

# When Did Simplistic Words Replace Simple, Eloquent Ones?

There are times when the simplest words are the most eloquent.

Expressing an idea, a concept or a feeling in uncomplicated language allows something profound to rise above the craft of constructing a meaningful phrase.

I had the experience of contrasting two parallel phrases when I saw the stage adaptation of "To Kill a Mockingbird" written by Aaron Sorkin.

At one point, Scout, the young daughter, is being lectured by her father, Atticus, about the mentality of a mob.

He spends a number of sentences on the process of mostly reasonable folks joining a mob and then concludes with, "A mob is a place where people take a break from their conscience."

I was impressed with this Sorkin-esque discourse, but I could not capture enough of it to jot

it down in the dark theater. I found the short version online.

However,  
just before launching into this description, Atticus rebuffs Scout's expectations of others with the pithy, "A person is smart; people are dumb." Those seven words capture everything about crowd-sourcing anger.

By the way, intentionally or not, Sorkin lifted that line from "Men in Black," a decidedly lower-brow production. Tommy Lee Jones says it to Will Smith. Look it up.

It is harder to write short, but it is infinitely more satisfying (certainly for the listener!). I learned early in my career as a rabbi not to use up too many words in a sermon. The fewer I used for one talk, the more I had left for the next.

Simple words deployed in short declarative sentences do not necessarily put a speaker's erudition on display, but they hone a message to its essence.

When Moses sees his dear sister, Miriam, afflicted with debilitating disease (a punishment for sinning against him), he proclaims the prayer, "O God, please heal her!" (Numbers 12:13).

**<https://ethicsdaily.com/when-did-simplistic-words-replace-simple-eloquent-ones/> September 11, 2019 Jack Moline**

Five

words contain everything you need to know about the relationship between brother and sister and the character of the speaker.

Brevity

is not a guarantee of clarity, however.

We have

spent a lot of time over these past two-plus years reacting to simple words inexpertly jumbled.

Used in

place of profundity - or when profundity escapes the speaker - simple words can also reveal a simple mind.

The

decline of meaningful public expression is a loss I have felt increasingly, mostly after I hear someone capable of speaking well.

It is

true that a smooth-talking person can distract from the implications of his or her message, but the contrast between fashioning an inspiring thought and blurting out hackneyed adjectives like “great” or “unfair” is striking.

It was

**<https://ethicsdaily.com/when-did-simplistic-words-replace-simple-eloquent-ones/> September 11, 2019 Jack Moline**

apparent when I heard a candidate for public office recently who referred to “fecklessness” as characterizing a policy. My first thought was that his monosyllabic opponent likely thought the word meant going without sex.

My second thought was how refreshing it was to hear the kind of expression that William Safire used to champion.

I think the more urgent the thought, the more admirable the brevity. The plaintive plea for Miriam’s healing required no elaboration. The instruction offered by Atticus (or by “K”) was about respecting the person, suspecting the crowd.

But when nuance is essential, maybe it is not such a good idea to offer simple (read: simplistic) estimations of complicated notions.

We shouldn’t forget that, in contrast to this powerful and brief prayer, is the Book of Deuteronomy, almost entirely Moses’ monologue that goes on for most of 34 chapters containing 959 verses. I dare you to sum it up with more conciseness or power than these five words.