

Vaera: Moshe V'Aharon, Aharon U'Moshe

- Nisson Shulman. Moshe and Aharon, two messages, one to Pharaoh the other to the people of Israel.

VAERA: MOSHE VEAHARON, AHARON U MOSHE

(By Nisson Shulman, based on thoughts heard from Rav Yoseph Dov Soloveitchik zt"l)

AND GOD SPOKE TO MOSES AND TO AARON AND COMMANDED THEM ABOUT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AND ABOUT PHARAOH KING OF EGYPT (Exodus 6);

Rashi explains: Since Moses complained and protested that he was inadequate, a stutterer, difficult of speech, today he would have said, "I'm not a speaker", God added Aaron to help him and be his interpreter and spokesman.

I question this. Look through the whole story of the exodus. You won't find Aaron speaking to Pharaoh even once! Always Moses speaks. And the Torah is at pains to say that it is Moses who speaks to Pharaoh. If so, that what was the mission given to Aaron? How was he Moses' spokesman?

I question further; the Torah later stresses, HU AHARON U MOSHE, HU MOSHE VEAHARON, to teach, say our sages that they were equal in their function, Moses to Aaron and Aaron to Moses. Think of the story of the Exodus, do you really feel that Aaron was as critical, as crucial, as important as Moses? I somehow don't feel that the text of the Torah is giving empty honor to Aaron. There must be some way in which he is as important as Moses. What is it?

My last question. They are commanded toward Pharaoh and toward the children of Israel. What was their commandment toward the children of Israel?

We know that there were two parts of the redemption. One was the physical liberation from Egypt. The other was the spiritual release from the bondage of idolatry and the corrupt culture of Egypt. So God promised that not only would we be taken out of bondage and out of Egypt, but we would be brought to Mount Sinai, there to receive His law. This second, and spiritual redemption, is the more important, and by far the more difficult one.

We are told that the people were ready to be released from slavery. When Moses came to tell them in God's name he is releasing them from affliction and bringing them to a land of milk and honey, they bowed in acceptance. Redemption from Egypt? Why not! Of course! With the greatest of joy and thanksgiving! But when afterwards he came and told them, in God's name, "I shall take you to Myself as a people and you will know that I am God, they didn't want to listen! They were ready for freedom and for the Promised Land, but they weren't ready to change their way of life! They were satisfied with their cultural and spiritual assimilation and didn't want to change it.

That was the command towards the people of Israel. Just as Moses spoke in God's name to Pharaoh, someone had to speak in His name to the Jewish people to make them appreciate what

being Jewish means! And that was Aaron's job, and that's why he and Moses had tasks equally important, equally crucial, Moses to Pharaoh, Aaron the spokesman of Moses and God to Israel.

To Pharaoh, Moses himself had to speak, to demonstrate that Exodus did not come through oratory. On the contrary. God chooses as His messenger a man who is not a speaker, who stuttered and stammered, for "Who gives a man a mouth and tongue if not the Lord? It wasn't Moses speaking to Pharaoh, it was God Himself through Moses, and so a man with a natural speech impediment was the best choice for this mission. But to the people Jewish tradition had to be taught, and for this God makes use of the best communicator possible. Aaron, whose lips defend our faith, and from whose mouth teaches Torah, KI SIFSEI KOHEN YISHMERU DAAT VETORAH YELAMDU MIPIHU. And if you look through the story of the Exodus, you find that the main message to the Jewish people themselves is given by Aaron, Moses' spokesman. This was by far the harder task, and when Moses took it over completely from the Sinai revelation and on, he found it took 40 years, and we know possibly 3500 years, to become effective.

We, in our time, understand this best. We know about representing our cause to the nations of the world! Whenever a great change, such as the American inauguration, or an election here, or a newsworthy event anywhere, our first mental question, is how will it affect Israel and its security?

But we also know that the hardest representation of all is to our people; to prevent assimilation; to teach Torah; to convince our parents and children to make sacrifices for Torah and Judaism, and that is about the hardest thing I know.

Consider Jews of Russia. How we prayed and worked to open the iron gates towards Israel. But now that they had opened, and now that so many Russian Jews are in Israel as well as America, liberated and free, we badly need another redemption of the soul, the same message Aaron brought our forefathers in Egypt, to make those Jews Jewish again....

Here is this country we desperately need Aaron's message! We need it to dispel the cloud of Jewish illiteracy from our people! We need it to teach Jewish values to our people! We need it to demonstrate what Jewish culture and tradition means and how different from the secular world which includes drugs and homosexuality and promiscuity and empty hedonism. We need it especially to teach the lesson of Jewish continuity, and that the way of intermarriage and assimilation is the way to Jewish death!
