

## Shmos - Rabbi Lerner - January 8, 2012

### The Appointment of Moshe

3:1: *Moshe was the shepherd of the sheep of his father-in-law Yisro, and he takes them away into the wilderness, and he arrived at the Mountain of God, towards Chorev.* **Abarbanel**: Moshe's life can be broken up into three sections: the first 20 years when he was being raised in Egypt, and ultimately flees from there after killing the Mitzri at about age 20; during the second, longest phase of his life he stays in Midian until he is 80; and then from 80 until 120 he first takes the Jews out of Egypt and he then leads the nation through the desert. **Oznayim LaTorah**: Moshe had no flocks of his own - the flocks did not belong to him, but to his father-in-law. This was as opposed to Yaacov, who worked and shepherded Lavan's sheep, keeping a percentage - Moshe worked for decades and did not ask for any sheep of his own. He was the least materialistic man ever, and he was purely interested in the spiritual. We see this again when the Jews were leaving Egypt and they were collecting the wealth of Egypt, Moshe was more interested in collecting Mitzvos and was involved with seeking and retrieving the body of Yosef. When he was accused during the rebellion of Korach of taking money, he was furious and said he had not taken even a donkey from them for all of his work in leading them. A leader needs to be able to withstand the will of the people and generally should be wealthy so as not to be swayed by the people - Moshe ultimately did become rich when he carved out the second luchos which were made of sapphire - he kept the chips and became wealthy so that he should maintain his independence. He wanted to give over the sapphire chips to the people but Hashem told him to keep them - "Pesol **Lechah** - carve out for yourself." So the whole period he shepherded his father-in-law's sheep, he kept none.

3:4: When Moshe approached the burning bush, Hashem told him to remove his shoes. **Rabbeinu Bachya**: taking off the shoes in the Torah symbolizes taking off one's physicality - just like the shoe fits the individual foot, the physicality fits the individual body; one has to transcend that to reach high levels of spirituality; you have to remove the physical garb of this world to communicate with God. Moshe was already primed to receive Nevuah because he had no interest in the physical world.

3:2: *An angel of God appears to Moshe in a blaze of fire from the midst of a bush, and while the bush was burning in the fire it was not consumed.* **Sforno**: why was it an angel who appeared to him? This was Moshe's first contact with God, and there needed to be a slow ascent in kedusha for him - he had to begin slowly - first with an intermediary, a malach, and then later Hashem Himself. In line with this, in 3:6 Moshe hid his face because he was afraid to look at Hashem. This shows that he is still not on his highest spiritual level yet. In Beha'ahlosechah, when Hashem chastises Aharon and Miriam, He says that only Moshe can look at Hashem; but at this point, he could not attain that level. **Baal Haturim**: this was a lost opportunity that Moshe let slip through his fingers; had he been able to look at the burning bush which represents the Jewish people on fire, suffering; and had he seen them being consumed in Egypt and had he then begged for Rachamim, Hashem would have relieved the galus at that time and there never would have been another galus. The **Ibn Ezra** agrees with this. **Ramban**: while an angel appears initially, in 3:4 it says *Hashem saw that he turned aside and Hashem now called out to him from the bush* - this is why the Ibn Ezra says that because the Torah introduced this section with an angel speaking to Moshe, the reference in 3:4 was also be an angel speaking for Hashem, and not Hashem Himself. But this is absolutely incorrect - Moshe was on such a height of prophecy that

he would not have hidden his face from an angel. In 3:13 it was clear that already at this point Moshe was at the top level - in wisdom and at the heights of Nevuah, where he could even ask Hashem which of His names to use when addressing the Jews. God first appeared as an angel, but it was Hashem who talked to him and he reached the highest heights of Nevuah very quickly. **Abarbanel**: what comes out from this is that Moshe does not get prophecy through an angel or through obscure visions or riddles - he is the Father of Neviim and starts that way from the beginning.

Why then is Moshe so reluctant to take on this mission if he is already at the height of prophecy, as several of the meforshim claim? **Ramban**: all of this has to do with Moshe's special characteristic of Anivus, humility. In 3:12 Hashem has to reassure Moshe who claims he is a lowly shepherd while Pharaoh is a mighty emperor - who is he to speak to Pharaoh? It was his great Anivus that forced him to feel he that he was inadequate for the job even though he had this incredible level of prophecy. How do we reconcile this, that he was at this unbelievable level of Nevuah and yet felt he could not do the job for Hashem? **Meshech Chachmah**: In 3:11 Moshe answers Hashem "*who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take them out of Egypt?*" Hashem answers in 3:12 that *he will not be alone and the sign that He had sent Moshe will be that the Jews will serve Hashem on this mountain.* How does that answer Moshe? Moshe was the most humble person in the world, which Hashem relates to Miriam and Aharon. When Hashem reveals Himself to Moshe, he calls out to him in 3:4 "Moshe Moshe" and Moshe answers "Here I am." The Medrash says that this *Moshe Moshe* was not the language of closeness and love, as it was when Hashem called out to Yaacov. Here it means that he is Moshe before Hashem spoke to him, and he was the same old Moshe after Hashem spoke to him at the highest level of Nevuah. His response to climbing to these incredible heights was not to change him and who he was; he developed not a bit of arrogance. That is why he was able to reach the top of prophecy right now because he was completely unaffected by it and it did not go to his head; he did not feel any special pride that he was something special. How can it be that a person would not be changed after reaching these heights? There was no one in existence who can be at a higher level than him and yet he still sees himself at the level of an infant - how can this be? What caused it was the very greatness and understanding of Hashem - that was the greatness of his humility. The understanding of God is what made him so humble - to be able to connect to the true God this way, when you compare yourself to the infinite God you realize that you are nothing. The more you understand the infiniteness of Hashem, the more you see that you are zero. Moshe did not need a growth process - with this first revelation he realized how awesome God was and, as a result, how lowly he and all humans are in comparison. He understood and recognized what it means to be God more than anyone else, and that is why he was so humble. Hashem chooses a humble person for Nevuah to begin with; this is also why Hashem selected Har Sinai for the revelation - it was not the highest peak - this is where they will get the Torah. The sign and proof that Hashem is sending Moshe is the same reason that the revelation will be on Har Sinai - Hashem likes lowliness and humility, not majesty - that is why He selected Moshe. He should not doubt himself - it is his Anivus that God loves about him and that is why he was chosen. Har Sinai testifies to this concept of humility, and that is why it will serve as a sign to Moshe that he is the one to take the people out of the land. The **Rav**: it was not an accident that Moshe became so humble - the more you understand God and the truths of this world, the more you understand how insignificant you are; understanding God fills one with humility.

**Abarbanel**: one of Moshe's chief concerns and reluctance to take on this mission is seen in Hashem's answer in 3:7-8 that *He hears their cries and suffering, and that he will take them out of Egypt to the land flowing with milk and honey, the land of the Canaan, Chiti, Emori...* This is what made Moshe so nervous. Moshe thinks that the very idea that God is coming to not only take them out of slavery, but also to take them to the land of Israel, is overwhelming and will be too much for them - Moshe is deterred by this. Why not free them and leave them in Goshen where they can worship God in seclusion? To tell them that not only is he freeing them from slavery but that they will have to conquer the land of Canaan from the seven powerful nations as well is too much. This was a constant fear that continues to haunt the Jews throughout their travels in the desert. Moshe feels that telling them this now would be too much, too frightening; it was a major challenge at the end of this journey of freedom and Moshe was afraid it was too much for the people to absorb.

**Abarbanel**: in 3:8 Hashem says He will take them out of the land of Egypt and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey. At no point does it say that Moshe will bring them into the land - just that Hashem will bring them there. Moshe already picks up the subtle message that he will not be the one to bring them in to the land, that he will not be the one to finish the job; he therefore does not even want to start the job and take them out of Egypt.

What is the burning bush all about? **Rashi**: says the symbolism is that the bush represents Hashem - He is with the Jews in their pain; Hashem is saying just as they are suffering, burning with pain in Egypt, Hashem is burning and suffering with them in their tzaros. Other meforshim, like the **Kli Yakar**, say that the bush is not Hashem who is on fire, but the bush represents the Jewish people on fire - it does not burn itself out throughout all of Jewish history - we will be burning, we will suffer throughout all of Jewish history - it does not come to an end; the bush refers to us, not Hashem. **Sforno**: it refers to the Egyptians - they were full of thorns and the bush will burn up with fire - the ten plagues; but Egypt will not be completely consumed; the country will be brought to its heels, but will still survive. **Kli Yakar**: another interpretation is like what Moshe says when he realizes why the Jews are suffering, when Dasan and Aviram snatched on him. This is the craziness of the Jewish people - even when there are so much tzaros surrounding the Jews from all sides, internally each of us are like a thorn in our neighbor's side; even with our being assaulted from all sides by external enemies, we attack each other. This is why we are still in galus - worse than all other nations, we live with sinas chinam; our parents fight and we perpetuate the fights. We have put the Jewish people on fire; we cannot get rid of this fire, this fire of machlokes, and until we get rid of it, we will continue to be on fire, and remain in galus.