



Unetaneh Tokef:

The Power of the Still, Small Voice

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Unetaneh Tokef (Machzor Seder ha'Tefilot p.224)

וּנְתַנְּה תְּקֵף קִדְשֵׁת הַיּוֹם כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאִיוֹם וּבּוֹ תִּנְשָׂא מְלֻכוֹתֶיךָ וַיִּכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כְּסֻאֶיךָ
וְתִשָּׁב עָלָיו בְּאַמֶּת. אָמֵת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דִין וּמוֹכִיחַ וַיִּוֹדַע וַיַּעַד וְכוּתֵב וְחוֹתֵם וְסוֹפֵר
וּמוֹנֵה. וְתִזְכֹּר כָּל הַנְּשֻׁכָּחוֹת, וְתִפְתַּח אֶת סֵפֶר הַזְּכוּרוֹנוֹת. וּמֵאֲלֵיו יִקְרָא. וְחוֹתֵם יָד כָּל
אָדָם בּוֹ. וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע. וְקוֹל דְּמַמְהָ דַּקָּה יִשְׁמַע. וּמֵלְאָכִים יִחַפְּזוּן. וְחֵיל וּרְעָדָה
יִאֲחִזּוּן. וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִנֵּה יוֹם הַדִּין. לִפְקֹד עַל צָבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין. כִּי לֹא יִזְכּוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּדִין

We declare how profound is the holiness of this day, for it arouses in us the deepest awe. Today the power of Your kingdom stirs within us. Love is the foundation of Your throne, and the spirit of truth rests upon it. Truly You are the one who judges and tests, who probes and bears witness. You record and seal, You count and measure. You remember all that is forgotten. You open the Book of Memory, and it speaks for itself, for every man has signed it by his life. The great shofar sounds, **and a still small voice is heard**. God's messengers feel the alarm. Possessed by fear and trembling, they announce: "Behold the Day of Judgment!"

1 Kings 19: 11-13

וַיֹּאמֶר צֵא וְעַמַּדְתָּ בְּהָרֹם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה עֹבֵר וְרוּחַ גְּדוּלָה וַחֲזָק מִפָּרֶקֶת הָרִים
וּמִשֶּׁבֶר סִלְעִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לֹא בְרוּחַ יְהוָה וְאַחַר הָרוּחַ רֵעַשׁ לֹא בְרֵעַשׁ יְהוָה:

וְאַחַר הָרֵעַשׁ אֵשׁ לֹא בָאֵשׁ יְהוָה וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּמַמָּה רַקָּה:

וַיְהִי | כִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהֵיו וַיִּלֹּט פָּנָיו בְּאֲדָרְתּוֹ וַיֵּצֵא וַיַּעֲמֵד פֶּתַח הַמְּעָרָה וְהִנֵּה אֱלֹהֵי קוֹל
וַיֹּאמֶר מַה-לָּךְ פֹּה אֱלֹהֵיו:

And He said: 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before God.' And, behold, God passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before God; but God was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but God was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but God was not in the fire; and after the fire **a still small voice**.

And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

Job 4: 12-15

וְאֵלֵי דְבַר יִגְנֹב וַתִּקַּח אָזְנִי שְׁמִיעַ מְנִהוּ בְּשֹׁעֲפִים מְחֻזְיָנוֹת לַיְלָה בְּנִפְל תִּרְדָּמָה עַל-
אֲנָשִׁים: פֶּחַד קָרְאֵנִי וּרְעָדָה וְרֹב עֲצָמוֹתַי הִפְחִיד: וְרוּחַ עַל-פָּנַי יַחַלֵּף תִּסְמַר שְׁעָרַת
בְּשָׂרִי: יַעֲמֵד | וְלֹא-אֶפְרִי מִרְאֵהוּ תְמוֹנָה לְנִגְדַי עֵינַי דְּמַמָּה וְקוֹל אֶשְׁמַע: הֲאֶנּוֹשׁ
מֵאֱלֹהִים יִצְדֵּק אִם מַעֲשָׂהוּ יִטְהַר-גֹּבֵר:

(12) Now a word was secretly brought to me, And my ear received a whisper. (13) In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, (14) Fear came upon me, and trembling, And all my bones were made to shake. (15) Then a spirit passed before my face, that made the hair of my flesh stand up. (16) It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance; a form was before my eyes; I heard a still voice: (17) 'Shall mortal man be just before God? Shall a man be pure before his Maker?

Shemot Rabbah 29:9

אָמַר רַבִּי אַבְהוּ בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, כְּשֶׁנָּתַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, צְפוּר לֹא צוּחַ, עוֹף לֹא פָּרַח, שׁוֹר לֹא גָעָה, אוֹפְנִים לֹא עָפוּ, שְׂרָפִים לֹא אָמְרוּ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ, הַיָּם לֹא נִדְדַעַע, הַבְּרִיּוֹת לֹא דָבְרוּ, אֲלָא הָעוֹלָם שׁוֹתֵק וּמַחְרִישׁ, וְיִצְא הַקּוֹל: אָנֹכִי יי אֱלֹקֶיךָ

Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: When God gave the Torah, no bird chirped, no fowl flew, no ox lowed, not one of the *ofanim* stirred a wing, not one of the *seraphim* said, "Holy, holy, holy!" The sea did not roar, creatures did not speak – the whole world was hushed into breathless silence. Then the voice went forth: "I am Adonai your God."

Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology (Rabbi Arthur Green)

God spoke only the first letter of the word. That letter, *aleph*, is by itself silent. God speaks only the great silence; the divine is a silent womb that contains all language within it... all God says is that which cannot be spoken, the pronouncement of the unpronounceable word. But this word is overflowing with the energy of Being.

"Still, Small Voice"; CCAR Journal, Spring 2001, Michael Comins

...I prefer to follow Rashi and Abraham Joshua Heschel's literal rendering of *kol dmamah*, "a voice of silence." Precedent for such a reading can be found in the book of Genesis, where God says to Cain, "the voice of your brother's blood calls out to me" (Gen. 4:10). Here *kol* is a silent voice rather than an audible sound. And that, I believe, is precisely what Elijah hears: a voice without sound. I propose, then, a metaphorical but grammatically strict translation. *Kol dmamah dakah*: the "voice of fragile silence."