

## “TRADITION OF SILENCE”

The prophet Ezekiel learns the value of words in a dramatic way: “God said to me – ‘Mortal, eat what is offered to you. Eat this scroll, and then speak to the House of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth, and He gave me the scroll to eat. He said to me, ‘Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you.’ I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey to me (Ezek. 3:1-3).” Ezekiel’s prophecy is inaugurated by the physical consumption of a scroll -- ingesting the words.

At the end of the same chapter, however, God says to Ezekiel: “I will make your tongue cleave to your palate, and you shall be dumb (3:26).” Having tasted the power of words, Ezekiel will now be trained in silence.

“To You,” sings the Psalmist to God, “silence is praise (Ps. 65:2).” Silence, too, can be eloquent. As Posthumus says to his absent Imogen in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, “I’ll speak to thee in silence.”

We can express meanings in silence that sometimes go deeper -- or higher - - than ever the most charged words. In his vision of messianic times, when the world will be perfected, Zephaniah prophesies a day when “God will be silent in love (3:17).” Speaking love is powerful; conveying it through silence, which does not limit love by fitting it into words, gives it the taste of eternity.

We are a verbal people, but we know the power of not speaking as well. An interviewer once asked Elie Wiesel if there is a tradition of silence in Judaism. “Yes” answered Wiesel, “a very powerful one. But we don’t like to talk about it.”