

Parshat Bo

To Care, to Communicate

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The Torah describes Moshe as *"great in the land of Egypt, in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants and the entire nation (Shemot 13:3)."*

The statement deserves a second glance. Why would Egyptians respect Moshe because he revered G-d's prophecy? The question would exist regarding any population – reverence of prophecy does not earn a man respect – but exists doubly so in the case of the Egyptians who equated these prophecies with the destruction of their country. What about Moshe's dedication inspired them?

The Ramban explains that Moshe merited this because of what is mentioned in last week's parsha. When G-d commands Moshe to go and speak to Pharaoh, Moshe expresses hesitation, *"I have sealed lips."* (6:12) The Torah then lists the genealogy of Israel until Moshe and Aharon, and then repeats almost word for word the dialogue between G-d and Moshe. Rashi explains (6:29) that the Torah repeats G-d's command to Moshe and Aharon to reinitiate the story where the Torah had left off before revealing the genealogy of its principle heroes.

The Ramban finds this interpretation of the text unappealing. Instead, he suggests that Moshe initially understood that when *"G-d spoke to Moshe and Aharon (6:13),"* He intended to communicate to both Moshe and Aharon. Therefore, Moshe would remain silent while Aharon communicated the prophecy for both of them. After the interruption of family history, G-d corrected Moshe's misinterpretation. Only Moshe would receive the prophecy. Aharon would hear it from Moshe and repeat it for Pharaoh and his court. To this, Moshe protested *"but I have sealed lips!"* (6:30) If the transmission of your word relies upon this chain of transmission, who is to say that your word will be accurately communicated to the Egyptians?

With this, we understand that the detailing of family lineage, along with the famous pair of verses that switch the order of mentioning Moshe's name before Aharon, elucidates the basis of Moshe's mistake. Aharon possessed just as great lineage as Moshe. And more than that, as displayed by the reordering of their names (Rashi, 6:26-27) Moshe and Aharon were equal in their fulfillment of the potential G-d allotted to them.

The Ramban concludes by noting that for Moshe's humility, that he could not bear to risk the mistranslation of G-d's prophecy because of his closed lips, Moshe merited to be viewed with greatness even in the eyes of Pharaoh's servants.

Why would Moshe – or any prophet for that matter – desire to communicate a prophecy accurately after G-d acquiesced to a poorer quality form of transmission? **Because of concern for the audience!** If a prophet truly cares for the well-being of those G-d wishes His word to reach, he will do his utmost to ensure that the word of G-d arrives accurately. The audience must receive every opportunity to fulfill G-d's will!

Moshe would not settle for a second rate translation of G-d's word because he desired that the Egyptian should hear exactly what G-d said and possess the ability to follow G-d's word. Astonishingly, Moshe desired this despite the fact that the Egyptians tormented the lives of Moshe's people for over a century and the fact that the prophecies only predicted the just punishment from G-d for these crimes. Moshe could not conscience that the Egyptians would not possess the full ability to heed G-d's word. Such humility – desire to service others to one's utmost capability – could not fail but inspire respect from onlookers.

Eizeh hu mechuvad? Hamechaved et habriyot.
Who is honored? He, who honors his fellow creations.

(Pirkei Avos, 4:1)