

In the past couple of years, a lot of research has been conducted in the field of leadership skills. Businesses throughout the world are constantly trying to get a competitive advantage and thus try to pick their employees and CEOs based on what the latest scientific research shows world leaders have in common. So for example, recent studies have shown that height tends to be a big predictor of success. Columbia management professor Sheena Iyengar has found that men earn about 2.5% more per inch of height.¹ That's one of the main reasons I decided to become a Rabbi!

Daniel Hamermesh, a University of Texas at Austin psychologist who studies beauty in the workplace, found that good-looking people tend to get paid more than not good-looking people.

Another factor is physical fitness. German researchers have found that Marathon-running CEOs head companies valued 4% to 10% higher than CEOs who don't run marathons.

But perhaps the greatest indicator of successful leadership is one's oratory skills. Accordingly, we should be very surprised when we think about the fact that the greatest leader in our history, Moshe Rabeinu, had one of the biggest cardinal flaws to leadership: a speech impediment!

In last week's parsha we read how Moshe initially declined to be the savior for the Jewish people because he thought nation wouldn't listen to him because he was *Kivod Peh and Kivod lashon*, literally heavy of mouth and tongue. And the research shows us that Moshe had a good point! If its extremely difficult to become a CEO or leader with a speech impediment, then how can we expect Moshe to believe that he could lead an entire nation of hundreds of thousands of people and convince them he is bringing them out of slavery!

¹ Although only about 4% of Americans stand 6'2" or taller, Malcolm Gladwell found in his book "Blink" that 30% of Fortune 500 CEOs are at least that tall.

What was the purpose of Hashem choosing a leader who seemed so unfit for the task? Or another way to ask the question: if Moshe was supposed to be the true leader of Bnei Yisrael, why did Hashem make it so exceptionally hard for him to complete his task?

Now, it is true that in this week's parsha we read about how it was actually Aharon who spoke on behalf of Moshe when speaking to Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh. However, this does not answer our questions. After all, once Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt and spend 40 years in the desert, the Torah in all but one occasion² describes Moshe as talking directly to Bnei Yisrael without any intermediary!

Furthermore, not only do we find Moshe speaking directly to Bnei Yisrael, but we see him even delivering a powerful oratory masterpiece! Sefer Devarim is a sefer in which Moshe, in his own words, poetically and emphatically delivered a masterful speech to Bnei Yisrael. In fact, the speech was so good and powerful it became part of the chumash itself! Clearly, his speech impediment was not insurmountable. However, this begs the question- what was its purpose of being there in the first place?

The mefarshim debate the reason why Moshe had a speech impediment. Many of us may be familiar with the medrash's account.³ According to the medrash, when Moshe was a young child in Paroh's palace, he removed Paroh's crown and placed it on his own head. In order to determine whether this was a sign that Moshe would eventually try to overthrow Paroh, they decided to test Moshe by placing before him gold and a glowing coal. If Moshe would select the gold, it would be a sign he would eventually try to rebel against Paroh and he should thus be killed. But if he selected the coal it would just mean that Moshe likes shiny things. The story goes that Moshe actually reached for the gold but an angel

² Shemos 16:9

³ Shemos Rabbah 1:26

intervened, placing his hand on the coal and saving his life. Moshe then placed the coal in his mouth, burning his tongue.⁴

The Ramban⁵, understands this Medrash literally and adds that the reason why Hashem never healed Moshe was because his speech impediment served as a constant reminder to the miracles that occurred to him when he was a small child. Alternatively, Ramban suggests that Hashem didn't remove the speech impediment as a punishment for Moshe not praying for Hashem to heal him.⁶

Rabeinu Nissim Gaon, the Ran,⁷ has a different approach and says that Hashem specifically sought out a person with a speech impediment to be the leader of the Jewish people so that no one would think that the reason Bnei Yisrael left Egypt was because they followed a charismatic leader and Hashem was not really involved.⁸

However I would like to suggest a different answer. This answer, in my opinion, sheds light on one of the foundations of Judaism. In order to understand this answer we have to pose a much more basic question, perhaps as basic and fundamental as they come: What is a person's tafkid, mission, in this world?

I'm sure from time to time we think about this question. Judaism teaches that every single person has a unique purpose that they were sent to this world to accomplish. No one else can accomplish that task besides for you. So, besides for picking a career that makes sense financially, we also need

⁴ Compare to Yalkut Shimoni Shemot 166 and יוספוס קדמוניות היהודים ב'ט"ז'.

⁵ רמב"ן שמות ד'י"ג

⁶ According to this approach, you can say that in Sefer Devarim Moshe did not have a speech impediment anymore: either because he no longer needed the reminder or because his punishment had already been meted out to the proper extent.

⁷ Drashos HaRan 5

⁸ According to this approach, you can say that in Sefer Devarim Moshe did not have a speech impediment anymore because by that time it was already clear that Bnei Yisrael left because Hashem took them out and not because they followed a charismatic leader.

to think about whether our career, or really everything we do, is fulfilling our purpose in this world.

If you were to ask a person how one is to figure out what one's purpose in this world is, the most common answer you will hear is that if you are naturally good at something, then it is a good indicator that your purpose in life involves that thing. While there is truth to this, the Vilna Gaon⁹ and Rav Tzadok HaKohen M'Lublin¹⁰ say the exact opposite: the way to figure out your mission in life is by fixing and overcoming the things that come hardest to you and that you struggle with the most.

So for example, let's say you have a guy who learns in kollel all day. Learning Torah is something that he greatly enjoys and come easy to him. Very often when you have a guy like this, they are not necessary the best daveners. However, he doesn't think much of it because he'll probably say to himself, *"yea, I may not be the best davener but its ok because my thing is learning. I'm just not the biggest davener but its ok because I compensate that with my learning."* According to the Vilna Gaon and Rav Tzadok, this attitude is completely incorrect. If this guy isn't the best davener, that doesn't mean his "thing" or tafkid is learning. It means he was sent to this world specifically to work on his davening because that is what comes hard to him!

Or let's take a different example. Let's say you have a businessman who is very successful BH and is able to give a lot of tzedakah. However, it is hard for him to wake up in the morning and make it on time for minyan. It's true that every cent of tzedakah he gives is a tremendous mitzvah, but perhaps Hashem expects this person to give tzedakah and is more interested to see whether he will work on himself to get better at getting to minyan on time.

⁹ Commentary tom Sefer Yona 4:3

¹⁰ Tzidkas HaTzadik 49 and 70.

We should not look at people's accomplishments as succeeding *despite* their struggles, but rather they succeeded *because* they overcame their struggles.

Many people go through life thinking Hashem is like an A.T.M machine. What do I mean by that? We expect Hashem to fulfill our requests and to alleviate our struggles just like one simply presses a button to take out money from the A.T.M. machine. However we fail to realize that it is Hashem Himself who is sending these struggles our way. Yes, He wants to daven. Yes, He doesn't like to see us suffering. But He is sending them our way specifically to overcome these challenges and not for them to go away as simply as pressing a button. It is these specific struggles that define our existence and it is these specific struggles that Hashem wants us to overcome.

I think this is what Hashem is trying to show us well when picking Moshe Rabeinu as a leader. If you think about it, it's so ironic! Here we have THE GREATEST AND MOST IMPORTANT COMMUNICATOR IN THE HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE- A PERSON WHOSE PURPOSE IN LIFE WAS TO COMMUNICATE THE DIVINE WILL TO THE WORLD- AND THIS PERSON STRUGGLED SPECIFICALLY IN THE AREA OF COMMUNICATION!

Hashem is trying to show us the essence of life not just by giving us the Torah, but even in the way He gives us the Torah. Hashem specifically chose Moshe to convey the message that the essence of life and the Torah is by overcoming the challenges that are hardest to a person just like Moshe, the communicator of the Torah, struggled in communicating.

May we all merit to identify our struggles, to work on them, and to eventually overcome them so that we may fulfill our mission in this world.

Good Shabbos!

