

Parashat Naso 5782, 2022:

Moshe's 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, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* concludes with the following *pasuk*:

When Moshe came into the *Ohel Moed* to speak with Him (*l'dabare eto*) he would hear the Voice (*HaKol*) speaking to him from between the two cherubs (*me'bain shnai HaK'ruvim*) on the ark cover over the Ark of Testimony; He [Hashem] thus spoke to him (*vayidabare aluv*). (*Sefer Bamidbar* 7:89, translation, *The Living Torah*, Rav Aryeh Kaplan *zatzal*, with my emendations)

This verse contains several exegetical challenges: What does the phrase *l'dabare eto* connote?

Why does the Torah write “*HaKol—the Voice*,” with the definite article, “the?” Why did Hashem speak to Moshe, “*me'bain shnai HaK'ruvim*,” rather than from a different part of the *Ohel Moed*?

Then, too, what is added by the expression, “*vayidabare aluv*,” since the beginning of the verse makes it quite clear that it refers to Moshe?

Our first question is answered by the Netziv *zatzal* (Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, 1816-1893) in his Torah commentary, *HaEmek Davar*. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 7:89, s.v. *u'v'vo Moshe*) He maintained that the expression, “*eto*,” implies “the two of them [Hashem and Moshe] spoke [directly] to one another.” Moreover, their dialogue focused on “*Torah She'Ba'al Peh* (Oral Law), wherein Moshe asked [his questions] of the Holy One blessed be He and He responded.” Alternately, the Netziv suggests *eto* could mean, “Moshe learned through the divine illumination of the holy spirit that went forth from Heaven (*b'shefa Ruach HaKodesh min HaShamayim*). Both

of these interpretations lead the Netziv to suggest, “Moshe’s came to the *Ohel Moed* on a daily basis[to learn] *Torah She’Ba’al Peh* [from the Almighty], as it is both boundless and endless.” (Translations my own) This analysis coincides with the Netziv’s consistent emphasis upon the exceptional import of *Torah She’Ba’al Peh*.

Answers to our second question, “Why does the Torah write “*HaKol—the Voice?*” were offered by Rashi (1040-1105) and the Sforno (c. 1450-c.1550) in their Torah commentaries on our verse. Rashi writes that “one might have thought that it was a quiet voice; the text, however, states, ‘*HaKol,*’ the same Voice with which He spoke to him [Moshe] at Sinai,” that *Dovid HaMelech* describes as powerful and magnificent. (*Sefer Tehillim* 29:4) The Sforno also interprets this term as referring to a highly specific voice. He maintains that it was “the very same Voice that he [Moshe] heard prior to the [grievous] actions associated with the *Eigel* (Golden Calf).” He notes, as well, that this voice was truly unique in the sense that, “it was not present in the first *Beit HaMikdash*, and all the more so, in the second *Beit HaMikdash*, as in these cases, a prophet could not go to the *Mikdash* to prophesize and immediately receive a prophetic vision.” (Translations my own) While Rashi and the Sforno identify “the Voice” in different ways, both analyses stem from the singularity of Moshe’s prophecy, which was different in kind and degree from that of all other *nevi'im*.

In his Torah commentary, *Bat Ayin*, the Avritcher Rebbe *zatzal* (Rav Avraham Dov Baer of Ovruch, Ukraine, d. 1840) directly addresses the question, “Why did Hashem speak to Moshe, “*me’bain shnai HaK’ruvim,*” rather than from a different part of the *Ohel Moed?*”

This entire matter is based upon the notion that the indwelling of the *Shechinah* takes place solely with broken-hearted and people of crushed spirit, as the text states: “Hashem is close to the broken-hearted and He will save the crushed of spirit.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 34:19) ... And this was the level that *Moshe Rabbeinu, aluv hashalom*, achieved. As such, he merited to receive the Torah, and it is

called after his name, as the text says: “Remember the Torah of Moshe My servant.” (*Sefer Malachi* 3:22) [Why was this so?] — because he achieved the ultimate level of humility. As the text states: “And the man, Moshe, was exceedingly humble, more so than any other person on the face of the planet.” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 12:3) ... And all our words are hinted at in the text when it states, “...he would hear the Voice (*HaKol*) speaking to him from between the two cherubs on the ark cover over the Ark of Testimony.” For Moshe was like the *shnai K’ruvim* [that had faces like young children]... who represented flawless humility. [Therefore, Hashem’s Voice spoke to him from between the K’ruvim whom he emulated on the human level.] (Parashat Behalotecha, s.v. *vayitba’er zot*, translation and brackets my own)

Our final question, “What is added by the expression, ‘*vayidabare aluv*,’ since the beginning of the verse makes it quite clear that it refers to Moshe?” is explained by Rashi as, “*l’ma’ate et Aharon min hadibrot* — to exclude Aharon from these words.” This statement is a brief synopsis of a much longer midrashic passage found in *Midrash Sifrei Bamidbar* 58, wherein Rabbi Yehudah ben Bateira cites “thirteen exclusionary statements [in the Torah] that prevented Aharon from participating in many of the prophetic declarations from Hashem,” one of which is “*vayidabare aluv*.” In my estimation, Moshe, alone, was vouchsafed these prophecies because of his unequalled status, as illuminated in next week’s *parasha*:

Hashem descended in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the Tent. He called to Aharon and Miriam, and they both went out. He said, “Please listen to My words. If there be prophets among you, [I] Hashem will make Myself known to him in a vision; I will speak to him in a dream. Not so is My servant, Moshe; he is faithful throughout My house. With him I speak mouth to mouth; in a vision and not in riddles, and he beholds the image of Hashem. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 12:5-8, translation, *The Judaica Press complete Tanach* with my emendations)

On measure, our *pasuk* bespeaks the true greatness of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. According to the Netziv, Moshe is Hashem’s dialogical partner in the exploration and understanding of *Torah She’Ba’al Peh*. For Rashi and the Sforno, he is the sole human being in the post-*Har Sinai* world capable and worthy of hearing the direct Voice of the Almighty. As we have seen, “With him I [Hashem] speak mouth to mouth; in a vision and not in riddles, and he beholds the image of Hashem.” Then, too, for the Avritcher Rebbe, Moshe emerges as the one person in history with whom Hashem’s *Shechinah* could always dwell, due to his boundless humility. Little wonder, then, that in the

concluding verses of *Sefer Nevi'im*, Malachi the Prophet urges, “Remember the Torah of Moshe
My servant—*Zichru Torat Moshe avdi.*”

Shabbat Shalom

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