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The Sound of Silence

by Jane Geller Epstein

When my two older children were pre-school age, I enforced a daily nap after lunch. It was intended for me. It gave me time to do housework without them under foot; to read without interruption; or to make necessary calls without their simultaneously needing me. It was my time to do whatever I had to do while they were safely in other rooms. But, what I did not realize back then, it actually was also their time to be alone, to find themselves separated from frantic activity and to allow their brains to develop creatively. Did they really sleep at all during this "nap time"? Sometimes. Were they quiet? Yes - by enforced design. Were they "doing nothing"? Not at all.

We all have heard the stories of scientists arriving at amazing discoveries during moments of rest or relaxation. How many of us have made useful lists of what we must do the next day - while we are on the verge of falling sleep? I have often thought out entire articles or arrived at innovative solutions to problems late at night, lying quietly in my bed.

During those years that I insisted on "nap time," my son discovered how countries were arranged on a map. He memorized the lists of presidents of the United States, and also came to understand how the calendar was arranged. He loved watching television, but his time on the bed forced him to think on his own. Since he had already mastered telling time by the age of 3, I made a deal with him. The first part of "nap time" had to be spent without physical activity. The next part still had to be spent on the bed, but he could read or play quietly. Some of the "toys" he chose were an outdated globe, a simple calculator and a calendar.

All children need their space. They need the opportunity to look into themselves and to explore within the context of a safe environment. Allowing a child to walk unaccompanied on a beach is not safe. Suggesting or insisting that a child take a book, a game or a favorite toy into his or her room for a period of rest time or "time out" is safe.

In the *Tikkun* magazine article, "Eloquence in Silence," Susan Dermond tells the story about a couple who decided to introduce silence into their home by turning off all modes of interruption once a week on Saturday mornings. Telephones and forms of entertainment were turned off during that time, "and they would not even talk with each other any more than absolutely necessary. Their interactions with their daughter would include quiet play, concentration games, and conversation."

As Jews, we are given this form of introducing both silence and spiritual interaction for an entire day every week - *Shabbat*. For me, the most spiritual time of prayer is during

the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service, the service that introduces the *Shabbat* on Friday evening. The recitation of Psalms, both silently and in harmonic song, allow the special feeling of *Shabbat* to enter my body and soul. In our home, we, like the family in the article, do not use the phone, the radio, television or (in this age) the computer. By refraining from bringing in the noise of the outside world for an entire day, we fill our home with silence and the sounds of *Shabbat*. Those sounds can include singing, laughing, sharing stories or conversation we have not had the time to share during the week. The enlarged "sound of silence" sometimes gives us the opportunity to think and talk about topics that would be closed out with the introduction of "outside noise."

Silence can take many forms. For some, it can be scary. For others, it can be a relief. It can lead to creativity or sharing. It can enhance one's spiritual being. It can take one beyond the ordinary. It can give one the insight to write a poem or prose story. It might help one to understand a difficult relationship. It might be the salve that's needed to heal an emotional wound.

May we all learn to live with the beauty that periodic silence, both daily and weekly, can bring to our lives. May we help our children to live with the kind of silence that will help them in their growth of self-discovery. May we learn to connect with each during times of enhanced silence within our homes. May we all find spiritual renewal through our own "sound of silence."