

BEHAALOSCHA (NUMBERS 8:1-12:16)

The 'Dad Brothers' Earn a Prophet

2016 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Moses needed assistance. G-d told him to gather seventy elders who would constitute a Sanhedrin (High Court.) They would assist him in leading the Nation of Israel. G-d would cause Moses's spirit of prophecy to rest upon those elders, and they would receive a one-time gift of prophecy.

Rashi explains how these seventy elders were selected. It would be impossible to have equal representation of all twelve tribes. Therefore, Moses selected six members of each of the twelve tribes. Then he set up a lottery whereby each of the potential elders chose one of seventy-two lots. Seventy lots had the word "Elder" written on them, and two were blank. This way, G-d would make the decision as to which tribes would have less representation on the Sanhedrin. The seventy who would be selected were to join Moses at the Tabernacle. (The "Tent of Meeting")

Things didn't turn out quite the way Moses had planned.

Moses ... gathered seventy men ... and had them stand around the Tent. G-d descended in a cloud and spoke to him; and He increased some of the spirit that was upon him and gave it to the seventy men, the elders, and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, but did not do so again. (Numbers, 11:24-25)

So far so good, right? Seventy elders have been given the one-time gift of prophecy, and they are now qualified to assist Moses in leading the people.

Suddenly it became clear that things hadn't worked out quite as planned. There was the matter of the "Dad Brothers," El-Dad and Mei-Dad.

Two men remained behind in the camp, the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the second was Meidad, and the spirit rested upon them, they had been among the recorded ones, but they had not gone out to the Tent, and they prophesized in the camp.(Ibid, verse 26)

Eldad and Meidad were supposed to be among the seventy; as the above verse states, they had been among the recorded ones. But they were no-shows. Instead all seventy of the others, including the two who weren't supposed to be selected, went to the tent and became temporary prophets, and members of the Sanhedrin.

But now Eldad and Meidad, without the spirit of Moses that had been shared with the others, were standing in the camp and "doing their own thing." They were stating prophecies about things to come in the immediate and distant future.

Joshua was taken aback. How dare they prophesize in the camp?! He asked Moses to make them stop.

The response was Classic Moses: "Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that the entire nation of G-d would be prophets, if G-d would but place His spirit upon them!" (Ibid, verse 28)

Moses had no problem with Eldad and Meidad. He didn't see them as "competitors in any way. The man Moses was exceedingly humble; more so than any person on the face of the earth. (Ibid, 12:3) Moses was a modest servant of G-d, and saw no need to protect his "turf."

A few questions:

Why didn't Eldad and Meidad join their fellow Sanhedrin designees at the Tent of Meeting? What was the prophecy that they were declaring in the camp? What was it about their prophecy that upset Joshua, but left Moses unfazed?

Rashi tells us that Eldad and Meidad felt that they were unworthy of this great honor. Therefore, they didn't attend the lottery. So all seventy of their fellows, including the two who would otherwise have been rejected, became prophets. Eldad and Meidad would remain "civilians."

Or so they thought. But as Moses learned, way back at the Burning Bush, when G-d decides that He is going to give you greatness, you are going to become great.

Two men remained behind in the camp, the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the second was Meidad, and the spirit rested upon them...

Eldad and Meidad were not like the others. ... and the spirit rested upon them...The others were inspired by the spirit of Moses, and granted temporary prophecy. Eldad and Meidad were uplifted by G-d's spirit and granted ongoing prophecy. Due to their humility, they were given this gift of greatness.

And what was it that they prophesized? They predicted that Moses would die and Joshua would lead the nation into the Land of Israel.

This should have been good news for Joshua and his career. He was hearing prophecy that he would someday be the leader of this great nation.

But Joshua, a student of Moses, was cut from the same cloth as his master. "What?! How dare you even suggest that our great leader Moses will not lead us to the Promised Land?! Who am I to step into such big sandals?"

And finally, Moses himself. What was his reaction to all this? After all, we will read in the upcoming chapters of the Torah that Moses argued incessantly to be allowed to enter the Land. How did he feel about this prophecy?

Moses was thrilled to see two of his fellow Israelites achieve this exalted level of holiness. The fact that the information included in the prophecy included news that wasn't good for him was irrelevant. He was seeing greatness among his people, and that made him happy.

Who were these two men? This is a subject of discussion among the commentaries.

The Targum Yonason states that Eldad and Meidad were the sons of Elitzafan ben Parnach, who would eventually become the leader of the Tribe of Zebulun. What is more interesting is who their mother was – Yocheved bas Levi, the mother of Moses! Some commentaries state that Amram divorced Yocheved during the Egyptian decree to murder all newborn baby boys, and Elitzafan married her, subsequently divorcing her, to be remarried by Amram. Others say that Elitzafan married her after Amram's death.

In any event, according to these commentaries, Eldad and Meidad were actually half-brothers of Moses.

Apparently, humility runs in the family!

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz