

## Moses' Speech Impediment

Rabbi Shayna Golkow

<p><b>Exodus 4:10</b>          But Moses said to Adonai, "Please, O Adonai, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."</p>	<p><b>שמות ד':י'</b>          וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' בִּי אֲדֹנָי לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אָנֹכִי          גַם מִתְמוּל גַּם מִשְׁלֵשִׁם גַּם מֵאֵז דְּבַרְךָ אֶל־עַבְדְּךָ כִּי          כִבְד־פֶּה וְכִבְד לְשׁוֹן אָנֹכִי:</p>
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<p><b>Rashi on Exodus 4:10:2</b>          Slow of speech (lit. heavy of mouth) — I speak heavily (with difficulty); in old French, <i>balbus</i>. (English = stammerer).</p>	<p><b>כבד פה</b>. בְּכִבְדוֹת אָנִי מְדַבֵּר. וּבְלִשׁוֹן לַעֲז בַלְבּוֹ:</p>
<p><b>Rabbeinu Chananel on Exodus 4:10:1</b>          The very fact that Moses mentioned both these deficiencies of his separately is a clear indication that he had difficulty in formulating certain words which are articulated with the teeth. The consonants he had difficulty with were זשרצס, and when he referred to difficulty as כבד פה (heavy mouth), he had in mind the letters דתל"ט.</p>	<p><b>כי כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי</b>. זה שהזכיר שני דברים          כבד פה וכבד לשון יורה כי משה רבינו לא היה צח          (הדבר) [הדבור] באותיות זשצר"ס שהן אותיות          השניים זהו שאמר <b>כי כבד פה</b> גם לא באותיות          הלשון שהם אותיות דטלנ"ת. ועל זה אמר <b>וכבד          לשון</b>:</p>

### Exodus Rabbah 1:26

(26) "And the child (Moses) grew" - Twenty four months she nursed him, and you say "and the child grew"?! Rather he grew, not in the way of the [rest] land. "And she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh..." The daughter of Pharaoh would kiss and hug and adore him (Moses) as if he were her own son, and she would not take him out of the king's palace. And because [Moses] was so beautiful, everyone yearned to see him. One that would see him would not leave his presence. And it was that Pharaoh would kiss him (Moses) and hug him, and he would remove Pharaoh's crown and place it on his own head, as he would do to him in the future when he was great.... The daughter of Pharaoh raised the one who would punish her father in the future.... And some of the observers sitting among them were the magicians of Egypt that said, "We are wary of this, that he is taking your crown and placing it on his head, that he not be the one we say (i.e. prophesy) that will take the kingship from you." Some said to kill him,

and some said to burn him. And Jethro was sitting among them and said to them, “This child has no intent [to take the throne]. Rather, test him by bringing in a bowl [a piece of] gold and a coal. If he outstretches his hand towards the gold, [surely] he has intent [to take the throne], and you should kill him. And if he outstretches his hand towards the coal, he [surely] does not have intent [to take the throne], and he does not deserve the death penalty.” They immediately brought the bowl before him (Moses), and he outstretched his hand to take the gold, and Gabriel came and pushed his (Moses’) hand, and he grabbed the coal. He then brought his hand along with the coal into his mouth and burned his tongue, and from this was made (Exodus 4:10) “slow of speech and slow of tongue.”

<p><b>Exodus 6:12</b> But Moses appealed to Adonai, saying, “The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh heed me, a man of impeded speech!”</p>	<p>וַיִּדְבֹר מֹשֶׁה לְפָנָיו ה' לֵאמֹר הֲנִי בְנִי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאִיךָ יִשְׁמְעֵנִי פֶרְעֹה וְאֲנִי עֶרְלֵ שִׁפְתַּיִם:</p>
<p><b>Exodus 6:30</b> Moses appealed to Adonai, saying, “See, I am of impeded speech; how then should Pharaoh heed me!”</p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפָנָיו ה' הֲנִי אֶרְלֵ שִׁפְתַּיִם וְאִיךָ יִשְׁמַע אֵלַי פֶּרְעֹה:</p>

**“‘Heavy of Mouth’ and ‘Heavy of Tongue’ on Moses' Speech Difficulty,” by Jeffrey Tigay**

History has known other creative geniuses and national leaders, from Demosthenes to Felix Mendelsohn and Churchill, who worked their effect on humanity despite speech impediments. The bible viewed Moshe as an agent of God whose success owed nothing to his natural endowments, but only to the persuasion worked by the words and deeds he uttered and performed under divine direction.

**Summary of Rabbi Nissem ben Reuven (“The Ran”)**

If Moses had been an eloquent speaker, skeptics could claim that the Jewish people accepted the Torah only because of Moses’ charisma. We all know that a powerful speaker can convince people of just about anything. Since it was actually difficult to listen to Moses, however, everyone can be certain that Jews did not accept the Torah because we were impressed by Moses; we accepted the Torah because we were impressed by God.