

The Army used to have a slogan, "Be all that you can be." While I always liked this catchy little motto, I liked it even more, after I saw a commentary from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein on this week's Parsha.

The Torah after giving the relevant genealogical background of the tribe of Levi, writes "And this is Aaron and Moses whom G-D has said to them to take out the Jewish nation from the land of Egypt." While this verse may seem quite unspectacular and insignificant, Rashi finds it quite surprising; he is bothered by the order of the names. Usually the Torah places Moshe before Aaron, after all Moshe was the leader, perhaps the greatest Jew to ever walk to face of the earth. Aaron although the High Priest and certainly a great man, does not occupy the place in history that Moshe does. So why do we find a reversal in this verse, why is Aaron mentioned first? Rashi answers that the Torah specifically reverses the order to show us that in fact they are truly equal. However, that is quite a shocking statement, in the annals of Jewish history Moshe's legacy is unparalleled, can Rashi accurately claim that they are equal?

The Gemara in Bava Basra relates that Rav Yosef had a near death experience, during which he got a glimpse of heaven. Upon his recovery and subsequent return to Earth, his father, Rav Yehoshua asked him what he saw up there. The reply was "An upside down world I saw, those on top here were upside down in heaven and those that were on the bottom here were on top over there". Rav Yehoshua, immediately informed his son that he glimpsed a clear world, not a backwards one. What is the meaning of this cryptic assessment of the next world?

Rav Moshe explains that greatness cannot be measured objectively by accomplishments, accolades, or fame. Greatness can only be measured in relation to one's talents, skills, and potential. One who struggles with math cannot be expected to win the Wolf Prize in Mathematics, and one who struggles with language cannot be expected to become the next Shakespeare.

The legendary Chassidic Rebbe, Rav Zusia said it best when he lamented about himself "When I meet my Master, He will not ask me - Zusia why weren't you Moses? Or, Zusia, why weren't you Abraham? Hashem will ask me, Zusia, why weren't you Zusia?"

With this understanding, Rav Moshe explains the Talmudic passage. People who we may consider great in this world based on their accomplishments, may not be truly great if they had the ability and skills to accomplish a lot more. People, who we consider utter failures in this world because they fail to leave any lasting impressions on this world, may have in fact done their very best and fulfilled their potential on this world. Things are blurry and unclear here, but in the next world people will be accurately judged in accordance with their true potential.

This, Rav Moshe explains, is the lesson of the Parsha. Aaron was in fact equal to Moshe, as surprising as that might seem to us. Just as Moshe became the greatest person he was capable of, Aaron maximized his potential and became the greatest person he could be with his unique talent and skill set.

The US Army has changed their slogan, they now refer to strength and being "Army strong", it is too bad that they care more about strength than about true greatness.

Shabbat Shalom,

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