

Editorial

“Shut Up!”



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The liturgy of *Kippur* tells the strange and shocking story of ten rabbis tortured to death by the Romans. The prayer book says: “Then a heavenly voice shouted at God, ‘Is this the Torah and its reward?’ And God answered, ‘Shut up, otherwise I will destroy the world.’”

To suffering, only silence is relevant. Words of comfort and explanations are out of place. Debates and words will never account for the problem. They will distort the problem or make it unbearable.

Yet keeping silence before pain means being its accomplice. The Talmud says, “To be silent is to agree.” The witness who keeps quiet is as guilty as the criminal. To be silent before suffering is to admit the normality of evil and

ultimately to close oneself to hope. Therefore the Bible which reflects all the suffering of the world answers with the shout and silence together. In the heart of suffering, besides the silence of shock when you stumble on the mystery, and the silence of the crushed victim, we hear the shouts of Job who revolts, of the Psalmist who hopes, and of God who is angry. On the other hand, the heavy and embarrassing silence of the friends of Job, as well as their pedantic words, have tortured the miserable who needed something else.

Both Martin Gray who endured Treblinka and the loss of “those he loved” and Delcy Kuhlman who shared the pain with the dying in hospitals witness to the same struggle. They were torn between the need to comfort and speak the

right words and the deep knowledge that true suffering cannot be reached with mere words. This is also the existential experience of two eyewitnesses of the tragedies which tear apart their hearts and their countries. From Bosnia in former Yugoslavia and from Rwanda in Africa, we hear the same interrogation with the same painful tension between heavy silence and false words. Professor Richard Lehmann shows how suffering has come through the use of words which were distorted or simply misunderstood, the very words of the One who suffered in silence. Suffering has then become a Jewish-Christian issue, and after the Holocaust perhaps the Jewish-Christian issue *par excellence*. In fact the Jewish-Christian experience of suffering has taught us that words as well as silence can kill.

Before suffering, silence may be adequate or scandalous, the word may be opportune or bitter. In regard to suffering, it is both difficult to speak and to keep quiet.

Please note: from now on Shabbat Shalom will appear as a thicker issue, yet only three times per year (Fall, Winter, Spring).