

3] MOSHE RABBENU

Day of Yahrzeit 7th of Adar

The complete story of the greatest personality of the world, the teacher of all humanity, is something beyond anybody's scope.

G-d Himself concluded His Torah with the world shaking terms:

"No other prophet has arisen in Israel who knew G-d face to face. [No one else could reproduce] the signs and miracles that G-d let him display in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and all his land; or any of the mighty acts or great signs that Moshe displayed before the eyes of all Israel" (Dvorim, 33, 25).

The point at hand is that he attained the ultimate of inner vision, of understanding the deity that could ever be conceivable. The miracles which he brought about were most astounding. These taught all of humanity that truly there is a great Creator, that He constantly observes the good deeds, or the errant deeds, of each and every member of humanity, whether Jew or Gentile.

That this great Creator intervenes, to bring about reward or punishment.

That there are constant miracles involved in our human affairs, whether perceivable by humans or not.

The great Mosaic creed, taught to humanity via the Revelation at Mount Sinai, not only brought about the better aspects of the Christian and Moslem faiths (as remarked by the Rambam in the uncensored edition of his Mishna Torah, last chapter of Book of Kings) but also brought human morality to a higher, more civil level.

We once again understand better Moshe's lofty quality, by reading the Torah's description of his unique rank in life, how he differs from all other prophets of the world. G-d admonished Miriam and Aaron:

"G-d said: Listen carefully to My words. If someone among you experiences divine prophecy, then when I make myself known to him in a vision, I will speak to him in a dream. This is not true of my servant Moshe, who is like a trusted servant throughout my house. With him I speak face to face, in a vision not containing allegory, so that he sees a true picture of G-d. How can you not be afraid to speak against my servant Moshe?" (Bamidbar 12. 6-8)

We learn from the quoted passage that Moshe was the only individual of the world to be able to have a clear comprehension of the Divine plan. All other mortals have only a blurred vision, concealed by imagery. (See more on this point in the adept summarization of the Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah, Chapter seven).

What we want to touch upon here is to study what were the good preparations that Moshe had so to be truly worthy of being chosen by G-d for this lofty position?

The answer is that he possessed a pure heart. He had no conceit (Bamidbar 12. 3) and therefore was entirely altruistic. His one and only goal in life was to be "good unto others". The Midrash relates that when Moshe ascended to the heavenly abode, the angels feared opposing him, since his face was so similar to the epitome of goodness (Shmot Rabbah, chapter 28). As Mahara"l explains, people who are constantly gracious unto others, their facial muscles receive certain tenderness, a certain mode of constant facial expression, which is readily recognizable by the keen eyed ("Gevurot ha-Shem, chap. 36, p. 136).

In his very early youth, even before reaching the age of Bar Mitzva, (according to the Bartnora commentary to Avot, chapter five, thirteen to Mitzvot; or before the age of 18 according to Midrash Yalkut Shimoni, Shmot 168, so too Ramban, Shmot chap. two) he left Pharaoh's palace to observe closely the tribulations of the Jewish people. When he saw the heavy burdens which they were coerced by the lash to bear, he bent his young shoulders so to ease their burdens. He pretended as if his only intent was to see that "the job was done well", as if he wanted the Egyptian weal. But his true purpose was to help others (Midrash Shmot, one, 27).

So too the Midrash (Shmot two, 2) relates that when he was a shepherd, serving his father in law Yitro, he once saw far off a young lamb rambling off, straying from the main flock. He immediately chased after the errant lamb. By the time he reached him, he saw that the lamb had approached a small stream of water. Apparently the lamb had been thirsty and therefore strayed. Moshe had great compassion. He understood that the young lamb was fatigued from the long trek. Moshe placed the young lamb on his shoulders (so to save him the trouble) and took him back to the rest of the flock. Immediately G-d decided: "This is the man that I need, He is to have compassion on my people. He will be their leader".

We know that when the Jews sinned, Moshe put all of his powers of concentration to press and pray for their salvation. The scriptures record "Moshe began to plead before G-d" (Shmot 32, 11). Our Rabbis reinterpret this passage: "Va'ye'chal" Moshe prayed with such emotional force that he became weak and sick (Berachot, 32a). Where do we ever see anybody who can so "place himself in somebody else's shoes", to see things so immensely personal, that he becomes sick due to his overwhelming heartbreak? But Moshe was such a noble and saintly personage.

We find that not only did Moshe endanger his life so to rescue a fellow Jew from the lash of the Egyptian, but he undertook to rescue the seven shepherd girls who were persecuted by the Gentile ruffians (Shmot, 16-17). It is one matter to aid a compatriot Jew, especially against foreigners. It is another matter to aid people from another nation (as the daughters of Yitro). Especially so since he was a stranger, a persecuted refugee, desperately in the necessity of receiving food, water and shelter. Why antagonize these strangers? The group of them could easily have overcome Moshe, brave as he was. But he could not deny the inner voice of morality.

In order to properly comprehend the Divine message, one must be as similar as possible to the Divine attributes (Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim, book one, chapter 54).

We know that the hallmark of Moshe's character was humility, and Maharal (Nativot, book two, Path of Humility chapter one, page 2) teaches that he who is humble is as similar as is humanly possible to the Divinity. Since all of that which G-d relates to all of the created beings is due to His great Humility (as explained by Maharal. Op. Cit.) this is the first and foremost attribute of the Divinity. And since Moshe had absolutely no interest in furthering his own interests, but was entirely engrossed in aiding others, therefore he was the most fitting of all humanity to be G-d's agent. This is easily seen by his withdrawal from marital life for 40 year span. This self rejection was due to gross absorption with dealing with public welfare, 24 hours a day. This is what we recognize from his forty day stint without eating or drinking. He was completely "a soul".

Even when G-d asked of Moshe to approach Pharaoh and arrange the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, Moshe declined the great honor and counter proposed that G-d send Aaron to do the job. Our sages comment that Moshe deferred the honor since Aaron was three years older than Moshe, and Moshe feared that he would feel piqued at being passed over. (See Rashi to Shmot 4, 14 Ve'ra'acho ve'samach). We would think that the age difference between 80 and 83 is so slight as to be unimportant. Yet Moshe was overly considerate.

Even when Moshe mistakenly berated his nephews for neglecting to offer the sacrifice (Va'yikra 10, 16-20), and then Aaron explained the facts of the situation; we are apprised by the Targum Yonatan that not only did Moshe admit his error in his private conversation with Aaron, but he also **sent a public announcement** throughout the entire encampment to the point that Moshe mistakenly admonished his nephews. We all know how difficult it is for any normal human to admit his errors. But to make a public announcement to that effect (in order to dispel any maligning against the accused party) is something truly super-human.

Another great aspect of Moshe's personality was his wonderful sense of appreciation and gratitude at receiving benefit from others.

Our sages (Midrash Tanhuma, Matot, 3) teach us a most interesting point. G-d commanded Moshe, point blank: "Take vengeance in the name of the Jewish nation from the Midianites" (Bamidbar 31, 2) since they caused the death of 24,000 Jews. However, Moshe did not participate at all in the forthcoming battle! He was not present there at all, even as a bystander, or to encourage the battlers. He sent others to do the job. Why did he not do this personally?

The answer is, as recorded by the Midrash, since he received protection by the Midianites, some decades preceding the war, when he killed the Egyptian and fled for his life to the house of Yitro, therefore it would not be "mussaric" if he would forget that favor.

How did Moshe know this proper attitude? This is due to past precedent. We know that G-d told him (in Egypt) to tell **Aaron** to strike the Nile River and cause the Plague of Blood (Shmot 7, 19). So again by the plague of frogs (Shmot 8, 1). This was done by agent, since Moshe's life, as a newborn Jewish boy, was saved by the protecting bushes of the Nile (Shmot 2, 3). So too Aaron was the messenger to strike the earth and cause the plague of lice (Shmot 8, 12) since Moshe had temporary

rescue from the Egyptian officials by concealing the corpse of the persecutor by burying him in the earth (Shmot 2, 12). All this was a lesson to remember favors received from others. Therefore Moshe, due his lofty morality, could not attack the Midianites, since he many years ago found by them refuge.

One of the great high points of Moshe's noble character was his complete identification with his brethren in their travails. When they fought the Amalekites, he stood all day in prayer, both of his arms stretching upwards towards the heavens, in supplication for rescue. Being however over 80 years old, he at long last had to sit down and rest. Despite that his position was that of a King of Israel, he denied himself the comfort of a soft pillow, and sat on a rough stone, feeling every projection of rock. This was he associated himself with their troubles (Ta'anit 11a).

To sum up, Moshe's greatest good point was his immense humility. May his merit stand to our advantage.