

The profound mystery of Moshe's assignment

Moshe is advised that he need only perform the task, and the success of the mission is totally in the hands of God, Who will cause the goal to be achieved against all odds, as it were.

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The beginning of Parshat Va'eira appears to be very puzzling.

After informing B'nei Yisrael (the Children of Israel) about the upcoming Geulah (Redemption) from Mitzrayim (Egypt) and his words not being accepted (Shemot/Exodus 6:9), Moshe is instructed by God to go to

Pharoah once more and tell him to release B'nei Yisrael - yet Moshe demurs, again stating that he cannot speak clearly and will not be heeded. (ibid. v. 10-13, 29-30)

However, unlike when Moshe originally sought to exempt himself from this mission in Parshas Shemot, whereupon God became displeased with Moshe for his repeated refusal (ibid. 4:10, with Rashi), in the present case God does not express displeasure with Moshe and instead elaborately reassures him, at which point Moshe (together with Aharon) pursues the mission with which he is tasked.

What changed in this situation, such that God does not display anger toward Moshe for his refusal, and what in fact is it about God's reassurance that causes Moshe to accept the assignment?

After having felt quite unsuccessful the previous time, it was clear to Moshe that he was definitely not the man for the job, as it had been proven beyond a doubt that he could not accomplish it. Whereas when Moshe was initially charged to go to Pharoah and Moshe attempted to decline the undertaking, it was out of a concern that his older brother Aharon might feel offended by the idea of Moshe, who was three years younger and, unlike Aharon, was not an established prophet, being selected to lead the mission of redemption (Rashi on ibid. 4:10, from Midrash Shemot Rabbah), Moshe's effort to decline the assignment was now based on a proven inability to get it done. Hence God did not display anger toward Moshe.

However, something very profound and mysterious was about to occur here.

Moshe ended up accepting the assignment and met smashing success with it, so to say. What changed Moshe's mind, and why did God tolerate Moshe's demurrals until Moshe subsequently accepted the mission?

Moshe had been apprehensive about failing to accomplish the task assigned to him. Although Moshe was advised back in Parshas Shemot

(3:19) that Pharaoh would rebuff Moshe's appeal to free B'nei Yisrael, something quite different was happening now regarding Pharaoh's unreceptiveness and negative reaction.

For this time, God told Moshe, **"You will speak all that I command you, and your brother Aharon will speak to Pharaoh, and he will send B'nei Yisrael forth from his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the Land of Mitzrayim.**

And Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will put My hand against Mitzrayim, and I shall bring my legions, my nation of Yisrael, from the Land of Mitzrayim, with great judgments." (Ibid. 7:2-4)

The message here is that Moshe's job was not to achieve anything – he was to merely do as God instructed, and God would make it happen, despite Moshe's words to Pharaoh appearing to be totally ineffective. Once Moshe was assured that the mission's success was not his responsibility, and that God would manipulate the scenario and redeem B'nei Yisrael despite what seemed to be an impossibility, did Moshe accept the mandate.

God informed Moshe that He – God Himself – would make Pharaoh stubborn, and that He rather than Moshe would Himself step in and bring about the wildly miraculous Geulah (Redemption). Moshe thereupon saw that his job was simply to do what he was told, and that the Geulah was not being accomplished by him; it was totally in the hands of God, and Moshe was merely going through the actions, so to say.

It may very well be for this reason that the opening genealogy of B'nei Yisrael, which was clearly focused on the identity and details of Shevet (the Tribe of) Levi, perplexingly appears smack in the middle of God's repeated commands to Moshe to go to Pharaoh, as presented at the commencement our parshah. Levi is the shevet of Avodah, Divine Service, and was not the shevet of actual leadership in B'nei Yisrael. Chazal (the Sages) tell us that even though the Levi'im carried the Aron (Holy Ark), the Aron really transported itself; the Levi'im just went through the motions of

bearing and transporting the Aron, but it was God Who elevated the Aron and caused it to travel. (Sotah 35A)

So too, when Moshe erected the Mishkan, Chazal tell us that the Mishkan's planks were way too heavy for any human to lift; rather, Moshe went through the motions of erecting the Mishkan, having been directed by God to assemble it, and God miraculously made it happen. (Rashi from Midrash Tanchuma on Shemot 39:33)

Similarly, in the Beis Ha-Mikdash, where the Levi'im served, there were on a constant basis numerous supernatural occurrences; the Levi'im in effect went through the motions, and God made miracles come about.

This is the deeper meaning of the role of Shevet Levi; it performs God's Service and executes His missions, and God steps in and causes the seemingly impossible to transpire. And this is perhaps why the detailed development of the families of Levi is presented literally in the middle of the episode of Moshe receiving and undertaking God's command to go to Pharaoh, where Moshe is advised that he need only perform the task, and the success of the mission is totally in the hands of God, Who will cause the goal to be achieved against all odds, as it were.

And this is in truth how a Jew must live, aware that the success of our endeavors is solely in God's hands. The entire drama of existence is a profound mystery to us, understood and controlled by the Master of the Universe. We need only do our part, and the rest is up to God.

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