


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT
 שבת..... *for Friday night*..... קדש
 27 January 2017 - 29 Tevet 5777
 Sedra Va'era

MOSES AND AARON

THE SEDRA¹ DESCRIBES THE DUAL ROLE OF MOSES AND AARON in their dealings with Pharaoh. Together they had to transmit to him the word of G-d. In this task they acted in different but complementary ways.

Moses described himself as having a speech defect². For this reason, he said, he would not be able to go to Egypt and to redeem the Jewish people. G-d told him that Aaron his brother would be with him. G-d will speak to Moses, and Moses will tell Aaron, and Aaron will do the speaking³.

Why did Moses feel he could not speak himself? The Sages tell us his soul came from such an exalted realm that he could not easily communicate through speech. He was absorbed in holiness, beyond this world. Further, when he did speak, they tell us “the Shechinah (Divine Presence) spoke from his throat”⁴.

This means that Moses spoke with tremendous power. He was expressing something from G-d. However, these powerful statements with their quality of absolute truth needed translation into normal terms which people could understand. At this stage, when Moses wanted to communicate with the Jewish people, Aaron would do the talking. He would be the mouth of Moses. However, he would be very faithful to Moses’ own words.

In this week’s Sedra we learn a further point in this process. G-d told Moses: “I am making you as a G-d to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet”⁵. When they confront Pharaoh, Moses *himself* will make a brief powerful statement,

directly transmitting the word of G-d. Then his brother Aaron will use his power of oratory to express this Divine message in a comprehensible way.

In order to deal with Pharaoh, the source of the problem of the slavery in Egypt, Moses himself would speak. His direct Divine message would spiritually dissolve the negativity of Pharaoh. True, his words would have such power, they might not be understood at all. So then Aaron would translate them into rational terms.

The Torah is not only talking about the past, but is telling us how we should deal with the Pharaoh within. The inner Pharaoh wants to enslave our Jewish selves. It wants to force us to work only for selfish, secular, material goals. Our real purpose in life, however, is to make our personal lives, our homes and ultimately the whole world into a spiritual domain where G-dliness is revealed.

We have to fight against the inner Pharaoh using the two approaches of Moses and Aaron. We need both a few straight words of Divine truth, from Moses, and much rational persuasion from Aaron. The words of truth come directly from the Torah, including the most spiritual aspects of the Torah. They also come from our own inner Moses, the Divine Soul, which often prompts us to make a step forward in Jewish terms.

Yet we do not always understand the Torah in itself, and we need interpreters, who help to make it sound relevant to our lives as people in the 21st century. We sometimes do not even hear properly the urging of our own Divine Soul. It is too simple, too pure. We have to add rational arguments, practical and even materialist reasons for obeying its directives, the quality of Aaron.

Just as, in the case of the Exodus, ultimately it was Moses who broke the power of Pharaoh, so too in our own inner battle: however eloquent the rational persuasion of Aaron, we cannot do without a few words of pure truth. This truth of Torah, especially the spirituality of Torah, will bring us to inner redemption, and ultimately will redeem the whole world⁶.

1. Exodus 6:2 – 9:35 2. Exodus 4:10. 3. Exodus 4:15. 4. See *Torah Or*, 107a. 5. Exodus 7:1; see Rashi's comment. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol.16, 69-78.

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SEDRA VA'ERA

THE HABITS OF ANTS

"Did you know" David said, sitting at the supper table one night, "ant colonies are sometimes described as super organisms".

He had been pleasantly fascinated that day in the science lab to find that he wasn't the only one who had brothers and sisters who bothered him, and he wasn't the only one who had friends, work mates and a bustling life.

"Mum" he said, "today in the science lab the teacher showed us some ants under the microscope. Did you know that when they find food they leave signals for the friends to come and get some as well, and a crushed ant can make some kind of alarm chemical which in high concentration sends nearby ants into an attack frenzy, and in a low concentration attracts them to come close. I think it is so amazing to see how similar they are to humans."

"Well" his older brother Ben said "the way you describe them they are interesting, but I wouldn't say they are so similar to us. Hey, just imagine if there would have been a plague of ants when we were going out of Egypt! There were frogs and lice and wild animals, but imagine if there had been millions of ants emitting their alarm chemical in high concentration and running wild!"

Their mother wrinkled her nose. It was not quite the best topic for suppertime.

So, trying to change the subject, she launched a slightly different conversation. “Who has heard the idea that we ourselves go out of Egypt?” she asked her two sons.

“I have,” David said. “Mr. Benson said that every single person can experience a little Exodus from Egypt, at any time.”

“What do you mean?” asked Ben.

“Well” David continued, “the Hebrew word for Egypt ‘mitzraim’ מצרים can also be pointed ‘meitzarim’, which means limitations. So the point is, that we can break through our own limitations and go beyond ourselves. That is really our own personal exodus from Egypt, going free.”

“Do you mean beating your own running record?” asked Ben, half joking. “If you run a hundred meters ten seconds faster than you did last month, have you gone out of Egypt?”

“No,” said David. “I don’t think so. Mr Benson gave the example of someone who can’t do their homework, as soon as they sit down to do it, they think of something else to do, and something else. So their homework never gets done.”

“But at last they resolve to do their homework, once and for all, and they sit down and do it, so they have gone out of Egypt!” said Ben.

“That’s right” said their mother. “Egypt can mean being trapped in a bad habit. You break the habit and you are free. Ants are creatures of habit, their instinct, but a human being has good habits and bad. When he chooses to break the bad habit, he or she goes out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom.”

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