



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

TUESDAY JANUARY 12, 2010 / כ"ו טבת תש"ע

PARSHA:

VA'ERA / וארא

SERMON TITLE:

SPEECHES VS. MIRACLES

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Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family

In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל אהב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

VA'ERA

SPEECHES VS. MIRACLES

As Barack Obama marks his first year in office, one thing everyone will agree on – is that his greatest strength is his ability to speak—even Rush Limbaugh agrees that he’s a fabulous speaker.

Obama is blessed with a golden tongue. He a first-class, five-star orator, and, as we saw through his campaign, he has the power to hypnotize millions with his mouth. It’s obvious that for a leader, the most important tool is his tongue.

In this week’s Parshah, we meet the greatest and most famous leader of all times, Moses.

The Parshah tells us about the dialog between G-d and Moshe. G-d wanted him to be His messenger, to be the one to take the Jewish Nation out of Egypt. Moshe, however, refused offering various excuses.

At first, he said that the Jews wouldn’t believe him. Then he said that the Pharaoh wouldn’t listen to him. This went on for seven days.

Once Moshe ran out of excuses, he played a winning ticket: an objective problem—not a problem about whether this one or that one will not listen to him but rather, a very serious problem. Now Moshe complained: “I am not a man of words... I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue.” As Rashi explains, “I speak with difficulty”—it was physically hard for Moses to speak.

Now, this is a serious problem.

The entire strength of a leader depends on the power of speech. Imagine if Obama had difficulty speaking—he’d never become President! His entire strength is his mouth. Take that away from him? He’s finished.

Another example might be a new rabbi coming to a synagogue for a job try-out. He wants to become the rabbi—but, he explains to the board of directors, he has a slight

problem: it's hard for him to speak. How do you think the community would react to such a rabbi?

The president of the synagogue might advise him to become the rabbi's speechwriter—but to become the synagogue's rabbi? That would never happen—because the entire function of a rabbi is to teach Torah. And teaching Torah is done by talking.

On second thought, there might be people who would want such a rabbi. After all, his speeches would be really short and he wouldn't wear out their patience.

So now we come back to the greatest Rebbe in all of Jewish history, Moshe, who personally testified against himself that he was "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue."

But what did G-d answer him? Don't worry. Your brother Aaron will speak for you.

However, we might have expected G-d to pull off a minor miracle here. Why didn't He heal Moshe of his problem? That would have solved the biggest problem blocking Moshe from becoming a leader, would it not?

Besides, that's a much smaller miracle than turning a stick into a snake or turning water into blood, not to mention the Splitting of the Sea—all we're asking for here is something that even human doctors could do. We have yet to hear of anyone who can turn a stick into a snake—but for G-d, healing a human being of a speech impediment is small change! How hard is it for G-d to correct Moshe's one small problem?

But G-d chose to not fix this problem, as we see in our Parshah. After Moshe goes to the Pharaoh for the first time, he brings up the problem again twice. This tells us two things: 1. G-d did not heal him, and 2. it bothered Moshe greatly.

However, we can say that the answer to our question here lies in the very opening words of our Parshah.

In the beginning of the Torah portion, G-d says to Moshe: "I revealed Myself to the Patriarchs with the name Almighty G-d, but My Name Hashem I did not make known to them."

G-d's "names" express specific revelations. As the Midrash says, "I am called by My actions." This means that the name that G-d uses expresses a specific behavior towards the world.

For example, the name Elokim is numerically equivalent to the word "hatevah," the Hebrew phrase referring to the order of nature. What does this mean? It means that the name Elokim expresses how G-d is disguised inside the laws of nature, which do not let us see His power openly. The sun rises every morning, and it's hard for a person to remember that it's G-d who makes the sun rise every morning and set every night. The entire order of the universe has G-d hidden inside it.

The name Hashem, on the other hand, symbolizes miracles. When G-d bends the laws of nature and works a miracle, then everyone remembers that there's Somebody in charge of this town here—there's a hidden hand that steers everything.

What G-d was really telling Moshe was: I revealed Myself to the Patriarchs. I spoke to them. They went and told the world that there is a G-d. But "My Name Hashem I did not make known to them"—I did not work miracles. The world only heard of G-d; they did not see open miracles. That's why the Patriarchs' entire campaign was a bit removed: they gave a lot of speeches that there is a G-d, but the people did not actually see it.

So what G-d was telling Moses was: No more speeches. It's time for everyone to see that the universe has a Creator. You don't need to know how to speak well. What you need is only a big stick to do miracles with.

Moshe's mission was not to convince anyone with good arguments and philosophical proofs that there is a Creator of the universe. That was already taken care of by the Patriarchs. They gave long speeches, each over the course of a long life. Avraham, for example, lives for 175 years, and we can only imagine how many speeches he must have given, and not short ones either.

Moshe's mission was to change the order of nature—to break nature: to turn water into blood, to split the sea, to bring Manna down from heaven. He didn't need to be a great speaker—with one miracle; he could do more than any one speech could do. With one miracle, he could reveal G-d in the world and cause millions to believe in a Creator of the universe more than all three Patriarchs combined.

While we are in exile, there are not too many miracles, and certainly not open miracles. However, from time to time, "G-d exposes His Arm"—G-d works open miracles which remind us that He runs the world.

The wars for Israel's existence & Entebbe are just some examples miracles in the modern day.

When it happened, it was a revelation of G-dliness—something that inspires more faith in G-d than all the rabbis' speeches combined.

We are all waiting for the coming of Moshiach – a leader who will not need to give eloquent speeches – rather – with one miracle he will bring the world closer to G-d.

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