

# WHAT'S IN IT FOR HIM?

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

At the beginning of Parshas Vaera, after Hashem describes to Moshe and Aaron exactly how He plans to bring about the Jewish Exodus from Egypt, and what they should say to Pharaoh, king of Mitzrayim, the Torah does a sudden about-face, and returns to discussing the lineage of the Tribes of Israel, starting with Reuven and Shimon until after Levi, from whom Moshe and Aaron descended. Since, in a sense, their mission of redemption really begins here (until this point, Moshe and Aaron had only presented their case, but had no positive results to show for their efforts), the Torah honors G-d's agents by tracing their decent from the Patriarchs [Rashi]. This lineage is concluded by the following obscure passage:

*This was the [same] Aaron and Moshe to whom Hashem said, "Take the Children of Israel out of Egypt according to their legions." They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; this was Moshe and Aaron. And it was on the day when Hashem spoke to Moshe in the land of Egypt. [6:26-29]*

In case it seems like I finished off the above section in the middle of a sentence - I did. But so does the Torah. We know that the Torah signifies the end of a section by a space of at least nine letters. Well, this section ends with the words, "And it was on the day when Hashem spoke to Moshe in the land of Egypt," which we would normally expect to find at the beginning of a section. Indeed, Rashi is bothered by this very problem, and is forced to say that this is an exceptional case where the Torah begins a new section at the end of a previous one.

Rav Gifter zt"l (Pirkei Torah p. 190) writes: Upon examining the above section in the Torah, dealing with the lineage of Moshe and Aaron, one is struck by the fact that the entire section is no more than a prelude to the last few verses, "This was Aaron and Moshe... they were the speakers... this was Moshe and Aaron." It's as if the Torah is telling us: Only Moshe and Aaron could have done what they did - it was Aaron and Moshe and no one else!

What was so unique about what they did that it could not have been done by anyone else?

It is natural, he explains, that when one is appointed to a very special and important position, he is humbled by having been chosen. Only the most arrogant individual feels sure from the onset that "he is the man for the job." However, it is also true that as time passes, and the mission progresses successfully, that a person feels contentment and satisfaction in having accomplished a job well done. It is only the most truly humble person that can, mission accomplished, fail to feel any more

personally attached than he did when he first set out. Such humility can only be felt by one who sees himself as no more than a cog in the machinery - a tool in the hand of the Almighty, through which He has chosen to make something wondrous or special come about. But who realizes that the accomplishment - the final product - is Him, not me.

This was the uniqueness of Moshe and Aaron. Rashi comments on the words, "They were the speakers" - "They were the same ones who were commanded, and they were the same ones who executed." What does Rashi mean? Of course they were the same Moshe and Aaron - did we suspect, perhaps, imposters? What Rashi is trying to emphasize, explains Rav Gifter, is where the uniqueness of Moshe and Aaron lies. They felt no more personal attachment to their mission when it began to take shape than they had when Hashem had first commanded them. There was no smug sense of satisfaction at being "the ones" to take the Jews out of Egypt, no pride at having been chosen to address the monarch of Mitzrayim and mingle among the elite, and no false humility masking the swell of the self-important heart. It was the same Moshe and Aaron - from beginning to end.

Perhaps this is the meaning behind the cryptic last verse in the section: And it was on the day when Hashem spoke to Moshe in the land of Egypt. It was to Moshe and Aaron - throughout the entire duration of their leadership - always the same as the first day they had been spoken to; the same humility, the same feeling of undeservedness.

David HaMelech (King David) writes in Tehillim (Psalms 34:3), "In Hashem does my soul take praise; the humble will hear and be glad." Who is the one whose soul takes praise only in Hashem - who views himself but "as clay in the hands of the Sculptor?" The humble will hear and be glad - only one of true humility and modesty.

It is told that Rav Gifter zt"l was once asked to become the president of a certain institution. He responded that his busy schedule as a Rosh Yeshiva didn't allow him to invest the time needed to take on such responsibility, to which he was told that he wouldn't have to do anything at all - they merely wished to have him on their letterhead as honorary president. "What?" he asked, "honor - do you think that's what I need?"

So often, when considering taking on a mitzvah or position of responsibility, the first thing we ask ourselves is, "What's in it for me?" Perhaps its the monetary incentive, perhaps the honor, perhaps even the simple self-satisfaction of knowing we've done something good. But somehow, we're there - front and center. How different this attitude is from that of our leaders, Moshe and Aaron, whose only concern was: What's in it for Hashem?

Have a good Shabbos.

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