

Parashat Naso 5777, 2017:

Appreciating Moses' Greatness

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Shoshanah Elka bat Etiel Dina and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The final verse of our *parasha* is fascinating in form and content:

When Moses would come into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him (*ledaber eto*), he would hear the voice (*va'yishma et hakol*) speaking to him (*medaber aluv*) from the two cherubim above the covering which was over the Ark of Testimony, and He spoke to him (*va'yidaber aluv*). (*Sefer Bamidbar* 7:89, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, with my emendations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

This *pasuk* (verse) is directly focused upon the communications that took place between the Almighty and Moses when the latter entered the *Ohel Moed* (Tent of Meeting). Rashi (1040-1105) explicates four aspects of this exchange: The origin and projection of Hashem's Voice, the manner in which G-d spoke to Moses, the nature of the Almighty's Voice and the use of the term "*aluv*." His analysis of these points enables us to gain a more profound understanding of our *pasuk*.

Based upon the *Sifrei*, the halachic Midrash to *Sefer Bamidbar*, Rashi notes that "the Voice emanated from heaven to [the area] between the two cherubim, and from there it went out to the Tent of Meeting." In other words, the Voice originated in *shamayim* (Heaven), transported itself to the space between the cherubim, and finally became audible to Moshe when its sound filled the *Ohel Moed*.

According to Rashi, these *Ohel Moed* communications were indirect in nature:

The word *midaber* (to speak) is similar to *mitdaber* (to speak to oneself, i.e. the reflexive form) and, therefore, it connotes Hashem speaking to Himself. It is out of reverence for the Most High to express it in this way. [The Voice] would speak to itself, and Moses would listen to it.

When the *pasuk* states, “*va’yishma et hakol*,” we immediately wonder, “What kind of voice did Moshe hear?” Was it the Voice that Eliyahu heard on Mount Horeb? As the text states: “After the earthquake fire, not in the fire was the L-rd, and after the fire a still small sound (*kol dimamah dakah*, *Sefer Melachim* I:19:12).” Or, was it the Voice of the Revelation at Mount Sinai that King David describes as:

The voice of the L-rd is upon the waters; the G-d of glory thunders; the L-rd is over the vast waters. The voice of the L-rd is in strength; the voice of the L-rd is in beauty. The voice of the L-rd breaks the cedars, yea, the L-rd breaks the cedars of Lebanon...The voice of the L-rd cleaves with flames of fire. The voice of the L-rd causes the desert to quake; the L-rd causes the desert of Kadesh to quake. The voice of the L-rd will frighten the hinds and strip the forests... (*Sefer Tehillim* 29:3-5, 7-9)

Rashi answers our question in no uncertain terms:

I might think it was in an undertone. Therefore, Scripture teaches us: “the Voice”- the very Voice which spoke with him at [Mount] Sinai. But when it [the Voice] reached the entrance, it stopped and did not proceed outside the tent.

Rashi’s statement, “when the Voice reached the entrance, it stopped and did not proceed outside the tent,” facilitates our understanding of his interpretation of “and He [the Almighty] spoke to him (*va’yidaber aluv*).” Rashi opines that this section of our *pasuk* excludes Aaron. In addition, many Rabbinic sources inform us that it was not only Aaron who was denied access to the Divine utterances to Moses in the *Ohel Moed*; rather, no other person in the world was privy to these messages. Clearly, Moses was different in kind and degree from all other prophets of his time, and as we know, for all time to come.

What were the constitutive elements of Moses' uniqueness? We are fortunate that the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) addressed exactly this question in his classic work, *Perush HaMishnah*. Therein, Maimonides presents four distinctive characteristics of Moses' prophetic encounters:

- Unlike all other prophets, Moses spoke to Hashem in a direct manner, i.e. without any intermediary.
- In contrast to all other prophets, Moses communicated with the Almighty during the day and when he was completely conscious.
- All other prophets felt anguish, trembled, shuddered and became weak due to their meeting with Hashem. Moses, however, remained fully in control of his physical and psychological powers throughout his prophetic engagements with Hashem.
- All prophets, with the exception of Moses, received their visions whenever G-d appeared to them – and without their control. Moses, however, spoke to Hashem whenever he so chose. (Synopsis based upon, *Perush HaMishnah, Sanhedrin, Introduction to Perek Chalek*, Rav Kapach edition)

Maimonides describes the unique spiritual intimacy that obtained between Moses and the Creator. As such, the portrait of Moses that emerges is that of a singularly gifted individual who enjoyed unparalleled access to the Almighty due to his exceptional spiritual gifts. Truly, Moses was *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moses our Teacher), the rebbe of the Jewish people forevermore. While none of us will ever be able to reach his exalted level, each of us, like Moses, can try on our own level to establish a personal and existentially meaningful connection with Hashem. With His help may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org> They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Megillat Esther* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.