

“A Word at the Right Time”

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski

A man has joy in the utterance of his mouth, and a word at the right time, how good it is (Proverbs 15:23).

As a rule, silence is golden, and generally we do not regret having held our peace. But exceptions exist to every rule, and sometimes not saying the proper thing is wrong.

We often keep silent because we do not know what to say. Especially in cases where others have suffered great personal losses, what can we say? Every conceivable remark seems so inadequate.

Not only do we tend to remain silent, but the awkwardness of keeping silent may cause us to avoid the discomfort of such a situation. Suppose we hear that an acquaintance lost a child in a traffic accident or to a serious illness. What can we say? It is one thing to pay a condolence call to someone who has lost a parent and say, “Please accept my sympathies.” It is the way of the world that parents die before their children. These words are so empty, however, to grieving parents who have lost a child. Since we do not know what to say, we may simply avoid the bereaved family and thereby add loneliness to their suffering.

May God spare us all from such experiences. But if, God forbid, we have heard of a tragedy, we should not stay away or keep silent. If we feel another’s pain, we should not hesitate to say so. “I feel along with you” are simple words, and when said in sincerity, can support distressed spirits.

Words cannot restore anyone’s loss, but there is truth in the adage that “A sorrow shared is halved.”