

A Closer Look- Parshas Yisro

God prepares to reveal Himself to the Jews at Mount Sinai.

Text:

God said to [Moses], “Go to the people [and instruct them in preparation for the Revelation].”

[Exodus 19:24]

God wanted to give the Ten Commandments. Moses was standing [atop Mount Sinai]. God said, “[If I say], ‘I am the Lord your God,’ [the Jewish People] will say, ‘Who said it – God or Moses?’ Rather, let Moses descend, and then I shall say, ‘I am the Lord your God.’” So God said to Moses, “Go to the people [and instruct them]...”

[Midrash, Ibid.]

[God’s message to the people was a pretext; God hoped that Moses] would realize that He wants him to leave.... He did not want to tell [Moses] explicitly to leave, because He did not want to hurt his feelings.

[Commentary of Maharzu on Midrash]

Question:

1. Why would Moses be insulted if God told him to leave? He had done nothing wrong! God simply wanted to make it clear that *He* was uttering the commandments, and not Moses. Couldn’t God have explained to him this simple rationale?
2. If there was no way to prevent Moses from feeling hurt, why did God sent him on a mission so that Moses “would realize that He wants him to leave” – isn’t that just telling him to leave in different words?

Answer:

The words “You do not belong here” have an inherently hurtful connotation. Instead, God *implied* it, without actually *saying* it. Human beings are sensitive to nuances of speech, even when there is no logical difference in the meaning.

Message:

Sensitivity is not a sign of weakness; it is one of the essential qualities of being human. Moses, the greatest prophet of all time, was incomparably rational; he was also “the humblest of all

men.”¹ Yet even Moses could be affected by the choice of words, and God devised a strategy to avoid slighting him. We, too, must invest effort to ensure that our speech is always refined, sensitive and tactful.

¹ Numbers 12:3