The Speaking Voice …

By

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*Silence is a source of great strength*

- Lao Tzu

The speaking voice always betrays itself. By which I mean, the person talking always “gives himself away.” Let the speaker be glib, complimentary, diplomatic. The more he speaks, the more the truth will out. He will be unmasked. This is even more true of the one who is harsh, crass, speaks in curses and blasphemes. The voice, the speaking, is our vulnerability.

Silence is a difficult argument to counter.

We learn that silence is a great virtue save on one night of the year; on that night we are to speak – and to speak at length! “You shall tell your child on that day…” On Pesach night, we are to tell the great story of our redemption. “Pesach” itself refers to this command to speak on that night. “*Peh sach*” means, literally, the “speaking or the conversant mouth”.

The depth, power and nexus of silence and speaking, sacred and profane becomes apparent in the opening *pesukim* of Tzav as we continue to learn about the various korbanot and their accompanying Temple service. In these verses, we learn about the mincha, the meal-offering, and how it was to be offered by the kohanim. After the mincha was offered on the Altar, “Aaron and his sons shall eat what is left of it; it shall be eaten unleavened (matzot) in a holy place, in the Courtyard of Ohel Moed shall they eat it.” (Vayikra 6:9). Then, in the next verse, the Torah continues, “It shall not be baked leavened”, (lo teafe chametz).

The *posuk* makes clear why the *kohanim* can’t consume their part of the *mincha*, *chometz*, “I have presented it as their share from My fire-offerings: it is most holy, like the sin-offering and like the guilt offering.” Their share too must not be leaven; their share is just like the *korban* itself.

Abarbanel amplifies the significance of the *kohanim’s* portion. “I have presented it as their share from My fire-offerings” suggests that when the Kohen eats his part, he is now *just like the Altar*, which provides its atonement. He has become as the Altar! Therefore, when the *kohanim* eat their share of the *mincha* they must do so within the same parameters as the Altar itself. Just as leaven and honey may not be consumed on the Altar, neither can they be consumed by the *kohanim*, who are integral to the *korban* process.

Here, in the very first *parashiyot* of Vayikra, focused on the *korbanot*, the avoda in the *Mikdash* it is impossible not to hear, woven within the explicit teachings of the sacred role of the *kohanim* in performing God’s work, the whispered tones of Pesach.

The *korbanot* may not include leaven (*chometz*). The *kohanim* are again warned that their part of the *mincha* shall be, “matzot teachel b’makom kadosh” – matzot [unleavened]shall be eaten in a holy place.

The interesting question is, What holy place? The simple and obvious reading of the text tells us that the holy place is in the courtyard of the *Ohel Moed*.  But the hints, the whispers prod us to ask if that simple and obvious reading tells us the whole story. Surely hearing these Pesach-related terms, *chometz*, *matzot* cannot help but make us think of Pesach. It is surely no coincidence that Parashat Tzav is always read during the Nisan- Pesach time of the year. Often, on Shabbat Hagadol.

The text speaks *korbanot* but the subtext whispers Pesach.

Ibn Ezra’s short comment on the words *lo teafe chometz* demands we consider, What then is *really* Pesachdig here?  His teaching is that there is no subtlety at all. For Ibn Ezra, *lo teafe chometz* is the very essence of Pesach – “*hu ha’ikar b’mitzvat Pesach*.”

Certainly, the *korban mincha* and the matzoh are closely related. They both speak to “the thing itself” without elaboration. Matzoh is referred to as “*lechem oni*” in the Haggadah. To be free (pesach) and to be connected to God (*korban*) one must approach God in humility and honesty, as a simple “I”.

Simple. Uncomplicated. That is the essence of matzoh. Flour and water. The most basic and unadorned of ingredients. Our own essence is as simple and unadorned. But we have invested lifetimes in making ourselves elaborate, masking who we really are in order to impress, fool, deceive. To truly approach God, we must do so as matzoh. Pure. Simple. Unadorned.

Approaching God, coming *close* to God is the essence of the sacrifice. “*Korban*” is derived from the Hebrew *shoresh* or root, “*k*, *r*, *v*” meaning “close, or connected”. In bringing a *korban* to God, man must be his *real* self, without elaboration or costume, without mask or deception. He must stand before God *without leavening or flavoring*.

Just as we must approach God as our authentic selves, so too should we do the same when we engage with others. It is not only our relationship with God that demands authenticity but so do all our relationships.

To be real and genuine, I must beme, myself.

A true and healthy relationship must be like the *korban* – unleavened. How often do we create “personas” when we meet with or engage with others, thinking that they will “like”, or “respect” our personas more than our true selves? Ultimately, our true selves are revealed, exposing not just our real selves but the falseness of our masks, of our deceptions.

The Maharal writes in *Gevurot Hashem*, “And perhaps you are wondering how aniyut (impoverishment) is connected to freedom (matzoh and *korban*), since they ostensibly are two opposite conditions? But this is not difficult, because poverty itself speaks to redemption…”

The *posuk* tells us that the matzot shall be eaten by the koahanim b’makom kadosh – in a holy place, in the Courtyard of *Ohel Moed*.   The Tiferet Shlomo teaches that *b’makom kadosh* does not *only* refer to the Ohel *Moed* but also refers to the mouth, the place where the matzot will enter.  And here we see another powerful connection to Pesach.

Each year, we engage in meticulous preparation prior to Pesach. We clean closets and attics. We scrub cupboards, shelves, refrigerators, and stoves. On and on and on. Wooden shelves, Formica countertops. Granite. Aluminum. What is the best way to *halachically* clean each? What about self-cleaning ovens? Keurig coffee makers? Toaster ovens?

We are *relentless* as we clean and kasher; we leave no spot unscrubbed, no mote of dust uncleaned. Except…

…we clean everywhere *except* the most important place, the *makom kodesh*.

Such a thing to overlook! Where is that *makom*? Is it the ark in the shul? The bimah where the scroll is read? My *tefillin* bag?

None of those places says the Tiferet Shlomo. The *makom kadosh* is the mouth where the matzot must enter!

The foolishness of man! He scrubs and kashers his house, his car, his kitchen but overlooks the most important *makom* of all! With no thought, he allows the matzot to be ingested into a hole of insults, curses, and foul language!

This cannot be. The *kohanim* were clearly instructed to eat their share of the *mincha* in the *makom kadosh*. The *mincha* required matzot because leaven could never be included in the sacrifice, for leaven represents ego, arrogance, self-puffery, and self-aggrandizement – the opposite of the simplicity and authenticity we need to approach God.

We should learn from this that before we clean and kasher our homes and kitchens, we should first turn out attention to ourselves as the vessel, as the altar for the holy matzot.

*Peh Sach*. The speaking mouth.

Pesach. The celebration of our redemption.

“You shall tell your child on that day…”

On Pesach, we are commanded to be the speaking voice. We are commanded to teach our children about *yetziat Mitzrayim*. The mouths we use to tell this miraculous tale must be as pure as the Altar upon which the *kohanim* *brought* the *korbanot*. They must be in opposition to the Pharaoh, whose name in Hebrew “*peh ra*” means “evil mouth.”

Our authentic being, our ability to approach God, our ability to speak the truth of our redemption all come from the same *makom kodesh* – our mouths. The sacrifices of old and the remembrance of this very day are wedded by the same thing.

Pesach.

*Peh sach*.