

Parsha Q's- Vaeira

We begin with a question so obvious that it is frequently overlooked – why does it matter whether Mosheh speaks well?

Note that Derashot HaRan argues that the reason Hashem didn't simply heal Mosheh's speech defect was specifically to show that the Exodus was not the work of a silver-tongued orator, but rather the result of Divine intervention. Following his view the question should be reformulated as: Why does Mosheh mistakenly think his speaking ability (or lack thereof) matters? But this interpretation seems forced in light of G-d's response, which involve both anger (4:11 "Who gave humankind a mouth?") and the appointment of Aharon as spokesperson – neither seems warranted if speaking is really irrelevant.

But I should really say "responses" and "appointments", because Mosheh complains of his speech defect three times (4:10, 6:12, and 6:30) and Aharon is appointed twice (4:14-17 and 7:2-4). We'll deal first with 6:12 – 7:4, and then move back to 4.

6:12-13 Mosheh said to G-d: "Look – the Jews didn't listen to me. How can Pharaoh be expected to listen to me? Anyway, I have a speech defect!"

G-d spoke to Mosheh and Aharon, commanding them to speak to the Jews and Pharaoh King of Egypt, so as to take the Jews out of Egypt.

6:29 – 7:1 G-d said to Mosheh: "I am G-d; Speak to Pharaoh King of Egypt everything I say to you." Moshe said before G-d: "Look – I have a speech defect, so how can Pharaoh be expected to listen to me?"

G-d said to Moshe: "See, I have made you an *elohim* to Pharaoh, and Aharon your brother will be your *navi*."

6:12 and 6:30 surround a truncated genealogy in order of birth, beginning with Reuben and his children and moving on to Shimon and then Levi. Levi is complete through the generation of Aaron and Mosheh, but the list stops after the birth of Pinchas to Aharon's son Elazar. Mosheh's children are thus not mentioned. Any explanation of the seeming repetition of 6:12 – 6:30 should have to account for the interjection of the genealogy specifically between them.

Rashi and Ibn Ezra take the simplest approach. They argue that this is a case of resumptive repetition, i.e. that 6:12 and 6:30 recount the same episode, but that this apparent redundancy is justified by the interjection of the genealogy. They do not, however, explain why the dialogue had to be introduced before the genealogy. Ramban suggests that Mosheh understood 6:13 to imply that Aharon would always at least share the speaking duties, and thus was nonplussed when 6:29 made no mention of Aharon. He does not explain why the Torah bothers recording this misunderstanding. In sum, neither explanation is entirely satisfactory. (Note, though, that Ibn Caspi claims that this shows that Mosheh had not yet reached his full capacity as prophet, which opens the possibility that the Torah records it to give us a benchmark for Mosheh's prophetic development.)

4:13-16 G-d said angrily to Mosheh: Isn't there your brother Aharon the Levite – I know that he will speak, and look, he is coming out to greet you, and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart. You will speak to him, and put the words in his mouth; I will be with your mouth and his, and instruct you what to do. He will speak for you to the nation. So he will serve as your mouth, and you will be his *elohim*.

A host of commentaries say, with variations, that Aharon was initially appointed to speak for Mosheh only to the Jews, then later appointed spokesman to Pharaoh as well. What is really striking, however, is that Mosheh is described as *elohim* in both appointments, but with regard to Aharon in the first and Pharaoh in the second. Is this a deliberate parallel, and if yes, what does it mean? Note that *elohim* may not have precisely the same meaning in both contexts – for instance, in 7 it may mean "judge". Note also that Aharon is merely a "mouth" with regard to the Jews, but a "navi" with regard to people.

My suspicion, and suggestion, is that unpacking this parallel will help greatly to answer the question with which we opened. Note that the appointment of Aharon as spokesperson to Pharaoh does not come in anger, and that this may reflect a substantive difference in attitude rather than mere resignation – k'b'yachol – on G-d's part to Mosheh's reticence.