



## **PESACH 5775**

**Second Day of Pesach / 16 Nissan**  
Communication Secrets from Pesach  
April 12, 2017

PEH-SOCH: THE SPEAKING MOUTH  
COMMUNICATION SECRETS FROM PESACH

ABSTRACT

When was the last time that you had a normal face to face, eye to eye, heart to heart, conversation with a loved one?

We live in a time of a communication crisis. On one hand, we have never had better communication devices. We can connect with anyone, anywhere, anytime. “Communication revolution” is what these times are called. On the other hand, are we really communicating better? Are our relationships and marriages deeper and more connected? Are our friendships more heartfelt? Are we speaking more with our children, with our parents, with our colleagues?

Good communication is an art that lies at the heart of success in almost all aspects of life: relationships, education, parenting, finances, leadership, diplomacy, and so much more. Our words are powerful tools. And life is largely about learning how to wield them most wisely and most effectively.

What is the secret to successful communication?

Pesach and its protagonist, Moshe, provides us with the answer.

One of the primary themes of Pesach is communication. The word Pesach is made up of two words: *peh soch*, a speaking mouth. A central mitzvah of Pesach is to speak and tell the story of the Jews’ exodus from Egypt to our children – to effectively communicate it to the next generation.

We can learn the secret to successful communication from the hero of the Pesach story, Moshe Rabbeinu. Though Moshe had a speech “impediment,” G-d tasked Moshe to be His spokesperson and messenger. He was G-d’s messenger to tell Pharaoh to let the Jews go, to lead the Jews out of Egypt, and to relay His words and instructions to the Jewish people. Why would G-d choose a “man of no words” to be His communicator?!

And ironically the words of this “man of no words” have lived on in history arguably more than any other words ever uttered. What was his secret? What made his words so effective, and what made them stand the test of time?

This sermon teaches us that Pesach has a lot more to offer than wine and matzah balls; it guides us to becoming better communicators, which in turn can enhance every aspect of our lives.

Moshe educates us, on the most basic level, that the key to being a successful communicator is not primarily in what you say, or even how you say it. There’s something even more fundamental that you must do before you communicate. Doing these things will change the way you communicate, as well as the effect that your words have on your listener. And the effect you have on the world.

## 1. Self-Centered Communication (Joke)

A guy takes a girl out on a date. He chatters on about his exploits in business, his favorite sports teams, all the places he's traveled, and so on.

After the girl endures this monologue for about two hours, he finally says to her: "Well, that's enough about me. Let's talk about you. What do you think of me?"

## 2. Communication Crisis

We live in a time of a communication crisis. On one hand, we have never had better communication devices. We can connect with anyone, anywhere, anytime. "Communications revolution" is what these times are called.

On the other hand, are we really communicating better? Are our relationships and marriages deeper and more connected? Are our friendships more heartfelt? Are we speaking more with our children, with our parents, with our colleagues?

I was in a car with a good friend who I haven't seen in a long while. We both were being driven to a wedding. I really was looking forward to this opportunity to catch up with my friend. But from the moment we entered the car he began texting on his phone, and as much as I tried I couldn't get his attention. All I wanted was a decent face to face to conversation. Finally, exasperated, unable to get him to even look up, I decided that I'll text him.

I could tell that he received my text, when he seemed startled for a moment. He looked up at me and incredulously asked: "is that you texting me?" I said "yes, indeed." "Why," he continued, "are you texting me, when you're sitting right near me?!" "Because I can't get your attention! That's why!"

You see what I mean. When was the last time that you had a normal face to face, eye to eye, heart to heart, conversation with a loved one?

## 3. Good Communication: The Key to Success

Good communication is an art that lies at the heart of success in almost anything: relationships, education, parenting, leadership, diplomacy, and so much more. In the age of smartphones and social media, communication has become way easier in many respects. We can communicate to many more people, in much less time. But that's quantitatively speaking. What about qualitatively speaking?

Yes, communication seems to be more accessible than ever. Social media is the most utilized communication tool of today. But one thing it's made difficult is deep, meaningful communication. On social media, we ex-

press ourselves, our beliefs and philosophies. We show off our accomplishments, kids, grandkids, pets off to the world. . . But as we blast that message to a huge audience of people, we are truly connecting with no one. The intimate, personal connection we all crave is much more difficult in a world in which we're all glued to screens waiting for faceless masses to validate our brilliance, or beauty, or accomplishments.

We may have thousands of Facebook “friends,” but actually not have any real friends at all. Some even cynically suggest that the creators of social media are the most anti-social people out there. And they developed a “social network” of friends you never have to meet.

Truly authentic, genuine, vulnerable communication is a rarity these days. That's true both on an interpersonal level, in our families and communities, and on a broader scale, among cultures and nations. It seems to me as though, despite the fact that we can now communicate at the simple click of a screen, our world at large is plagued by as much misunderstanding, strife, and discord as ever.

What then is the secret to successful communication?

The answer my dear friends can be found – believe it or not – in the Yom Tov we are presently celebrating – Pesach, and in its main protagonist, Moshe Rabbeinu.

#### 4. Moshe: Man of No Words

One of the major themes of Pesach is communication. In fact, the word Pesach is made up of two words: *peh soch*, a speaking mouth.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Pharaoh is comprised of two words as well: *peh rah*, an evil mouth. Haggadah, the book we read at the Seder table, is a Hebrew word meaning “the telling” or “the story.” As we all know, one of the most central mitzvos of Pesach is to tell the story of the Jews' Exodus from Egypt to our children, based on the verse<sup>2</sup> “V'higadito l'vincho,” “You shall tell your child.”

The “speaking mouth” and healthy communication of Pesach and the Haggadah heals us from the “evil mouth” and unhealthy communication of Pharaoh.

But where we really get to the heart of what powerful and successful communication means, and how to truly connect with others, is by looking to some of the details of the Exodus narrative. In fact, we learn the secret to successful communication from the hero of the Pesach story, Moshe Rabbeinu – the greatest and most famous communicator of all time, the man chosen by G-d to be His mouthpiece.

But this is ironic. Why? Because Moshe Rabbeinu had a speech impediment, and he was, by his own account, no great orator. When G-d assigns him the role as His messenger, Moshe argues with G-d: “I am not a man

<sup>1</sup> Pri Etz Chaim Shaar Chag HaMatzos chapter 1. Chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 13:8.

of words . . . my speech is difficult and my tongue is difficult”.<sup>3</sup>

Moshe’s argument seems justified. Why, indeed, did G-d choose a “man of no words” to be His communicator?!

What is even more baffling is that the words of this “man of no words” live on in the Torah more than any other words ever spoken in all of history!

How is that possible? How could a “man of no words” end up being the greatest communicator of them all?!

## 5. Moshe, The Greatest Orator

G-d Himself provides us with the answer to this mystery.

In response to Moshe’s argument that G-d not choose him because “I am not a man of words . . . my speech is difficult and my tongue is difficult” – G-d replies with these immortal words: “Who gave man a mouth, or who makes [one] dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?”<sup>4</sup>

Think about these words. They are absolutely astonishing. G-d is essentially telling Moshe the secret of true communication: Not someone who is a great orator. Not someone who has the gift of gab. Not someone who is brilliant. Not someone who has charisma. Not even someone who has mastered the art of persuasion.

True communication is not about you. It’s not about you the speaker. It’s about you putting yourself aside, and being a transparent conduit of G-d’s words; of you becoming G-d’s mouthpiece. “I will be your mouth.” Then and only then can you convey the truth. Because the truth is not yours. So as long as you are a great speaker, you are communicating your own ideas. But when you empty yourself and become G-d’s messenger and mouthpiece then you convey G-d’s higher truth.

G-d continues:<sup>5</sup> “So now, go! I will be your mouth, and I will instruct you what you shall speak.”

So Moshe goes on to 1) approach Pharaoh and demand he let the Jews go, 2) lead the Jews out of Egypt, 3) receive the Torah at Mount Sinai and teach it to the people.<sup>6</sup> So much for a “man of no words!” Moshe becomes the communicator of Divine words for all time!

An entire book of the Torah, Devarim, consists JUST of the “words that Moshe spoke to the people.” Moshe’s words altered history forever. They have been studied for thousands of years, and they continue to

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<sup>3</sup> Exodus 4:10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 4:11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 4:12.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 1:1.

be studied to this very day – their every nuance dissected and debated in holy books. Moshe’s words have lived on perhaps more than any other words ever uttered.

What made his words so effective? What made them stand the test of time?

Man, even the greatest man, is mortal, and thus his words are also mortal. Only the words of the eternal G-d are eternal. As the prophet says: “The grass shall dry out, the blossom shall wilt, but the word of our G-d shall last forever.”<sup>7</sup>

Had Moshe been a speaker, even if he was the greatest orator in history, he would only be able to articulate man-made impermanent words. But since Moshe was a “man of no words” – precisely because he was not saying his own words, but G-d’s words – G-d was his mouth (“I will be your mouth”, “who gave man a mouth... Is it not I?”) – that imbued his words with divine eternity.

## 6. The Great Power of Words

We can learn many remarkable lessons from this.

First and foremost it teaches us about the purpose and function of words.

The human being is called “medaber,” the speaker, the communicator; we are set apart from other types of species by our ability to communicate.

On the positive side, we think of words as bridges used to connect people and communicate ideas. Our sages teach us, “Words that come from the heart enter the heart.”<sup>8</sup> With language we can open minds and hearts. We can empower and build self-esteem. We can bond with others through words of love and friendship. We can comfort and soothe. We can uplift and inspire.

On the negative side, words can be forces that divide us. Words can offend, obscure, deceive, manipulate. Use the wrong word and you can shut down the person you are attempting to open up.

Take the word *G-d*. That is a loaded word that means many different things to many different people.

There’s a story told about the famed Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once telling a self-proclaimed atheist:

“The G-d whom you don’t believe in, I don’t believe in either.”

Certain words that seem innocuous to us are loaded with meaning to another. Perhaps as children we heard a certain expression used in a derogatory fashion and that word, throughout our lives, becomes inseparable from its meaning, and that meaning becomes etched in our psyche. Words that to some seem neutral, cause another person to recoil. Language is subjective to each person’s experience.

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 40:8.

<sup>8</sup> Rabbeinu Tam – Sefer HaYoshor Section 13. Cited in Shaloh 69a.

A good teacher will communicate in a way that resonates with students and engenders trust. That's because a good teacher knows not only how to say the right things, but how to avoid saying the wrong things.

Rule number one of effective communication is, paradoxically, to be quiet. Listen to the other person. Because in communication, what is most important is not what you say, or even how you say it, but understanding who you're speaking to. As much as possible, be sensitive to their situation. Understand their personality and background. Consider their needs. Empathize with their feelings. Real, connective communication is about a relationship between two people. A partnership. In any relationship of equals, each must put his or her ego aside and listen intently to the other.

An anecdote: A husband and wife go to see a therapist to work out some of their communication issues. The husband says, "I don't understand why she's so unhappy. I give her everything she wants and more! She asks to go on a vacation upstate; I take her to Europe! She wants a 2-carat diamond; I give her a five-carat diamond!" The therapist says, "Then are you really giving her what she wants, or what you want her to want?"

To connect with another person, we have to first listen to them, understand them, and take ourselves out of the picture. Then the words that flow out of us will likely be ones that help, move, and inspire.

## 7. Key # 1 - Humility

Moshe embodied the ability to "getting out of the way" for the purpose of connecting to another. More specifically, he achieved true connective communication through his traits of humility and sensitivity.

First, humility. Moshe, G-d's messenger and the communicator of G-d's Torah, was known as the most humble man on earth.<sup>9</sup> This utter humility that Moshe embodied allowed him to speak Divine words that resonated in the hearts of all who heard him speak.

Moshe was a "man of no words," because when he communicated to the Jewish people, he knew that his words were not his own. They were G-d's. He was humble enough to know that he was only the channel for communicating a higher truth. None of G-d's words became lost in translation. No alternate meanings were imposed, no ideas hijacked for personal gain. Moshe was able to convey divine communication in its most pristine form.

This teaches us something extremely important. True communication is not about brilliant ideas, eloquent oratory skills, compelling presentations; it is about recognizing that you are a channel – a transparent conduit – to convey a truth that is greater than yourself. And the more transparent you are, the better your communication will be. Conversely, the more your ego is in the way, the less resonance your message will have.

<sup>9</sup> Numbers 12:3.

G-d chose Moshe, the “man of no words,” precisely because he didn’t want the job. G-d didn’t want someone who was enamored with themselves and their speaking abilities. He didn’t want a leader who was interested in showing off their great oration skills. He wanted someone who would excel at absorbing higher wisdom, divine knowledge, and who would be sensitive enough to convey them to the Jewish people in a way that would allow them to truly internalize them and take them to heart.

## 8. Key #2 - Sensitivity

That brings us to the second trait: sensitivity.

We find another deep explanation, taught in Kabbalah, as to what it meant that Moshe was a “man of no words.” Moshe, whose utter humility and selflessness made him completely integrated in body and spirit, could not help but reflect the reality that surrounded him. Therefore, in a world of pain – a depraved Egyptian exile, imposing slavery and genocide on an innocent people – Moshe could physically not speak clearly. Explains the Zohar<sup>10</sup> that just as the Jews were in exile Moshe’ “speech was in exile.” With suffering all around him, Moshe’ mouth was literally locked. (Ultimately, once they were redeemed from Egypt, Moshe too was healed<sup>11</sup> and was able to express in words the deepest dimensions of the Divine.)

A more callous person, whose life does not necessarily reflect the pain of others – can continue speaking and pontificating even when he should be silent. But Moshe could not rest when he witnessed others in pain. His physical body ached and his mouth quivered from all the suffering the Jewish people endured in Egypt.

Moshe’s sensitivity is relayed earlier as well in the Book of Exodus,<sup>12</sup> where Moshe is described as a shepherd. The Midrash explains<sup>13</sup> that G-d tests his leaders with sheep (as He later does with David). One sheep once wandered away from the entire flock. Moshe sensed the missing sheep, and went searching, only to find the young animal sipping water from a nearby brook. Moshe carried the sheep back to the flock. “Ahh,” G-d’ said. “If Moshe is that sensitive to a single sheep amongst thousands, even when no one is watching, how much more so he will be sensitive to my people. He is worthy of being my chosen leader.

These two examples demonstrate Moshe’s profound sensitivity to his people, undoubtedly a large part of the reason G-d deemed Moshe worthy to be his messenger. Moshe loved the Jewish people so intensely, and was so sensitive to their plight, that G-d knew that with Moshe communicating His words, there would be no judgment, no stereotyping of his audience. As a “man of no words,” G-d knew that everything that came out of Moshe’s mouth would come from a place of genuine love and concern for the people. And when the person communicating to you feels your pain and your struggle and has your best interests at heart, you listen.

<sup>10</sup> II 25b.

<sup>11</sup> Zohar ibid. Devorim Rabba 1:1.

<sup>12</sup> 3:1.

<sup>13</sup> Shemot Rabba 2:2.



## 9. Speaking from the Heart

So, for all our incredible advancements in communications technology, the source of the greatest wisdom on effective communication comes from Moshe Rabbeinu, the “man of no words.”

True communication must be a product, first and foremost, of recognizing that our power of speech is not our own – we are all men and women of “no words.”

G-d gave us a mouth with which to speak, and G-d gave us truth and meaning with which to teach and inspire others.

Communication is not about our brilliant ideas and the sheer eloquence with which we express them. Rather, it's about recognizing that we have a great responsibility. We are a channel, a conduit, for conveying a higher truth, something much greater than ourselves. The less our ego gets in the way, and the more in-tune we are with the person we're communicating with, the better the communication will be.

Moshe also teaches us that effective communication requires listening, and respecting, connecting, and empathizing with the person you're communicating to. We are not here to judge others, but try to understand them. We're not here to stereotype, but to listen. If we don't have the listener's best interests at heart, then our message will fall flat, or worse, be misconstrued. Words that come from the heart, enter the heart.

Of course, none of us are on the level of Moshe. But we can aspire to embody his humility and sensitivity.

How many of us can say that every time we communicate, and in any form we do it in, we truly have the other person's best interest at heart? How often is it about getting our point across, being right, persuading the other person to adopt our perspective or accept the validity of our message--about what WE need to tell them, rather than being about the truth that THEY need to hear, and are able to hear, at that moment?

To communicate well we must look at another and try to understand them, just as we want them try to understand us. For our words to be received have an impact, we need to make sure that when we communicate to them, we do it out of humility, sensitivity and love.

Pesach – “the speaking mouth” – has a lot more to offer us than wine and matzah balls; it guides us to becoming better communicators, which in turn can enhance every aspect of our lives.

Dear friends, as we celebrate Pesach, let us ask ourselves: When we speak, are we really making an impact? When we communicate, is our message penetrating?

This is particularly important in communicating with our children – the actual theme of the Pesach Seder and Haggadah – to relate, to communicate the story to our children. How well are we communicating with our sons and daughters? Are we giving them the time of day? Are we listening to them, truly listening to them and their needs?

Our words are so powerful. Let's be more intentional with them. Let's listen before we speak. Let's be sensitive to the needs of our listener/s. Especially of our children – our beautiful, vulnerable, impressionable children, whose very lives will be shaped by our every word.

Let's ask ourselves if our words are coming from a place of humility and love. And then, our words will be able to move minds and hearts and change the world to the better.

Wishing you a truly happy Pesach. Good Yom 'Tov.

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