

EIGHT CHAPTERS □ CHAPTER 7:6

by Rabbi Yaakov Feldman

Being the greatest prophet of all and arguably the greatest human being ever to have lived, we'd expect a lot from Moses. Indeed, Rambam described Moses elsewhere as the most perfect of people, and credited him with having actually comprehended the truth -- which was certainly no small feat; as being the father of wisdom, prophecy, and of Torah; as being G-d's chosen one from among humanity; and as having reached the spiritual level of the angels.

In point of fact, Moses expected a lot from himself, and with good reason. After all, as Rambam put it here in our text, Moses "realized that there wasn't a single screen he hadn't rent", that is, that not a single barrier between himself and G-d remained, and "that he'd achieved personal and intellectual perfection". So he took a chance; he asked to comprehend G-d. But despite his high station, Moses was denied that, as we'll see.

Let's backtrack a bit though and detail just what set Moses' prophecy apart from the others' as we said we would.

We're taught that Moses' prophetic process was qualitatively different than others'. Where the other prophets were contacted either in a dream or while in a trance, Moses prophesied in a waking, conscious state. While the other prophets would grow terribly weak when they prophesied, would shiver and become frightened by the encounter, Moses never did. Whereas the others couldn't prophesy at will, and would often have to wait for days or even years for a prophecy -- or might not ever prophesy again -- Moses could prophesy at will. Where the others were contacted by angels or had symbolic visions, Moses experienced clear and literal communications from G-d Himself instead. And whereas the others had to prepare themselves for prophecy, Moses was always attached to G-d and thus never had to prepare himself.

Moses was clearly of a whole other order of prophet -- and of being. So he made the unusual request we spoke of above.

He said to G-d, "Please show me Your Glory" (Exodus 33:18) -- allow me insight into Your very Being, L-rd, as no one else had ever been allowed. After all, hadn't he done all he could to deserve that, and wasn't that the loftiest of goals? But G-d denied him his request (in fact, who among us could ever imagine making such a request, let alone expecting it to be granted?).

Why was he denied it? Because it couldn't be otherwise. After all, "he was an intellect fixed in matter", or as Rambam explained, because "he was human" at bottom and it was written that "No

man will see (G-d) and (yet) live" (Exodus 33:20). The point is that "the only thing still standing between Moses and the comprehension of G-d ... was a single sheer screen"-- the fact that he was a mortal and thus imperfect.

Thus the lesson for all of us who hope for spiritual excellence is that, indeed, none of us is perfect and that what sets us apart from each other is our character.

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