

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



VA'EIRA

The Dynamic Duo

At the end of the book of B'reishit, we have two poignant vignettes. The first is Menashe graciously acknowledging the superior destiny outlined for his younger brother, Efrayim, by their grandfather, Ya'akov Avinu. The second is much less inspiring: as the other brothers lie to Yosef about their father requesting that no vengeance be wreaked upon them for their kidnapping of Yosef those many years ago. So, we are accustomed to struggles and competition between Biblical sibs.

Now we have a new version of the B'reishit theme. God tells Moshe: Notice that I have made you an ELOHIM to Pharaoh and Aharon, Your brother, as NAVI (Sh'mot 7:1).

I'm not sure exactly how to translate the two terms ELOHIM and NAVI in our verse, but I am sure that the one bestowed upon the younger Moshe is far greater than the one conferred on the older Aharon.

Let's try to understand those two terms. We're familiar with the word ELOHIM, but we also know that it is sometimes a holy reference to God, while other times a secular term for a

judge. I am going to assume that in our case the word isn't holy. It could mean that Moshe will be a judge over Pharaoh and help determine his fate (Rashi). Others maintain that Egyptians were used to calling natural powers, like the Nile River, gods. So, Moshe will be a god or power over the fate of Egypt (Cassuto). And then there's Targum Yonatan who translates ELOHIM as DECHILA or 'terror'. Moshe, you will intimidate and frighten the Egyptian monarch.

Now, what about the term NAVI? We're used to translating that as 'prophet'. What's a prophet? I guess the best description is a 'go between' communicating God's wishes or message to humanity. However, Rashi goes for 'preacher'. He is emphasizing the role of the NAVI to humanity. It's a double team of Pharaoh; Moshe will intimidate and Aharon will communicate.

So, I think the primary approach to our verse describes a wonderful partnership between the brothers. Rav Nesanel Yoel Saffran calls it 'Sibling Chivalry'. While Rav Yitzchak Blau explains: He (Aharon) suddenly hears that a younger brother away in Midian for decades has been selected as God's chosen messenger. While those of lesser character would harbor resentment, Aharon meets Moshe with undiluted enthusiasm. If so, Aharon not only exemplifies the pursuit of peace, he also exemplifies

the ability to rejoice in another's success.

Heartwarming and inspiring! But the Maor v'Shemesh (Rav Kalonimus Kalman Epstein, 1753-1825) goes in a very different direction to help us understand a very difficult concept and teach us a powerful pedagogical idea.

He discusses the word SOD, which is normally translated 'secret'. This is a Kabbalistic term, and is one of the four ways to interpret Biblical texts (PaRDeS, P'SHAT, literal meaning of the words; REMEZ, hinted meanings (often GEMATRIA); D'RUSH, homiletic interpretations (often based on anomalies in the text's style), and SOD, mystical secrets which require either Divine inspiration or special powers to reveal.

But the Ma'or v'Shemesh goes in a very different direction to explain SOD. He suggests that our verse is really about the nature of SOD, and it's not what you thought it was. He explains:

Here (in our verse) is written a secret of God. One needs to understand what are the secrets of Torah. One cannot say that the intention is the wisdom of kabbala, because the expression 'secret' means something that is not possible to be revealed to others, and aren't all these writings revealed to others? And since they are revealed, those are not 'secrets'.

But what is really a secret, that no human can reveal to any other is the secret of Hashem, the essence of Godliness that was, is and will be, and this is the root of all worlds, what can't be revealed to any human, only each person assumes for themselves the comprehension of Godliness according to their mind, and according to the abilities of their heart.

He makes a novel (at least to me) and interesting observation: A SOD, by its very nature, can't be revealed. So, what we usually call SOD in mystical study is something which was, perhaps, a SOD at some time but isn't anymore, because it has become revealed. The relationship between Moshe and Aharon is to reveal as much of the SOD that Moshe alone knows to the rest of us, including Pharaoh. How is this accomplished?

Since a SOD is hidden deep inside one's heart, soul and mind, it is, generally, impossible to reveal to others. So, how can this SOD be accessed? Find someone who is on a slightly lower spiritual level. Now have the first person communicate as much of the SOD as he can, and this other who is close to the first person's spiritual level can absorb most, if not all, of the SOD. This second person, who is closer to the level of others, now explains as much of the SOD as he can.

This explains a famous story in the

Talmud (Eruvin 54b) that after Moshe received the Torah on Har Sinai he called in a whole series of groups to relate this Torah. Then each of those groups restated it all. This process of succeedingly lower spiritual levels got as much of the Torah and its SOD out to the world. That was the relationship of Aharon to Moshe. Moshe got hidden material from God; Aharon revealed a tremendous percentage of it to Pharaoh and the world.

That was the power (ELOHIM) of Moshe and the communication skills (NAVI) of Aharon.

There is still so much that we don't understand about Torah and about the world around us, as revealed in our traditions. Everyone should find their Moshe (one a little bit more knowledgeable), absorb as much as possible and then be an Aharon to others.

This marvelous filial partnership was remarkable and inspiring, and still has much to teach us about how to be wiser, more spiritual and inspire others. 🙏