

Will the Real Me Please Speak Up?

HAVE YOU EVER PLAYED BROKEN TELEPHONE? It goes something like this: a group of girls sit in a circle and the first girl, Chavi, whispers to Chani, next to her, a few words like, “*Etzba al hamakom.*” Then Chani turns to Shevi, attempting to convey Chavi’s whisper, and says the words she heard: “*Esther Hamalka.*” When Chani tries to share what she had heard, she sounds intelligent, but the message is incorrect.

Does it sometimes happen to you? You have something to tell a family member, a friend, a co-worker, a *shadchan*. You say something. Your message, however, is not understood as you intended.

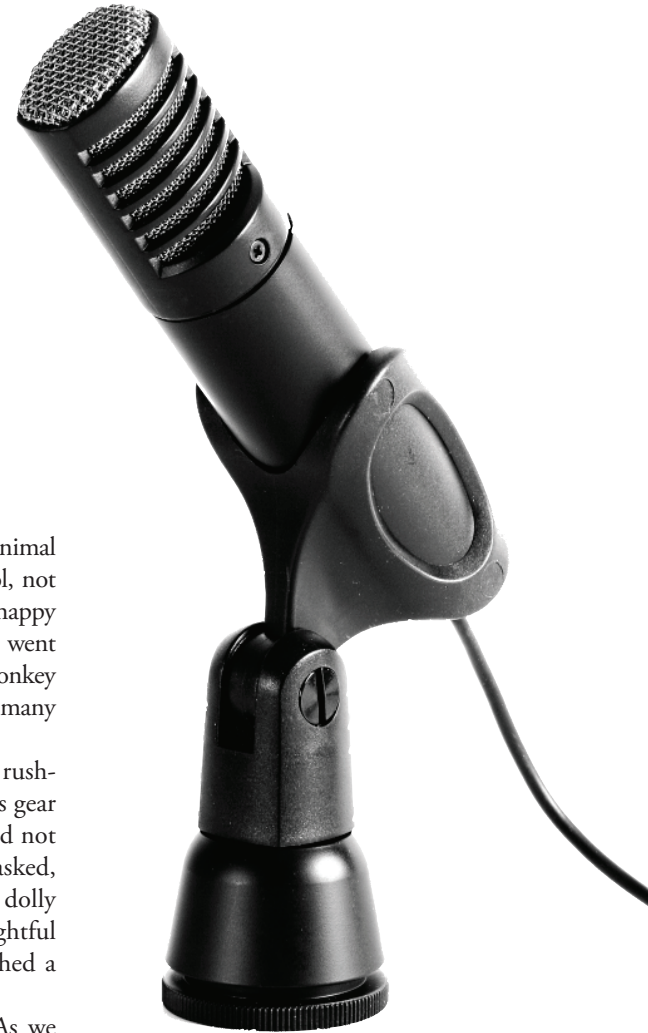
Another scenario: You know exactly what you want to say; you’ve rehearsed the wording in your mind numerous times, but when the moment arrives, you can’t seem to find the words. Instead, a nervous jumble of other words tumble from your mouth.

This past September, my three-year-old son started preschool. He was initially nervous to enter such a large building with so many unfamiliar things: the teacher, the children, the room, the schedule—and without Mommy! *Baruch Hashem*, through many *tefillos* and small-scale *nissim*, he began to go to school comfortably, even happily, but with one

caveat: he needed a dolly or a stuffed animal to come with him. He was in preschool, not *mesivta*, so hey, why not? It made him happy and kept him secure. So every day he went off to school with his lunch bag, monkey backpack, jacket and one of his many, many stuffed animals tucked under his arm.

One fateful morning, as we were rushing off to school, I was piling all of his gear into the car when I noticed that he did not have his usual companion. I gently asked, “Moshe, do you want to bring bear or dolly to school?” He responded with a thoughtful “No.” Hooray! I thought. We’ve reached a new milestone!

We packed up and hit the road. As we



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were about to reach the highway, I heard a wail from Moshe's car seat: "NOOO! I need my dolly!"

Oh boy! What to do? The girls were already late, and now Moshe wanted his dolly! If I kept going, maybe he'd just manage? Then I heard high-pitched sobbing in the back. Scratch that.

How long would it take for me to get to school, drop off the girls, turn around, come back for the dolly, head back to school, drop off Moshe, and be home in time to *daven* and eat breakfast before my next *kallah* came in for her class at 9:30 am? It was already 8:40—not looking too promising.

Okay, Plan C. I made a quick legal U-turn before oncoming traffic, headed back home, grabbed the dolly, raced back on to the highway, and dropped off the girls with late notes certifying that there had been a life-or-death situation regarding a super-important precious item needing to be retrieved prior to drop-off.

I looked back on this situation as I raced home to start the rest of my morning, and I thought: *wait a minute! I asked him if he wanted his doll! He said no!* But obviously, he didn't mean that "no." What happened? I asked, he used his words, and yet his message did not accurately reveal his need.

This universal experience is the phenomenon of losing your voice at the crucial moment. Using your voice to communicate your needs, desires and opinions requires self-awareness, self-esteem, and the self-confidence to express yourself respectfully. Communication can be your best friend when used appropriately and effectively. Perhaps my son sensed my own stress at being late and answered with the words he thought I wanted to hear. But when the realization set in—that he would not have his dolly for school—his real voice emerged, and quite loudly.

As we enter the *chag* of Chanukah, we learn how Mattisyahu Hakohein felt compelled to stand up and proclaim a message of Torah and fealty to Hashem, a lone voice among many Hellenist dissenters. But *devarim hayotzim min halev nichmasim el halev*; his message was sharp and clear. At the crucial moment, he stood before the Hellenists and shouted "*Mi laShem eilai!*" His message was sharp, clear and authentic: there was no turning back; it was now or never.

None of us are Mattisyahu, but we too can get our message across. There are three components to being one with your real voice: finding it, having the courage to use it, and being heard.

FINDING YOUR OWN VOICE

You may have been taught from a young age to "use your words" when communicating with others. But what may have been overlooked is the crucial step *before* using your words, and that is to seek your voice.

As you navigate the sometimes-bumpy road of relationships, the voice is the voice that expresses your physical, emo-

and what you dream and hope for in the future. It's not just about what others want for you, but also what you want for yourself. Sometimes what you want and what others want for you may be similar; other times they may be very different. The key is in knowing the difference and not fearing your authentic voice.

In the moment, you might feel paralyzed. How do you activate your authentic voice? How do you access it to ensure that

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tional and spiritual needs. It taps into who you are at your essence, the inner real you, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. It is the aggregate of your family upbringing, your education, your identity and your beliefs. This voice is your voice of independence, your desire to give to and help others and it is the voice of your aspirations for personal development and growth.

Investing the time and energy to explore what is important to you, what you believe in, what you are passionate about and who you are will help you seek and find your real voice.

ACCESSING COURAGE IN THE MOMENT TO USE YOUR VOICE

Using your voice accurately tells the other person what you need in the present,

it's heard? How do you stay true to yourself and still be gracious?

Here's a scenario: You have important plans for the upcoming weekend. A family member calls unexpectedly and requests your help over the same weekend. Before engaging in this important conversation, stop! Try this technique:

Take a deep breath and pause.

Think before you speak.

What is the message you would like to have heard?

Is what you are about to say thoughtful? Honest? Intelligent? Necessary? Kind?

Be calm. Keep your tone soft and even. Maintain a neutral body position.

Actively listen to the request. What are they asking of you?

What will you do to calmly and respectfully communicate your needs?

Actively listen to their response.

What can you do to resolve the situation in a mutually acceptable way?

MAKING YOURSELF HEARD

When you express your needs, accessing your authentic voice in a calm, non-reactive way will allow your message to be heard effectively. Your respectful demeanor will engender a similar response, thereby avoiding a conflict. This exercise takes patience, practice and time—but it's an investment well worth the energy expended. With effort, *ij"H*, you will become an even better



communicator.

A quick U-turn will not always be an option. So how can you find and use your authentic voice in that crucial moment?

Think back to a time when you may have tried to be real and say what you mean, but were not able to, or your message was not accurately received. Here are a few questions to ask yourself and gain clarity. Why were you unable to be authentic in that moment? What

In what way could you have made your message stronger and clearer?

What could you do differently the next time that question is asked of you?

How can you visualize what it would look and feel like to use your real voice?

To whom can you turn for support and/or to role play the sce-

Speak up with confidence and clarity, like Mattisyahu

can you do about it for next time?

When being asked an important question, how confident were you in the answer you wanted to give?

What might have stopped you from giving it?

What were some possible ramifications if you were to give the real answer?

What followed your not having been forthright?

nario in order to practice out loud, outside of your mind, using your real voice?

Relationships can be tricky, even under the best of circumstances. Sometimes we say one thing and intend another. Other times, while we say what we mean, it may be misinterpreted. Communicating with those closest to us often has an added emotional element: trying to live up to expectations. These are all normal situations. The difficulty is in clarifying what your message is, accessing the confidence to express yourself, and navigating the best way to communicate and ensure reception. The ability to do so will give you the confidence to articulate your authentic voice.

What can you possibly do right now to help you speak up with confidence and clarity, like Mattisyahu, using your authentic voice—particularly in the area of interpersonal relationships?

As you plan the next steps in your life's journey, reach into your soul and find your authentic voice. When speaking with family, friends, coworkers and *shadchanim*, prepare yourself to confidently and effectively express your message with the right words, in your own true voice. Your ability to use your voice will lead to more effective and successful interpersonal interactions, satisfying relationships and more confident decisions in all areas of your life.

May it be Hashem's will that all of us merit to find, access and use our authentic voices, and may we be heard, respected and valued for who we really are. **D**

Take the guess work out of your life puzzle!

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