

Parashat Naso 5783, 2023:

The Singular Nature of Moshe Rabbeinu

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The concluding *pasukim* of a *parasha* often serve as a summation of one or more of the subjects contained therein. In his *Commentary on the Torah*, the *Alshich Hakadosh* (Rav Moshe Alshich, 1508-1593) notes that this approach is not followed in our *sidrah*, as the final verse is disassociated from all preceding *pasukim*:

“When Moshe would come into the Tent of Meeting (*Ohel Moade*) to speak with Him, he would hear the Voice (*va'yishma et HaKol*) speaking to him from the two cherubim above the covering which was over the Ark of Testimony (*Aron HaEidut*), and He spoke to him (*va'yidabare aluv*).” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 7:89, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*): Behold, this verse does not appear to have any connection to that which comes before or after.

Since this is the case, I would like to borrow a phrase from Rashi’s *Commentary on the Torah* on *Sefer Bereishit* 1:1: “*ain hamikra hazeh omare elah darshani*—this text certainly calls for a thoroughgoing analysis.” The expression, “*Ohel Moade*,” is used numerous times in *Shemot*, *Vayikra*, *Bamidbar* and *Devarim*—without a precise definition. As such, its identity is often confused with the *Mishkan*. This leads the Abarbanel (Rabbi Don Yitzchak ben Yehudah Abarbanel 1437–1508), in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our *pasuk*, to clarify this term: “The *Ohel Moade* is the sanctuary, [and a section within the *Mishkan*,] where we find the *Shulchan*, *Menorah* and the *Mizbeach HaKetoret* (the altar upon which the incense was offered).” The *Kodesh Kedoshim* (Holy of Holies) was behind the *Ohel Moade*, and the area from which Moshe would hear “*HaKol* speaking to him from the two cherubim above the covering which was over the *Aron HaEidut*” when he was standing in the *Ohel Moade*.

Hakol refers to the Voice of Hashem that Rashi and most commentators explain as “*HaKol sh'nidabare*

imo b'Sinai—the Voice with which He [Hashem] spoke with him at Mount Sinai.” In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse, the Sforno (Rav Ovadiah ben Ya'akov, c. 1470–c. 1550) explains the unique manner of Moshe's communications with the Almighty:

“When Moshe would come into the *Ohel Moade* to speak with Him, he would hear the Voice (*va'yishma et HaKol*) ...” and this did not take place in the first *Beit HaMikdash*, and certainly not in the second *Beit HaMikdash*. For no other *navi* was ever able to walk into the *Mikdash* to prophesize and immediately obtain his prophecy...

The Sforno's insight is congruent with one of the Rambam's (Maimonides, 1135-1204) analyses of the matchless nature of *nevuat Moshe Rabbeinu* as found in his 13 Principles of Faith:

And the fourth difference is that prophetic visions did not come to any of the [other] prophets according to their will, but only according to the will of Hashem ... Moshe, our teacher, however, [could receive prophecy] at any time he so desired. [This is clearly illustrated in *Sefer Bamidbar* 9:8:] “Wait and I will hear what Hashem commands for you...” (*Perush HaMishnayot, Sanhedrin* 10, Principle Seven, Rabbi David Kapach Hebrew translation of the Arabic, English translation my own)

The final words of our *pasuk*, “and He spoke to him (*va'yidabare aluv*),” are understood by Rashi as Hashem speaking exclusively to Moshe in such a manner as “to exclude Aharon from the divine statements.” A very different and daring approach, however, is offered by Rabbeinu Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa (1255–1340) in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our *pasuk*:

It is possible to explain, “*va'yidabare aluv*,” as “and Moshe spoke to Him.” This comes to teach us the greatness of Moshe in contrast to all other prophets, for he was neither reluctant nor frightened to respond directly to the Almighty. As we find in the verse: “Then Hashem would speak to Moshe face to face (*panim el panim*), as a man would speak to his companion...” (*Sefer Shemot* 33:11), for it is the manner of a person who is speaking to their friend for one to speak and one to answer. So, too, does it state in our verse, *HaKol* would speak to Moshe from the two cherubim above the covering which was over the *Aron HaEidut*, and he [Moshe] would then speak to Hashem at any time he so desired.

In sum, Moshe emerges as the greatest prophet who has ever and will ever live, for he, alone, spoke to Hashem *panim el panim*, “as a man would speak to his companion,” at any time he so desired. Little wonder, then, that we find in the *Yigdal* hymn: “In Israel none like Moses arose again...” (Translation, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, page 14)

Shabbat Shalom

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