

Pirkei Avot 1:7

Translation:

Shimon his son said: All my days have I grown up among the wise and I have not found anything better for a man than silence. Studying Torah is not the most important thing rather fulfilling it. Whoever multiplies words causes sin.

Maimonides

The sage has said: "In the multitude of words there lacks not trespass. . . ." (Pv 10:19) The reason for this is that the multitude of words

[contain words that] are additional, superfluous, and sinful, as I shall presently explain. For when a man multiplies words he will assuredly trespass, since it is impossible that there would not be among his

words a word that is not proper to utter. Of the signs of wise men is a lessening of words, and of the signs of fools is a multitude of words, as it is said: ". . . and a fool's voice through a multitude of words." (Ecc 5:2) The sages have said that a lessening of words is evidence of the high station of the parents and that a man is of pure lineage. They said: In Babylon, silence is the mark of pure lineage. (Kiddushin 71b) It is stated in *Sefer HaMiddoth* that one of the sages was observed to be excessively silent in that he would never speak a word that is not proper to utter, and that he would speak only very sparingly. It was said to him,

שְׁמַעוֹן בְּנוֹ אֹמֵר: כָּל יָמַי
גִּדְלָתִי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים, וְלֹא
מִצָּאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב מִשְׁתִּיקָה,
וְלֹא הַמְדַרְשׁ הוּא הָעֵקֶר אֶלָּא
הַמַּעֲשֶׂה, וְכָל הַמְרַבֵּה דְבָרִים
מִבֵּיא חֲטָא.

"What is the reason for your excessive silence?" He said, "I examined all words and I found them classified into four categories." The first category: All of it is harm and without benefit, such as people's cursing, speaking obscenely, and matters of the like. Words pertaining to them are utter folly. The second category: There is harm in it from one aspect and benefit from the other aspect, such as praising a man in order to derive benefit through it. In that praise there

will be that which will provoke his enemy, and it will harm the one whom he praised. As a consequence of this reason, it is necessary to forsake words pertaining to this. [Meaning,] one should also not speak

pertaining to this category. The third category: Words that have neither benefit nor harm in them, such as most of the words of the multitude, [viz.,] how was a certain wall constructed, how was a certain palace built, and such as describing the grandeur of a certain building, the abundance of the produce of a certain province, and matters like these. They are the words that are superfluous. He said, words pertaining to this are also superfluous; there is not benefit in them. The fourth category: Words that all are benefit, such as words pertaining to the ...