way through Descartes, that de’ah and dibbur were the distinguishing features of man

Bleich\_Cloning... p. 58 he explains that Rava’s gavra was an anthropoid – i.e., not a person, so it could have been “a new species”? On the other hand, fn 35 has Pardes Rimmonim say that the gavra was just an apparition (ahizat eynaim) not real. Maharsha explains that R.Zeira killed the gavra because it didn’t speak – which is a reflection of the power of the SOUL. R.Zeira killed it because it didn’t have a HUMAN SOUL (see fn 36 that animal soul animates, human soul is rational faculty). See Contemporary Halachic Problems Vol. II, p.369 par. 2 – p.370 leviathan quote – explains that **speech ⇔ rational thought**. So it is NOT speech per say, but the ability to express intelligence. [note: “Anthropologist Margret Mead once observed that sophisticated language is a prerequisite for sophisticated thinking, a *a fortiori* for expressing such thinking” (TUM 2000, p195).

“Beyond humans...” **Once we have discerned purposeful behaviour in our object of study, we can begin to observe and (hopefully) to interact with it. As a result of these observations and interactions, we might decide that consciousness is present. Or, to put things differently, we might adopt the sort of attitude towards it that we normally reserve for fellow conscious creatures.**

[So here is a key argument: we never know for sure if someone is conscious/”soul-ed” and so “adopt an attitude” that assumes consciousness based on our interaction. It should be noted that apparently R. Zeira **DID KNOW** that the gavra **wasn’t** conscious – and while one could argue that he was acting rashly, given his stature and the fine editing that went into the Talmud – i.e., the story is not meant to disparage R. Zeira, but to teach ethics from his actions, we will assume he was on a level of perception that may not be available to the average bear. OR PERHAPS it was based on his “interaction” as well as “speech.”]

Indeed – language is about interaction:

Richardson\_An Anthropology... “Sociologist of technology Sherry Turkle believes that spoken conversation is under threat in the digital computing age, as users prefer to relate to each other in absence rather than face-to-face (Turkle 2011). Language is neither ‘affect-free, context-independent propositions’, but instead, speech is a ‘situated social activity’ with ‘the conventional dichotomy between language and non-verbal communication . . . less secure’ (Ingold 1996, p. 6).”

Rosenfeld\_Human... p4 Sidrei Taharot explains that RZeira saw (Moreover), even though among true men there are deaf mutes who cannot speak, this is only because their mouths are (incapable), but they do have the (basic) power of speech. But as for this (golem): R. Zeira saw that it lacked the power of speech entirely. And this (power) is the basis of mankind's completeness relative to all (other) creatures, as it says "And the man became a living soul;" which we translate "And it became, in the man, a speaking spirit. [i.e., it is the spiritual/intellectual power of speech that is what makes human beings above animals, and it was this that R. Zeira saw was lacking]

כי אך שגם באדם ממש נמצא חרש שאינו מדבר היינו רק משוש דפומיה הוא דכאיב ליה אבל כח הדיבור יש ייו אבל בזה ראה רבי זירא שאין בו כח הדיבור כלל שזה עיקר שלימות האדם על כל הנבראים כדכתיב ויהי האדם לנפש חיה ומת'יגמין והות באדם לרוח ממללא ולזה אמר ליה מחבריא את הדר לעפריך דמאחר שאינו אדם כשלימות חשוב רק כבהמה בצורת אדם ומותר להרג ו כן נראה נכון ביאור הסיגית בעזהש"י

From all these sources we see that speech is the expression of the soul, it is the power with which God made man distinct from the animals, and it is a power that can not easily be recreated by man himself – whether in the form of a Golem, or in the form of a Robot. And here we touch upon all the speaking machines that modern technology has achieved. It should be clear that these machines speak but do not really have “the power of speech” which, as the Radzyner noted was what R. Zeira found lacking in the Gavra. And indeed, Prof. John Searle explained the distinction between human speech versus AI/Robot speech with his famous “Chinese Room” analogy.

#### **תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף צט עמוד א**

אמרו חכמים: **יפה שתיקה** לחכמים, קל וחומר לטפשים, שנאמר אויל מחריש חכם יחשב.

**27** He that spareth his words hath knowledge; and he that husbandeth his spirit is a man of discernment.

**28** Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise; and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed as a man of understanding.

## EXTRA

Buber p143 #LANGUAGE: "... there are I and You, there is dialogue, there is language, and spirit whose primal deed language is, and there is, in eternity, the word." MacIntyre\_ p12 What has distinguished man from animal are various capacities which are all traced back to the capacity for #language. It has been argued that animals thus lack beliefs, concepts, reasons for action.

p30 To be said to possess Language skill one must have:

- vocabulary
- ability to associate words with things, etc
- ability of syntax, sentence building.
- understand context to make use of the language / speech act
- use of language must also serve an intelligible purpose.

all this is to be done in a SOCIAL PRACTICE. p31 And this makes it difficult for humans – who are not aware of the social practices of animals – to understand animal communication.

p32 Malcom says that though we say the dog “thinks” there is a cat in the tree – an animal without #language cannot think nor hold a thought. This is not as far as Descartes went in saying that animals have no mental activity whatsoever. Malcom would say that a dog could have a “belief” that the cat is in the tree. And it can act on its belief. p33 But some argue we cannot ascribe beliefs to a non-speaking entity.

Davidson: “a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another.” And this because we can make the wrong guesses about what one intends just by looking at the choices/acts they do. He also argues that one needs language to be able to have a belief because otherwise one can't form the concept of true and false belief. p34 Stich argues further that language is needed for belief in that a dog can NOT be said to believe the squirrel ran up the tree because it doesn't distinguish a squirrel from other animals, nor a tree from other vegetation. It must have language for that. p35 Searle brings (but does not hold) that we can ascribe beliefs to beings that can distinguish between “believing that” versus “guessing that” versus etc.. – and only beings with language have this ability. P35-37 MacIntyre argues against these points and explains that p37 we can say that we cannot ascribe beliefs to non-language animals with the DETERMINANCY that we can to those with language. p40 We cannot justify that a non-language being doesn't have some indeterminate belief that moves it to action. p41. Bottom line – non-language intelligent animals (eg. dolphins) can have beliefs that drive action.

p43 Heidegger – humans are world-forming, stones are without-world, animals are poor in world. p44 animals lack to the ability to “attend to beings,” they don't have an apprehension of what they relate to “*as something*” “*as something present to hand, as a being*”. p45 Animals are just driven, inhibited only by their environment. MacIntyre rails against Heidegger generalizing to all animals. Heidegger does this because there is a clear contrast between animals and humans in that humans distinguish between beings and being, the ability to apprehend a being “*as such and such*” – p46 “#language is of crucial importance”. Heidegger's language is diff than Davidson's. For Heidegger #language is the expression of a “conceptual capacity” (he call the “*as*”-structure). [this interp of language is like Gavra commentators]. [All this seems to apply to robots as well, but more importantly to minds – second order consciousness – but it does seem to say that sentience WITH language = second order consciousness] MacIntyre says that higher level animals DO have some kind of understanding and relation to the world that is more than the dumb animals he describes. p48 This is Heidegger's mistake.

p49 People relate to the world via bodily comportment, which, while greatly changed through human conditioning, is still based in animal nature – we are “remade animals”. And even our language use is just a transformation of the pre-linguistic animals that we were. “We remain animal selves with animal identities.”

p50 #Language is indeed the dividing line between animals and humans – but, MacIntyre emphasizes, there is a continuum not a zero and one divide.

p53 Kenny says only humans who can give (in words) reasons for their actions can be said to have reasons for their actions. p54 #language allows us to “evaluate that which moves [us] to action.”

p54 Aquinas says that being able “to pass judgement on one’s own judgement” is the expression of reason, of rationality. Kenny says this is only available to #language speakers. MacIntyre agrees and goes on to say that it is complex language that allows this. And THIS is the line between humans and animals – not just language, but the complex language that allows self reflection.

p57-8 there must be acknowledge a spectrum of intelligence with primates (chimpanzee) exhibits, beliefs, desires, reasons for action and intentions. Humans are beyond this, not only in use of language but using it in self-reflection.

p60 MacIntyre knocks Gadamer for being too superficial about animals when he says that lacking language they are dependent on environment. And McDowell who says that sentience is in the service of a life mediated by biological imperatives. McDowell says people born animals become thinkers and as a result of #language can give reasons. MacIntyre takes issue with not realizing that higher animals have more going on that they are credited for by these thinkers.

p71 To truly flourish we need to develop our independent practical reason and to this there are three dimensions which all demand #LANGUAGE – and not simply language but the ability to put it to use in particular ways.

Transition from human/animal dependent infant to human independent practical reasoner is to be able to evaluate reasons and choose good reason for action.

p76 The second transition is to detach from the immediate desire and ask if this is the good and right thing for me here and now

p74 The third transition from infant to practical reasoner is movement from awareness of only the present to awareness of the future. Only #language speakers have this capacity. Wittgenstien said “a dog may believe its master is at the door but can not be hopeful that his master will come the day after tomorrow.”

p81 We must have social relationships to become and even remain independent practical reasoners.

Many try to say that Aaron made sense of it and thus didn’t say anything. But it seems to me that he couldn’t make sense of it, but he accepted the gezeira and remained silent.

Here it says he justified the gezeira.

### **אדרת אליהו ויקרא פרק י פסוק ג**

(ג) הוא אשר דבר ה' כו'. עיין רש"י ז"ל. שהם גדולים ממני וממך. כיון שידע אהרן שבניו מיודעו של מקום שתק וקבל שכר : וידם אהרן. צדק עליו את הדין וכן יעקב קטנתי וכן בדוד נמקו חבורתי מפני אולתי כו' :