

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vaera
January 2020 / Tevet 5780

darchai.noam@gmail.com
www.darchai-noam.com

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Vaera – Reaching our potential

This week's Parsha of Vaera contains a partial genealogy of the Jewish people at that time. The key members of the tribes of Reuven, Shimon and Levi are delineated until we reach Moshe and Aharon.

*That is **Aharon and Moshe**, to whom Hashem said, “Take the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt with their legions”. They are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let the children of Israel out of Egypt. They are **Moshe and Aharon**.¹*

We see that in the first pasuk, the Torah refers to “Aharon and Moshe” whereas in the second pasuk it lists the brothers in the order of “Moshe and Aharon”. In his commentary, Rashi points out that sometimes Aharon is mentioned before Moshe in the Torah and sometimes Moshe is mentioned before Aharon. Rashi explains that this is to show us that both brothers were equal in stature. Thus, the Torah does not want to consistently place one of the brothers ahead of the other one.²

How can Rashi teach that Aharon was equal to Moshe, when the Torah itself testifies that Moshe was the greatest prophet of all time?³

The supremacy of Moshe is also supported by the Rambam's 13 principles of faith.⁴

- The sixth principle states: “I believe with complete faith that all the words of the Prophets are true”.
- The seventh principle states: “I believe with complete faith that the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu ע"ה, was true; and that he was the father of the prophets, both of those who preceded and of those who followed him”.

In formulating the principles of faith, Rambam was seeking to encapsulate the minimum number of fundamental principles that a Jew must believe. If the sixth principle already declares belief in the prophets, why do we need a separate principle that relates to Moshe's prophecy? Isn't that already included within the more inclusive principle number six? The answer is that Moshe's prophecy was on a totally different level than the other prophets and thus justified a separate principle of faith. Only Moshe had the ability to bring Torah down from the Heavens. The only reason we believe in other prophets is because Moshe told us to. The Gemara⁵ explains that the other prophets observed their prophecies through an obscure “looking glass” i.e., their prophecies were given as metaphoric visions but were not a direct perception of the matter. In contrast, only Moshe observed his prophecies through a clear “looking glass”.

Rav Dessler explains⁶ that as a result of Moshe's great humility, the “glass” through which he saw his prophecies was clear. His ego caused no obscurities or distortions in his vision. This was not the case with other prophets. However great they were, their “lens” was not completely clear.

Given Moshe's supreme status, how can Rashi (and the Midrash) state that Moshe and Aharon were equal?

¹ Our Parasha, Shmot 6:26-27.

² Rashi to Shmot 6:26, based on the Mechilta 7:1.

³ See for example Bamidbar 12:7 where Hashem criticises Aharon and Miriam for speaking negatively about Moshe. Hashem testifies that Moshe's prophecy is in a class of its own.

⁴ See pages 178-9 of the standard Artscroll Ashkenaz siddur.

⁵ Yevamot 49b with Rashi.

⁶ Rav Dessler on the Parasha, Parashat Yitro, p211.

Rav Moshe Feinstein⁷ explains that just like Moshe, Aaron succeeded in achieving his maximum potential. In this sense, both brothers were equal. Hashem measures our merit based purely on how well we achieve our potential, taking into account our unique circumstances. We can differentiate between external/objective greatness (the type of greatness that everyone can recognise), and internal/subjective greatness (overcoming one's personal challenges and achieving one's potential – the type of greatness that is only known to Hashem).

We can also suggest that Moshe and Aharon both excelled in different areas. Whereas Moshe may have been the greatest prophet and leader, Aharon outshone Moshe in other areas, such as love for his fellow man. We see that the mourning for Aharon was greater than the mourning for Moshe because Aharon would instil peace between man and his fellow man and between a wife and her husband.⁸ Many thousands of boys were named Aharon because they would not have been born if it was not for Aharon bringing peace between their parents.⁹ And when Aharon heard of the death of his sons Nadav and Avihu, he accepted this tragedy with silent acceptance instead of debating Hashem's will. He was the epitome of "Hod" (submission). Who is to say that these traits are less important than leadership and prophecy? These traits are vital and different – to compare them to Moshe's strengths would be like comparing apples with oranges.

On the one hand, this is quite a reassuring idea. What a relief! We will not be judged based on how we compare to other people because we all have different abilities and we each face a unique set of circumstances. At the end of our lives, we will not be compared to spiritual giants like Moshe Rabbeinu.

On the other hand, this can be quite daunting. We are only judged based on how we measure up compared to our own potential. However, we can never know what our potential is and when we have reached it. No matter what we have achieved, there is always more that can be done.

In one of his audio shiurim, Rabbi Akiva Tatz talks about a martial arts world champion who had just defeated his opponent and won the world title. As he was walking away from the mat, he was overheard muttering to himself – "still many mistakes". That is the attitude that we need to have to achieve growth and spirituality in this world.

Avraham Avinu also reached his potential. At Akeidat Yitzchak the heavenly voice called Avraham Avraham. Some commentators explain that one name was referring to the earthly Avraham and the other was referring to the heavenly Avraham – and they were both identical. But consider what it took for him to get there - he had to be willing to offer his son as a sacrifice! For Avraham, the epitome of chessed, his test and maximum potential was reached when he demonstrated extreme gevurah.

There is a famous story about Reb Zusha on his death bed. He was concerned about the questions that he would be asked when he got to the Heavenly Court. He was not concerned about being asked: "Why weren't you like Moshe or Avraham"? He could answer: "Because I'm not Moshe and I'm not Avraham. And besides, you already have a Moshe and an Avraham. You don't need another one." However, he **was** concerned about being asked "Why weren't you like Reb Zusha?" Hashem could say: "I don't need another Moshe or Avraham, but I do need a Reb Zusha". Only you can complete the unique task that was set for you.

After our 120 years in this world, we will be shown an image of who we could have been and what we could have achieved had we reached our potential. The Vilna Gaon teaches that the biggest pain we can experience is finding out just how much more we could have achieved with our potential. To minimise this pain as much as possible, we can try to focus on who we are, what resources Hashem gave us and what we are capable of. And then, with a fiery ratzon (will) try to achieve all that we can!

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember that we will not be compared to other people. We are not expected to achieve more than we are capable of achieving.
2. However, we will ultimately be measured against our own potential. We must deeply contemplate our own potential and then try to strive to achieve it, gradually but surely.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

* To subscribe to Darchai Noam, please email darchai.noam@gmail.com with the word 'Subscribe' in the subject.

⁷ See Artscroll Stone edition Chumash, footnote to Shmot 6:26.

⁸ See Rashi's comment to Devarim 34:8 (Parashat V'zot Habrachah).

⁹ Avot d'Rabbi Natan, chapter 12.