

- Israel and concerning Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring the Children of Israel out from Egypt.*
- 14 *These are the heads of their fathers' houses. The sons of Reuven, Yisrael's firstborn: Chanoch, Pallu, Chetzron and Karmi. These are the families of Reuven.*
- 15 *Shimon's sons: Yemu'el, Yamin, Ohad, Yachin, Tzochar and Sha'ul, son of the Kena'ani woman. These are the families of Shimon.*
- 16 *And these are the names of Levi's sons in the order of their birth: Gershon, Kehas and Merari. The years of Levi's life: One hundred thirty-seven years.*
- פְּרֹעֶה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת־
 בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: 8 שְׁנֵי
 יָד אֱלֹהִים רָאִשֵׁי בֵית־אֲבֹתָם בְּנֵי
 רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲנוּךְ וּפְלוּאֵל
 חֶצְרֹן וְכַרְמֵי אֱלֹהִים מִשְׁפָּחַת
 רְאוּבֵן:
 טו וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן יְמוּאֵל וְיָכִין וְאֶחָד
 וְיָכִין וְצֹחָר וְשָׂאוּל בֶן־הַכְּנַעֲנִית
 אֱלֹהִים מִשְׁפָּחַת שִׁמְעוֹן:
 טז וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמֹת בְּנֵי־לֵוִי לְתֹלְדֹתָם
 גֶּרְשׁוֹן וְקֹהַת וּמְרָרִי וְשִׁנִּי חַיִּי לֵוִי
 שָׁבַע וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה:

intended to win over the listener to the content of the speech. Moshe first had to become aware of his unsuitability for this mission. Now, however, peremptorily, as in verse 10 above, וידבר; and imperatively, ויצום. “You no longer have to deliberate whether you are fit or not; you have only to obey.” *Herewith begins the actual story of the redemption.*

14–30 *Immediately conspicuous is the interruption of the narrative by a genealogical register interposing in its midst and concluding with the words: הוא משה ואהרן, הם המדברים וגו' (v. 26), הוא משה ואהרן ומשה וגו' (v. 27) — as though these people were complete strangers to us, with whom we were becoming acquainted here for the first time. Only in verse 29 does Scripture return to the beginning of the narrative, repeat it, and continue it!*

Let us now consider this genealogical register. It is not limited to the lineage of Moshe and Aharon; rather, it briefly outlines the two preceding tribes. So, too, in the tribe of Moshe and Aharon, the register

- 17 *Gershon's sons: Livni and Shim'i, according to their families.* יי בְּנֵי גֵרְשׁוֹן לְבְנֵי וְשִׁמְעִי לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם:
- 18 *Kehas's sons: Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron and Uzziel. The years of Kehas's life: One hundred thirty-three years.* יח וּבְנֵי קֵהָת עֲמָרָם וַיִּצְחָר וַחֲבֵרוֹן וְעֻזִּיאֵל וּשְׁנַיִל חַיֵּי קֵהָת שְׁלֹשׁ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה:
- 19 *Merari's sons: Machli and Mushi. These are the families of Levi according to their descent.* יט וּבְנֵי מֵרָרִי מַחֲלִי וּמוּשִׁי אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת הַלֵּוִי לְתַלְדוֹתָם:
- 20 *Amram took to wife Yocheved, his aunt, and she bore him Aharon and Moshe. The years of Amram's life: One hundred thirty-seven years.* כ וַיִּקַּח עֲמָרָם אֶת־יְיֹכָבֵד דְּדָתוֹ לֹא לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לּוֹ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־מֹשֶׁה וּשְׁנַיִל חַיֵּי עֲמָרָם שִׁבְעִים וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה:

shows not only their direct lineage, but also the side branches: uncles and cousins, great uncles and second cousins. Thus, we are shown the relationship of their tribe with the preceding ones, and the relationship of their family and house with the families and houses of relatives, in previous generations and among contemporaries. We are also told the advanced age reached by their father and their grandfather, which shows us that not much time separated their demise from the rise of Moshe and Aharon. Then, pointing to these two in the midst of this wide circle of family and friends, Scripture repeatedly says: “these were the same Moshe and Aharon” — on the day that God spoke to them! (see vv. 26–28).

If we further consider the point at which we are given this list of their lineage and family relations, we can perhaps come to understand the significance and purpose of all this information.

Until now, the efforts of Moshe and Aharon have been completely frustrated. Were it not for later events, there would be no need for such an exact list of their lineage and family relations. *Now, however, begins their triumphal mission*, the likes of which no mortal had ever accom-

- 21 *Yitzhar's sons: Korach, Nefeg and Zichri.* כֹּחַ וְכִנֵּי יִצְחָר קֹרַח וְנֶפֶג וְזִיכְרִי:
- 22 *Uzziel's sons: Mishael, Eltzafan and Sisri.* כֹּחַ וְכִנֵּי עֲזִיאֵל מִישָׁאֵל וְאֶלְצָפָן וְסִסְרִי:
- 23 *Aharon took to wife Elisheva, the daughter of Aminadav, Nachshon's sister, and she bore him Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Isamar.* כֹּחַ וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן אֶת-אֵלִישֶׁבַע בַּת-עֲמִינָדָב אֶחָת נַחֲשׁוֹן לֹו לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לֹו אֶת-נָדָב וְאֶת-אָבִיהוּא אֶת-אֶלְעָזָר וְאֶת-אִיסָמָר:

plished before them or will ever accomplish after them. *Now* it is of critical importance to present an exact list of their lineage and relations, *so as to attest thereby for all time to come that their origin was ordinary and human, and that the nature of their being was ordinary and human.*

Right from the earliest times it has happened that men who were outstanding benefactors to their people were, after their death, divested of their human image and, because of their “godlike” feats, were invested with a “Divine” origin. We all know of a certain Jew, in later times, whose genealogical record was *not* available, and *because* it was not available, and because he brought people a few sparks of light borrowed from the *man* Moshe, he came to be considered by the nations as begotten of God; to doubt his divinity became a capital crime.

Our Moshe was human, remained human, and will never be anything but human. When his countenance had already become radiant from what he was allowed to see of God; when he had already brought down the Torah from Heaven, and had already miraculously led the people through the wilderness and won for them victories of God, God here commanded him to present his genealogical record and thereby affirm the fact that ביום דבר ה' אל משה בארץ מצרים (v. 28), on the day that God first spoke to Moshe in the land of Egypt, everyone knew his parents and grandparents, his uncles and aunts and all his cousins. They knew his whole lineage and all his relatives. For eighty years they had known him as a man of flesh and blood, subject to all the failings and

- 24 *Korach's sons: Assir, Elkanah and Avi'asaf; these are the Korachi families.* כר ובני קרח אסיר ואלקנה ואביאסף אלה משפחת הקרחי:
- 25 *Elazar, son of Aharon, took to wife one of the daughters of Puti'el; she bore him Pinchas; these are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levi'im, according to their families.* כה ואלעזר בן-אהרן לקח-לו מבנות פוטיאל לו לאשה ותלד לו את-פינחס אלה ראשי אבות קלויים למשפחתם:
- 26 *These are Aharon and Moshe, to whom God said: Bring out the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts.* כו הוא אהרן ומשה אשר אמר יהוה להם הוציאו את-בני ישראל מארץ מצרים על-צבאתם:

weaknesses, worries and needs, of human nature, a man like all the other men among whom he had been born and raised. הוא אהרן ומשה — they were flesh and blood like all other men, and God chose them to be His instruments in the performance of His great work; they were flesh and blood like all other men, and they carried out *His* great work.

This “certificate of origin” is meant to negate in advance and forevermore any erroneous deification, any illusion of an incarnation of Deity in human form. It is meant to uphold this truth: Moshe, the greatest man of all time, was just a man, and the position he attained before God was not beyond the reach of mortal human beings.

The list of names is also meant to negate a second illusion, the opposite of the first and no less dangerous. Thus the genealogical register is not confined to the direct line of descent of Moshe and Aharon — viz., Ya'akov, Levi, Kehas, Amram, Moshe — but lists also the tribes that preceded Levi, with their descendants, and lists also the other branches of the tribe of Levi. For although the certificate of origin establishes as a fact the human nature of Moshe and Aharon, it might also have fostered the belief that everyone, without exception, is fit to become a prophet. A person who today is known as a complete idiot

- 27 *These are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring out the Children of Israel from Egypt; these are Moshe and Aharon.* כו הם המדברים אל-פרעה מלך-מצרים להוציא את-בני-ישראל ממצרים הוא משה ואהרן:
- 28 *This was he on the day upon which God spoke to Moshe in the land of Egypt.* כח ויהי ביום דבר יהוה אל-משה בארץ מצרים: ם שלישי

could tomorrow proclaim the Word of God. God's spirit could suddenly descend upon an ignorant and uneducated person and teach him to speak in seventy languages. Indeed, this phenomenon of imagined or pretended prophecy is not uncommon in other circles. In their view, the more intellectually limited and empty-minded the prophet of today was yesterday, the more clearly this sudden transformation attests to a Divine call.

This dangerous illusion, too, is negated by the family register. True, Moshe and Aharon were men and nothing but men, but they were *chosen* men. Had God wished simply to pick the first comer, there were other tribes, besides Levi, who stood at His disposal; and within Levi, there were other branches besides Kehas; and within Kehas, there were other houses besides that of Amram; and among Amram's children, Aharon was the elder son and, like Moshe, was a worthy candidate. God, however, *chooses the worthiest and most exemplary* to be His emissaries who do His bidding. Before he receives his call, the human being must attain the heights of human virtue. It was not Avraham or Yitzchak but Ya'akov who became the true founder of the House of Israel. It was not Reuven or Shimon but Levi who became the chosen tribe. It was not Aharon or Miryam but Moshe who became God's emissary. (This idea is the essence of our Sages' comment on the verse *הלא כתבתי לך ששלישי* [Mishlei 22:20]; see *Tanchuma, Yisro* 10.) One is chosen only if he has matured on his own to the point that he has become worthy of being chosen.

We have already noted (above, 2:11–12) that, according to the Jewish conception, neither weaklings, nor simpletons, nor those who are de-

- 29 *When God spoke to Moshe [saying]: I, God! Speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, everything that I am saying to you;* כט וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר אני יהוה דבר אל-פרעה מלך מצרים את כל-אשר אני דבר אליך:
- 30 *Moshe said before God: Look, I am of unpliant lips; how will Pharaoh hearken to me?* ל ויאמר משה לפני יהוה הן אני ערל שפתים ואיך ישמע אלי פרעה: פ

pendent on others are chosen to be the bearers of God's spirit. On the contrary, even before he is chosen, God's emissary must be גבור חכם ועשיר — "healthy" in body, mind, and social standing. Healthy in body: so that deluded impostors (whose ill-health affects their mental outlook) should not disseminate morbid hallucinations which will be presented and regarded as visions of God. Healthy in mind: because only a mind that has developed to its full human capacity can grasp and transmit the Word of God. Healthy in social standing: because only a person who is independent, who requires nothing for himself and seeks nothing for himself, can understand people and assess situations objectively, as befits an emissary of God.

In *Bereshis*, in the account of the inception of our tribes, we listened to the feelings and thoughts of Leah, the glorious mother of our people, when she bore within her the tribes of the House of Ya'akov — her sons. We found that only with the birth of Levi did she attain the happiness and felicity that characterize Jewish married life.

If the thoughts and feelings of the mother-to-be affect the soul of the person-to-be, then from the names, which reflect her innermost feelings, we can surmise why it was not ראו-בן or שמ-עון but only לוי who was worthy of being chosen (see Commentary, *Bereshis*, 29:32–35).

And when we vividly perceive the thoughts and feelings, the courage and inspiration to duty, that sent "a man of the house of Levi" back to "the daughter of Levi" even in such a time of terror; when we vividly perceive the anxiety wrapped in hope, the glimmer of hope shimmering

7 1 *Thereupon God said to Moshe: Lo! I have appointed you as a god for Pharaoh, and your brother Aharon will be your prophet.* ז א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה נִתְּתִידָּךְ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרְעֹה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶחָיֶדְךָ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאָךְ:

through fear, the complete resignation, with which Yocheved put herself in God's hands when she became the mother of Moshe – then we will be able to assess what influence these prenatal feelings may have had on the child, whose character would be adorned by a precious pearl that would especially prepare him for his exalted mission: the trait of ענווה.

CHAPTER 7

1 **אלהים לפרעה**. This expression is perhaps connected to the idea just developed, the idea that, as we explained, necessitated the citation of the preceding genealogical register. For in the final analysis it was *necessary* that, to a man like Pharaoh, Moshe should appear as an incarnation of a god. In the heathen view, the first attribute of divinity is fearsome power inimical to man. We would not have been surprised if, after all the miracles Moshe performed, Pharaoh had prostrated himself before him and worshipped him as a god.

וַאֲהֲרֹן אֶחָיֶדְךָ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאָךְ. “As a prophet is to Me, so shall Aharon be to you.” This characterization is of great significance for Jewish prophecy as a true reality. As surely as Moshe and Aharon act here as two separate personalities, with Moshe giving the directions and orders which Aharon is to carry out and pass on, so is it certain that any definition of prophecy that has God speak not *to* the prophet but *from within* the prophet is false. “God speaks from within the prophet” is the claim of all those who deny actual Divine revelation, who let prophecy stand in name only, but in fact reduce the prophet to a mere inspired poet or lawgiver who is in a state of exaltation or ecstasy. Not so! The true prophet stands *face to face* with God, as Aharon stands before Moshe.

Accordingly, נביא is a passive concept, הַנְּבִיא, related to נבע, meaning “to flow” or “gush forth.” The prophet is used by God as a “wellspring” through which He, God, reveals His Word. The prophet is not the author but only the transmitter of the Word he speaks.