

WHY WASN'T MOSHE DEPRESSED?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Beha'aloscha

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape# 149, Bringing the Sefer Torah to a Temporary Minyan. Good Shabbos!

Why Wasn't Moshe Rabbeinu Depressed?

At the beginning of the parsha, the Torah gives Aharon the mitzvah of kindling the lights of the Menorah in the Tabernacle. A very famous Rash"i here asks why this section immediately follows that of the offerings of the Princes at the end of Parshas Naso. Rash"i answers that when Aharon witnessed the offerings of all the Princes, he became depressed that neither he nor his Tribe were included in that dedication ceremony. Rash"i says that G-d therefore consoled Aharon, by telling him, "I swear, Your portion is greater than theirs -- you will kindle the Menorah".

Rash"i says, as it were, that G-d gave Aharon a consolation prize. He didn't have a chance to participate in the Tabernacle Dedication with the other Princes, but he would have an opportunity for an even greater privilege.

There is a famous Ramba"n that explains the allusion to the Menorah lit in each generation by all Jews to commemorate the Chanukah story, in which Aharon's descendants played a major role. There are many things to comment on this Rash"i, but I once heard an interesting insight from the Rosh Yeshiva [of Ner Israel in Baltimore], Rav Yaakov Weinberg, Shlit"a.

Aharon was supposedly depressed because neither he nor his tribe were represented in the Dedication of the Mishkan. But who was the titular head of the Tribe of Levi? Off hand, we would say the head of that tribe was not Aharon, but was Moshe Rabbeinu. He was the head of all of Israel; he was a greater Novi than Aharon, so he was clearly the official leader of the Tribe of Levi.

So who should get depressed here? If anyone, Moshe should have been depressed. Aharon is the head of the Priests, who are only a subset of Shevet Levi. Yet it was he who felt depressed at the fact that the Leviim were not represented in the Dedication. Why not Moshe Rabbeinu?

Rav Weinberg explained that Moshe Rabbeinu, by becoming the leader of all Israel, was no longer a member of the Tribe of Levi. When one is the leader of the generation, he loses his provincial and parochial interests. He is no longer Shevet Levi; he is the 'Am' -- the People. He embodies the Nation -- Reuvain, Shimeon, Yehudah, Dan, everyone!

For example, the President of the United States no longer represents his home state -- that is the job of the Governor, even though the President has achieved greater honor and higher office. The President can no longer be a Texan or a New Yorker or a Marylander -- he must represent all the people, l'havdil -- it is understood -- tens of thousands of times.

That is the distinction between Aharon and Moshe. Moshe, by becoming the Rabbi of Israel, ceased to be merely a Levi. He had to leave behind any personal interests and biases and become the representative of the entire Nation.

Showing Appreciation For Miriam After 80 Years

Now we skip from the first Rash"i in the Parsha to the last Rash"i. At the end of the Parsha we have another famous incident. The Torah tells us that Miriam had complaints about her brother, Moshe Rabbeinu, and she talked about these complaints. G-d Himself comes down and says do not speak about Moshe; don't hold him to the standards of any normal human being -- "Not so is My Servant Moshe, in My entire house he is the trusted one..." [Bamidbar 12:7].

Moshe was in a league by himself and for talking about him, Miriam was stricken with Tzora'as. The law concerning such a person who is stricken with Tzora'as is that they have to be sent outside the Camp. Miriam was in fact sent outside the Camp of Israel for 7 days. The verse tells us that "...The nation did not travel until Miriam was brought back in." [12:15].

Rash"i, quoting the Talmud [Sotah 9b] says that this honor (that the entire Jewish people waited for her) was accorded to Miriam as reward for waiting by the Nile for her infant brother Moshe (to see who would pick up the basket in which he was floating).

The question can be asked -- why now? It is 80 years since Miriam waited for Moshe. Why all of a sudden is now the time for her to receive a reward?

At a simple level we could answer -- now is when she needed it. She is down and out, so to speak; now is a good time to give her honor.

The Shemen HaTov gives a better answer. He says that the reason why it was now the appropriate

time to reward Miriam is because now we -- as a people -- recognize what she did for us.

Sometimes a person does an act and even though we appreciate the act, we do not appreciate it to its fullest extent. Right now, we retroactively realized what Miriam did -- we realize who Moshe Rabbeinu really is. Now is when G-d gives personal testimony and says something about Moshe Rabbeinu that He never said about any other human being: "You don't realize who Moshe is. I speak to him mouth to mouth. He is in a league by himself!"

They had been living with Moshe Rabbeinu. They become used to Moshe Rabbeinu. They forgot who Moshe Rabbeinu was. So therefore G-d tells the people, "There is no one who was ever like him; there never will be any one like him."

Now, eighty years later, they can realize what Miriam did. That act -- standing and waiting, making sure that all would be all right with her brother, eighty years earlier -- saved a Moshe Rabbeinu! Now they are first able, to fully appreciate this.

Sometimes we do a Chessed and we don't realize the implications. Sometimes it takes time, a week, a month, a year. Sometimes it takes 80 years or longer to realize "Wow! What a remarkable act!" That is what they finally realize here. And now, 80 years later they had to show their appreciation.

Glossary

Shevet -- Tribe (of)

l'havdil -- to distinguish (said after using a secular analogy of a spiritual principle)

Tzora'as -- a skin disease caused at a spiritual level by improper speech.

Chessed -- Kindness

Sources and Personalities

Rash"i -- Rav Shlomo ben Yitzchak (1040-1105)

Ramba"n -- Rav Moshe Ben Nachman (1194-1204)

Rav Yaakov Weinberg -- Present Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel, Baltimore.

Shemen Tov -- Rabbi Dov Weinberger, contemporary, Brooklyn, NY.

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