

Moses played different roles in the 2 episodes of קבלת התורה, receiving the Torah at Sinai. In the first episode, his intended role was limited to preparing the people for entering into the covenant with Gd. The people heard the first of the Ten Commandments directly from Gd and then appealed to Moses to be the intermediary to bring them the rest of the Commandments from Gd. It is interesting to note that Gd tells Moses that He is coming to him through a cloud so the people will hear when Gd speaks to him. And as a result of this episode, the people will believe in Moses forever as well, וגם בך יאמינו לעולם.

Why was it necessary for the people to express their belief in Moses at Sinai? They already did so after the splitting of the Reed Sea, קריעת ים סוף, as it says 'ויאמינו בד' ובמשה עבדו? What was different about the faith or belief in Moses at Sinai versus at the Reed Sea?

If Moses was simply the go between at the first incident of receiving the Torah, in what way was his prestige elevated to earn the special status Gd mentioned?

Moses initially refused to accept the mission to free the people from Egypt when Gd commanded him to be His emissary, שליח. He sought to excuse himself saying his speech impediment disqualified him from being an effective emissary. Gd insisted that Moses accept the mission and finally tells Moses that Aaron will be his prophet. Why was the term נביא used to describe Aaron's role?

Moses persisted in resisting the mission, asking who he should say sent him when the people inquire. Gd tells him to say E-H-Y-H sent him and your sign will be after taking the people out of Egypt you will worship Gd on this mountain, וזה לך הַאֵת כִּי אֲנִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת הָעָם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה. Moses again says he is not a person of words and therefore was unfit for the role of redeemer. Did he not know that if Gd was telling him to go He would not forsake him? Why was he so concerned? And given his concerns, in what way were they assuaged by the promise of Gd that shortly after they leave Egypt they will worship Gd on this very mountain. How was this a sign for Moses?

The Gemara (Shabbos 118b) says that one who says praise to Gd, הלל, daily is considered a blasphemer. The Gemara asks, but we have another source that contradicts that statement saying he is worthy of the world to come, עולם הבא? The Gemara answers that one who recites daily the הלל associated with the Exodus, הלל המצרי, is a blasphemer. One who recites הלל associated with the verses of praise usually recited before ברכות קריאת שמע וקריאת שמע ושמונה עשרה, commonly referred to as הלל דפסוקי דזמרה, is worthy of עולם הבא. What is the difference between these forms of הלל?

Gd created the world with a specific natural order in mind. He imbued creation with a natural direction that was perfectly balanced according to His design. Gd prefers to operate within the scope of the natural laws He put in place. Gd bringing a supernatural event, a miracle, that contradicts the laws of nature He instilled in creation, is tantamount to His violating or breaking the natural order. According to the Ibn Ezra, the term Sh-D-Y refers to Gd as robber thief, destroyer, for He acts in a way that destroys or breaks the laws of nature. Gd does not seek to perform extraordinary events, however at times due to situational circumstances, He must do so. הלל המצרי describes Gd breaking the laws of nature to rescue the Jews. The miracles that were brought upon the Egyptians, the splitting of the sea, drowning the Egyptians in a supernatural way, all these events broke the built-in laws of nature and were not the preferred way for Gd to rescue the people. Rashi comments on the verse וארד להצילו, that Gd's prestige was lessened, כביכול, when He descended to Egypt, the most impure place, and ultimately coerced the Egyptians to free the Jews through supernatural events that went counter to the laws of nature.

On the other hand, הלל דפסוקי דזמרה describes Gd sustaining constantly the universe and all of creation. In the final analysis, what is more difficult, to split the sea and drown several hundred Egyptians or to create and maintain the universe and all of creation? Clearly it is the latter. Unfortunately, man takes these acts of Gd for granted and fails to appreciate them for the kindness they are. One who praises Gd only for supernatural events ironically limits and confines the greatness of Gd to acts that Gd would prefer to avoid and in the final analysis are not as great as the hidden miracles built into nature all around us.

Maimonides writes (הלכות עבודת כוכבים פרק א) that Abraham found Gd by observing the workings of nature and concluded there must be a supreme entity controlling all of creation. Abraham came to Gd through הלל דפסוקי דזמרה. On the other hand, Moses met Gd at the miracle of the burning bush. His initial interactions with Gd were of the miraculous variety, whether it was when he was saved from Pharaoh's sword or the miracles of the staff turning into a snake, water turning to blood, the 10 plagues brought upon Egypt or the splitting of the sea. Moses found to Gd via הלל המצרי.

Faith in Gd based on miraculous events can be tenuous. (See Maimonides הלכות (יסודי התורה ח:א).) An even greater supernatural event can cast doubt on earlier ones. Or people may lose faith if supernatural events cease to occur. The people's belief in Gd and Moses professed at the splitting of the sea was based on their witnessing a miraculous event. That faith was quickly called into question when the people sought food and water and were only assuaged when given Manna and meat from heaven as well as the water from the stone when Moses hit the rock. These additional miraculous events caught the attention of the people and sustained them for a while. With the act of striking the rock and drawing water from it, Moses succeeded in sanctifying Gd's name through the miracle. 38 years later Moses is punished after he strikes the rock instead of speaking to it as he was commanded. Gd tells him he was punished because יען לא האמנתם בי להקדישני. Why was Moses punished for his striking the rock instead of speaking to it? In what way did his action demonstrate a lack of faith in Gd?

Thirty eight years previously, after all the miracles associated with the Exodus and the splitting of the Reed Sea, Moses struck the rock and brought forth waters for the people to drink. It was a time of miracles and drawing water from the rock continued the series of miracles brought about by Moses. Gd recognized that if Moses were to do the same again at מי מריבה, the people may reconsider and reclassify his original act of striking the rock as an act by Moses the magician and not Moses the שליח ד'. Their faith in Gd that original act engendered would be lost. Gd wanted Moses to act differently at מי מריבה in order to reinforce the people's faith in Gd and ultimately in Moses as שליח ד'. Moses, the master נביא would now use his power of speech to convince an inanimate rock to give forth waters. It would reinforce Moses reputation and set an example for the people that Gd can

answer their needs through different means. When he failed his assignment, Gd informed him that his actions demonstrated a lack of faith in Gd as it could lead to the people reconsidering their original faith in Gd so many years ago at **מסה ומריבה**. Moses lost an opportunity to sanctify Gd's name and was punished for that.

The people were told they would come to Sinai to worship Gd. There would be no supernatural miracles; their arrival at Sinai required them to show faith in Gd for the natural as well as the supernatural events. The sacrifices brought at Sinai were the foundation for the daily morning and evening sacrifices that celebrated the continuity of the natural routine ordained by Gd.

Moses thought that being a stutterer disqualified him as Gd's messenger. The emissary of Gd must use words effectively to approach any situation. If the people are in need, a **נביא** must be able to pray on their behalf. If the people are in need of spiritual guidance, a **נביא** must effectively present Gd's message to them. The Torah tells us that when Abimelech was afflicted for taking Sarah, Gd told him to return Sarah to Abraham and ask him to pray on his behalf, **כי נביא הוא**. Why couldn't Abimelech pray on his own behalf, why was Abraham's prayer necessary? One of the definitions of **נביא** is someone whose words, prayers, flow as sweet, ripe fruit, **גִּיב שְׁפִתָּיִם**. One who has the power of prayer formulates his thoughts and needs effectively, as a cogent, compelling flow of words that cannot be ignored. Abimelech lacked that ability, however Abraham possessed it. His prayers would not be ignored. At times, the **נביא** is called upon to represent or rebuke the people. This role requires an ability to reach the hearts and minds of the people, as Elijah did at Mount Carmel.

When asked by Gd to undertake the role of a **נביא**, Moses takes stock of himself and says that he is not the right person for the role. His speech is limited. He failed to reach the hearts and minds of the Jewish people years ago in Egypt, being forced to flee when Pharaoh sought to put him to death after Dathan and Aviram informed the authorities about the Egyptian Moshe killed to save a fellow Jew. He was completely disconnected from them after so many years. He no longer shared the same day to day concerns with them. He was committed to tend Yitro's flocks. Why send him when there already was a prophet in Egypt, his brother Aaron,

capable of bringing Gd's message to the people? Moses said to Gd **והם לא יאמינו לי**, they will not believe me that Gd appeared to you. I have difficulty in presenting a message that is not based on miracles. How will I convince them that they will soon be an **עם סגולה**?

Gd informed Moses that he has a dual mission. The first part is to tell the Jewish People that they will be redeemed. He, along with Aaron, will bring that message to the people and after he performs the three miracles Gd showed him, leprosy, the stick turning to a snake and the water turning to blood, they will be convinced that Gd appeared to Moses. During this stage Aaron will be your **נביא** to ensure you're your message is heard by the people. However, Moses, you are correct that belief based on miracles is unsustainable. Therefore the true sign that I sent you will be discerned a short time after leaving Egypt, when this group of slaves will be transformed into a chosen nation that understands the power and importance of prayer and worshipping Gd on this very mountain (see Unkelos and Targum Yerushalmi, **שמות ג:יב**). **וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאך את העם תעבדון את האלקים**. **על ההר הזה**. For that will be the truly undisputable sign that Gd freed them and fulfilled the promise He made to Abraham hundreds of years before.

They will embark upon a national existence that recognizes the greatness of Gd by bringing **בכורים** to thank Gd for a bountiful harvest. They will celebrate the festivals that focus on the agricultural cycle as well as on the miracles associated with their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. They will appreciate the opportunity to perform the other commandments, to look up at the sky and understand that Gd has chosen them, protects and cares about them while maintaining all of creation, **המחדש בטובו בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית**. They will favor the recitation of **הלל המצרי** over **הלל דפסוקי דזמרה**.

However, there was also a change in Moses at Sinai. Until now, Moses' prayers to Gd were offered under some form of duress. When called on to contact Gd to stop the plagues, the Torah uses the word **צעקה**, to cry out to Gd. **צעקה** is a primordial form of prayer, not so much in words as a helpless primordial cry for help. Even at the Reed Sea, when faced with the impending attack of the Egyptians, Gd tells Moses **מה תצעק אלי**, why are you shouting to me. When the people required water

and complained to Moses, Moses again cries out to Gd from the pain he felt being squeezed by the thirsty nation.

At Sinai, Moses changes from צועק to מתפלל. He understands the needs of the people. Like Abraham, he is now able to cogently present their needs to Gd. Gd told Moses that He will come to him through the dense clouds and the nation will hear Gd speaking directly with Moses, the first human being to have a conversation with Gd. Their conversation is initiated as prayer (see Targum Yerushalmi 19:9 שמות). From this point on, Moses approaches Gd on behalf of the people through prayer. He no longer is a צועק, he is now a מתפלל. He understands their needs. His stuttering is no longer an issue. Moses formulates his prayers succinctly and clearly. When the people sin with the golden calf, Gd was angered to the point of taking out His wrath on Aaron and the people. Moses describes how he prayed on their behalf and Aaron's behalf, ואתפלל (דברים ט:כ,כו). His prayer is desperate but considered and focused. His words are clear and succinct, employing cogent arguments and pleas to seek forgiveness for their terrible sin. He is ultimately successful when Gd grants them a second covenant, a new set of Tablets and the Torah. Moses became the master prophet who knows exactly how to approach Gd and what to say. His prayers were not always accepted but they were always heard.

This was the fulfillment of the promise Gd made to Moses months and years earlier at the episode of the burning bush. Gd was telling Moses at that time that indeed you are not yet at the stage of your career where the people will believe in you. But have patience and you will discover that you and the people will mature. They will not only come to have faith in Gd, but in you Moses as well. Not as a miracle worker, but as נביא, as a מתפלל, as a teacher. In that role you will have your greatest impact and your reputation as the greatest of all human beings and prophets will be secured. You will teach them that Gd can be found in a thick cloud, amidst the turmoil of life when it is difficult to see Gd clearly. The message you will give them is don't look for Gd in the miraculous events associated with הלל דפסוקי דזמרה, look for Him in the cloud and nature represented by הלל המצרי.

This summary is copyright 2019 by Rabbi Josh Rapps. Permission to distribute this summary for individual use, with this notice, is granted. Distribution through electronic or printed media without the author's permission is prohibited.