

GUTS AND GLORY

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

There is a narrative in this week's portion that includes two verses that seem superfluous. The Torah, in reintroducing Ahron and Moshe to us as they emerge as leaders of Klall Yisrael, also defines their lineage. While tracing their heritage, the Torah also enumerates the descendants of all the tribes, starting from the oldest, Reuvain. It finally reaches Amram, the grandson of Levi and tells us that he married Yocheved who bore Moshe and Ahron. The Torah continues with Ahron's wife, descendants, and others from the tribe of Levi. Then the Torah stops the listings. The rest of the tribes are enumerated later. However, the Torah re-identifies Moshe and Ahron with two verses. "This was the Moshe and Ahron to whom Hashem commanded 'take the Children of Israel out of Egypt. They were the ones that spoke to Pharaoh telling him to send the children of Israel out of Egypt; that was Moshe and Ahron' (Exodus 6:26-27). We are talking Moshe and Ahron! Doesn't everyone who reads the Torah know that they are the ones that led the Jews out of Egypt? The details of their encounters with Pharaoh are clearly appraised throughout the first three portions of the Book of Shemos. Why then does the Torah, in two succinct verses, tell us that these are the Moshe and Ahron that were sent on a Divine mission these are the same pair that told Pharaoh to let the Jews go?

Rabbi Chaim of Sanz was once walking in a small shtetl with his shammass (sexton). Suddenly he stopped in front of the home of a simple Jew. "There is a certain spirituality that I sense here. I'd like to stop by this man's home."

His shammass knocked on the door, and as it opened the holy Rebbe exclaimed, "There is a smell in this home that must be from the Garden of Eden. It is sweet and pure. Pray tell me, where does it come from?"

The simple Jew did not know what to answer, but allowed the Rebbe to roam freely through his humble abode and open any door he chose. Suddenly the Rebbe pointed to a closet. "What is in that closet? The holiness comes from within." The man was reluctant to open the door, but the Rebbe urged him. The man opened the door and in the closet hung the vestments of a priest! The Rebbe turned to the man once again and asked. "Please tell me. What is a holy Jew doing with those clothing?"

The poor Jew told his tale: "Years ago, I was asked to help raise money for a family thrown into jail by a poritz (landowner) to whom they owed rent. My Rebbe asked me to raise the funds, and I immediately agreed. After all, I thought, with the Rebbe's wishes it would be an easy task. Everyone

would give to save a Jewish family! I was wrong. Everyone in town had an excuse not to give. There was a deadline approaching, and I had no choice but to approach the wealthiest Jew in town who was known for his malevolence toward Chassidim. "The man told me he would give me the entire sum that day on one condition. I must parade through the town, dressed as a priest singing psalms in Hebrew and asking for tzedaka (charity) in Yiddish. At the end of the day, he would pay the ransom.

"I did what I had to do, while a group of his friends followed me around, laughing and mocking me wherever I walked. I got the money and I never returned the vestments he gave me."

The Rebbe turned and said, "Yes. These clothing are truly holy. They are the source of the spirituality I sense." Legend has it that the Rebbe told the man to be buried in those clothes.

The Torah sums up the mission and job of Moshe and Ahron in two verses. They were the ones enthusiastically sent to redeem the Jews. Then it tells us that they were the ones that had to deal with Pharaoh. They were mocked with the words, "who is this Hashem that I shall listen to Him?" (Exodus 5:2). They were the ones who were threatened by Pharaoh that "the day you return to see me you will die! (Exodus 10:27). But they did not back down. They suffered the threats, the humiliation, the skepticism, and the failures with strength and fortitude. We may remember them as the ones who were told to take the Children out of Egypt but the Torah reminds us in the ensuing verse that we should never forget the difficult process that led to their great accomplishments. For in order to fulfill what one hears from G-d, he or she must also be ready to hear from a Pharaoh. In those two contrasting verses, the Torah teaches us that very often if there are no guts, then there is no glory.

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Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion which is sponsored by ***The Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation***

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