

The Speaking Volume

By Evelyn O. Shih



I have always admired persons with a loud voice. I imagine them as heroes in a Western, with strong characters.....straightforward. Sincere and heartfelt.

My late husband, the Rev. Torrey Shih, was such a person. In the age before microphones, his big voice became even louder due to his training in speaking at a preaching volume and the sound was always astonishing. When we installed a telephone at home, others in the building thought he held revival meetings over the phone. The woman who lived downstairs frequently thought we were fighting or he was scolding the children. Even I became tired of his ever-preaching voice.

Many years ago in New York City, I taught at Brooklyn College, and I took the subway to work. Many times, I chanced upon an embarrassing situation in which two Chinese commuters standing on opposite sides of the track would talk loudly to each other. Those listeners who didn't understand Chinese thought that there was emergency information being transferred, so they would put down their newspapers and nervously watched the facial expressions of the two hollering across the tracks. At those times, I also wanted to yell out: "Please mind your manners!"

In spite of the negative aspects of speaking loudly, it is necessary to do so sometimes. For example, if you lead a prayer at the level of a mosquito's hum, how can the listeners hear to say 'amen' with you. Likewise, we who are parents teach our children to speak up. We don't want them to

murmur as if they have done something shameful or are passing along some gossip.

Thus, it seems to be worthy to learn about appropriate speaking volume. That is, to learn when and where to speak either loudly or softly, as the same words spoken at different volumes will have different effects. A pastor once told me that the most used phrase taught to him by his elder mentor was this: speak softly for heavy words. Indeed, the heavier your words, the softer the voice used to convey the message, so that the listener will accept their importance.

In fact, did you know that we should lower our voices when we communicate with others for the maximum effectiveness of our communication? Let's consider how a couple quarrels. Have you ever heard a couple quarrel softly? No, talking softly is usually reserved for general conversation or perhaps love talking. Most of the time, the argument starts with person raises his or her voice and the other's volume increases in defense or protest. Before they know it, they are both caught up in outshouting the other and the problem cannot be resolved until they can talk calmly again.

In conclusion, it seems we should pay attention not only what we say, but how loudly we deliver our message. The Proverb says: A soft answer turns away wrath. Can you measure up to that speaking volume?

