

Walk through the Parsha

with Rabbi David Walk



VA'EIRA

Just between us gods!

In this week's Torah reading, we have a little review of the conversation that God had with Moshe in last week's parsha. Moshe declares that he's the wrong man for the job of presenting God's case before Par'o because he has a speech impediment. Both discussions end with God appointing Aharon as the 'negotiator' (not to be confused with the 1998 movie).

This week the mission roles of the brothers are more clearly delineated: See, I place you in the role of 'god' to Par'o, with your brother Aharon as your prophet (Sh'mot 7:1).

What does this mean? Initially, we just thought that Aharon would express in eloquent language whatever Moshe has said. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains what is probably P'SHAT, the literal meaning of this scene and its instructions:

God explained to him in a friendly fashion how He would deal with that problem. 'See, I have made you a master (not 'god') over Pharaoh.' Firstly, God would give Moshe a stature that Pharaoh could not ignore. Secondly, God appointed

Aharon as Moshe's spokesman. The word NEVI'ACHA, usually translated as 'your prophet' must be understood here as NIV S'FATECHA, (Yishayahu 57:19) 'he will express what emerges from your lips.' Onkelos translates the word as 'your interpreter'.

However, the Midrash claims that we're being told that this relationship represents something much larger. Since Pharaoh himself had claimed to be a god, and had declared: the Nile is mine because I created it (Yechezkel 29:3), it just made sense, in this context, for Moshe to be declared a 'god', too.

The Netziv accepts this premise and explains: You shall not speak to Pharaoh directly so that he will think that you are so great, like a god, that it is not easy even for him to converse directly with a god.

However, the Netziv understands that it's the great modesty of Moshe which precipitates the whole scenario. God wants such an unassuming individual to represent the Jewish people. He then observes: And in Moshe there was fulfilled the principle that whoever humbles himself, the Holy One exalts.

Finally, the Netziv concludes: Note carefully that the Lord said, 'I have made you a god to Pharaoh', but not to Israel, God forbid.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch was

also fascinated about God's instruction to be a 'god' to Pharaoh. He observes that historically this all makes clear sense, because in the ancient world many kings declared themselves either as gods or offspring of gods. He then explains that this kind of charade with a 'god' man speaking through a 'prophet' interlocutor made perfect sense to the people of those times.

Rav Hirsch describes how cynical many ancient polytheistic systems were. Their primitive theology saw gods as displaying their power through acts of cruelty bringing great harm upon mankind. Natural disasters were regularly described as the 'gods' at work wreaking simple revenge against disloyal subjects.

He concludes: We would not have been surprised if, after all the miracles Moshe performed, Pharaoh had bowed down before him and worshiped him as an idol.

Sure! Why not? Fits their world view.

All of this makes sense in the context of ancient theology and society, but does it make sense to us?

The Ran in his *Derashot* (number 7) asks what's really the most obvious question: Why did God choose someone so clearly unfit for the job to redeem our ancestors? I don't believe that this situation of a speaker with a spokesman was arranged for the

benefit of the Egyptians. I think that this whole situation was to teach us, the descendants of those who left Egypt, important life lessons.

First of all, wouldn't you expect God to pick a strong, perhaps charismatic, character to lead the Jews. Oh, I don't know, maybe someone like Charlton Heston! But no, God chooses someone who doesn't appear up to the job. However, over time he becomes the perfect shepherd for God's flock.

The Ran explains that this remarkable transformation of Moshe from Caspar Milquetoast to, well, Charlton Heston is the kind of miraculous and inspiring story that our nation could never forget. The Ran concludes: And this (metamorphosis) was the most essential of all, so that no other prophet could deceitfully presume to be prophesying something which contravened the words of Moshe our teacher. For God has apprised us that what Moshe attained was supernatural.

The evolution of Moshe as a leader was an essential part of the plan. The Ran is correct, who could ever question anything that Moshe said because his entire ministry was supernatural.

But there's another point, which cannot be ignored. Watching Moshe develop from a shy shepherd at age 80 to become and remain an inspiring

leader until age 120 should inspire us to take on spiritual responsibilities and duties as well. Just because I've never done it before shouldn't prevent me from trying to reach spiritual heights.

I remember a neighbor in Efrat who had never studied Talmud and began studying Daf Yomi in his mid-seventies. Even a diagnosis of cancer didn't prevent him from hanging on to make the Siyum of the entire Shas. One time he told me, 'I started earlier than Moshe, why shouldn't I complete it?'

When we say to each other AD ME'AH V'ESRIM SHANA ('until a 120 years'), perhaps we're not just talking about Moshe's age at death. Maybe we're also talking about his accomplishments after the age at which most of us have retired.

If this story doesn't inspire you, maybe you should look at it again. 