

Parsha Ponders

Va'eira | Jan 11, 2024 | 2 Shevat 5784

*The loyal spokesman*¹

וידבר משה לפני יקוק לאמר הן בני-ישראל לא-שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים: וידבר יקוק אל-משה ואל-אהרן ויצום אל-בני ישראל ואל-פרעה מלך מצרים להוציא את-בני-ישראל מארץ מצרים
Moshe said before Hashem, saying: "Behold! The Jewish people won't listen to me; how will Pharaoh listen to me? [For] I have blocked lips." Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon, and commanded them regarding the Jewish people and to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to take out the Jewish people from the land of Egypt²

Moshe famously had a speech impediment. He told Hashem that he would have no chance of convincing the Jews of their upcoming freedom, nor Pharaoh that he should let the Jews free. He was of blocked lips. The problem is, Moshe already made this argument in last week's *parsha*³. When Hashem told Moshe to lead the Jews out of Egypt, he told Hashem that he was heavy of speech. He was unfit for the job. Hashem responded that his brother Aharon would be his spokesman. Moshe would tell Aharon the messages delivered to him from Hashem, and Aharon would tell the people or Pharaoh what was said. Why then is Moshe repeating this argument⁴?

The Sage Hillel taught: "A *hin* (a liquid measure) of drawn water can invalidate a *mikveh* (before it was completed), but⁵ a person has to speak like his teacher"⁶. There are different interpretations of the latter half of this teaching. One understanding⁷ is that Hillel was taught by the Sages Shemaya and Avtalyon. These two were righteous converts⁸, and were unable to pronounce the letter "h" (*heh* in Hebrew). As such, even though the correct measure for this teaching is "*hin*", they would say "*in*". Hillel therefore informs us that even though the teaching is *hin*, he would say the incorrect "*in*", just like his teachers taught him, for one has to speak like his teacher.

Behold, Moshe would tell Aharon what Hashem told him, even though Moshe couldn't pronounce certain letters properly⁹. Just like Hillel with his teachers, Aharon had to say over the exact same thing he heard from Moshe, his teacher¹⁰, despite the mistakes. Moshe knew this, and therefore when the Jews weren't listening to him, he assumed it was due to his speech impediment. Aharon as a spokesperson wasn't helping, as he was just repeating what he heard from Moshe. This is his why he repeated his concern to Hashem.

¹ Based on [Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe IV to Exodus 6:12](#)

² [Exodus 6:12,13](#)

³ [Ibid 4:10](#)

⁴ See [Ramban ad. loc.](#), who tries to address this

⁵ Some versions of the *Mishnah* don't have the word "but"

⁶ [Eduyos 1:3](#)

⁷ [Rambam ad. loc.](#), saying he heard this from his father [Rav Maimon](#), who heard it from his teacher the [Ri Migash](#), who heard it from his teacher the [Rif](#). Cf. [Rashi to Shabbos 15a](#), who says that Shemaya and Avtalyon chose the Torah word *hin*, instead of the measurement of 12 *kav*, which is the unit usually used in the *Mishnah*

⁸ See [Gittin 56b](#); [Sanhedrin 96b](#); [Yoma 71b](#); [Midrash Tanchuma Vayakhel § 8](#)

⁹ See [Rabbeinu Bachaye to Exodus 4:10](#) in the name of [Rabbeinu Chananel](#), who says that Moshe couldn't pronounce the letters זש"רס"ץ, produced by the teeth (כבד פה), nor the letters דטלנ"ת, produced by the tongue (כבד לשון)

¹⁰ I wouldn't have thought that Moshe, at this point in the story, would be considered Aharon's teacher. Moshe hadn't really begun teaching anything yet, and Aharon was the eldest of the two

Hashem responded by speaking to *both* Moshe and Aharon, telling them to demand from Pharaoh to free the Jews. Hashem told them both to tell the Jews that they were to be freed from Egypt. Since Aharon heard the correct words from Hashem Himself, he was able to properly communicate the message to the Jewish people¹¹. Moshe's concerns were now fully addressed.

Good Shabbos

¹¹ This doesn't sound very practical. Besides this verse, most of the time Hashem only told Moshe what to say to Aharon, to tell Pharaoh or the people. What's the point of this whole spokesperson role then?