

Moshe said to Hashem, “...I am not a man of words...for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech.” (4:10)

Rashi teaches us that for seven days Hashem spoke to Moshe, attempting to convince him to go to Egypt and instruct Pharaoh to permit the Jews to leave his country. Seven days is a long time, especially when Hashem is talking. Moshe refused; he felt he was not worthy, because he had a speech impediment. How could he speak to Pharaoh if he had difficulty communicating orally? Moshe *Rabbeinu* used this excuse for seven days until Hashem finally became angry with him. Hashem said, “I will be with you, so you have nothing to worry about.” Yet, Moshe did not want to give in. Why did Moshe refuse to go? Was his speech the problem? He should have asked Hashem to rectify his impediment. Hashem should have taken away Moshe’s speech deficiency, and he would no longer have had an excuse. Apparently, Moshe wanted to retain his challenge. Hashem respected Moshe’s wish and left him as he was. Why? Why was Moshe so obsessed with retaining his speech impairment?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, explains that Moshe’s impediment came as a result of a miracle that was performed for him, a miracle that had saved his life. Moshe did not want to forget this episode in his life, so that he could always feel a sense of gratitude to Hashem. *Chazal* teach us that Moshe was favored by Pharaoh and shown great affection. As a young child, Moshe would take Pharaoh’s crown and play with it, even placing it on his own head! Seeing this, Pharaoh’s advisors became concerned lest this child be the one, the future leader of the Jews whom they feared. There was a dispute among the advisors concerning how to deal with this child. Some said to kill him; others said to burn him. Yisro said that the child had no designs on Pharaoh’s throne. He was merely an ordinary child with no special intelligence. He suggested a test to determine Moshe’s level of intellect. They placed a bowl of gold and a bowl of hot coals in front of him to see to which one he would gravitate. Moshe, being of superior intelligence, was about to touch the gold when the angel Gavriel came and pushed his hand into the hot coals. Moshe immediately took his hand still holding the hot coal and placed it in his mouth to cool off the burn. Understandably, he burnt his tongue, causing his speech impairment.

Moshe did not want to forget this incident. His speech impediment represented his deliverance from a near-death experience. He never wanted to forget Hashem’s benevolence. Hashem respected Moshe’s wish and allowed him to remain this way.