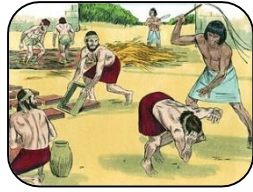


Parshat Va'eira – Striving for Greatness

By Rabbi Mayer Freedman

We find ourselves at the climax of the past number of parshiyot. Over the past few weeks, we read about God's promise to give the Jewish people the Land of Canaan, the rivalry between Joseph and his brothers that brought the entire family to Egypt, and the ensuing slavery that the Jews endured under Pharaoh's cruel rule. We are holding at the turning point in the story. The background narrative of the Jewish heroes, Moses and Aaron, has been developed. The highpoint of the redemption is



about to begin. But wait! The Torah interrupts the story just as the narrative is reaching its climax with seemingly mundane, unrelated details: the genealogy of Moses and Aaron. Why interrupt the storyline at its most suspenseful moment with this unnecessary information?



There is a powerful explanation shared by the anthological commentary on the Torah, Mayanah Shel Torah (Tel Aviv, Israel; 1955). Moses and Aaron are on the verge of their mission to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt and to the border of the Land of Canaan. With



all of the heroics that they are about to display, it would be understandable for one to begin to think of them as superhumans. They could easily come across as having some measure of divinity. They might even end up being considered divine themselves.



Such an error would not only cause colossal misunderstanding of the Jewish concept of the Divine, it would also exempt us, the typical human beings, from striving for greatness. We would feel that only one who is predestined for prominence can become great. The average person, however, should be satisfied with settling for mediocrity.

This is why the Torah specifically informs us here of the parentage of Moses and Aaron, showing us that they were mere mortal beings like ourselves. Yet, with all their human failings, they were able to become the greatest people that ever lived. One does not need to be superhuman to achieve remarkable feats. We all have that power; we all have that ability. And if we can, we must. There are no excuses. Mediocrity is not our goal. We must strive for greatness.

