



PARSHAS CHUKAS

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The Incomprehensible Humility of Moshe Rabbeinu

Leadership of Gevurah Versus Leadership of Malchus

The standard ruler governs with force. He either has financial, physical or psychological power through which he imposes his wishes on his constituents. Most leaders must use some form of force or power - which can include charisma or presence - or punitive measure to keep their followers in line.

This ordinary leadership is rooted in the attribute of Gevurah - strength.

However, there is a different method by which the will of a person is fulfilled by others. Those who come in contact with a tzaddik and recognize his greatness will feel a deep desire to fulfill his directive. They will not do so due to any physical or psychological control the tzaddik exercises over them, but because they recognize his tremendous greatness and instinctively wish to completely submit themselves to him.

This explains the phenomena of how an elderly, weak and frail tzaddik, who possesses no oratory ability whatsoever, has myriads of Jews fulfilling his every dictate even if he only indicates his will. With a small wave of his hand, thousands will alter their course. They are not scared the tzaddik will harm them if they do not comply; they know he loves every Jew dearly and would never harm anybody. They listen to him out of a deep sense of reverence and because they feel intensely connected to him. A tremendous source of spiritual vitality flows to them through him, and they feel this. For them, fulfilling the will of the tzaddik is more gratifying than fulfilling their own desires. They do not feel compelled to listen, but are very eager to - even if it is difficult for them. One who is touched by the greatness of a Gadol, and feels connected to him, will be thrilled at the opportunity of compromising his own wishes in the face of the directive of the tzaddik.

Once, a teenage boy came into the Rebbe of Ger with his peyos under his yarmulke, according to the custom of the Gerrer Chassidim. The Rebbe remarked, "It would be appropriate to have the peyos hanging down in Yerushalayim."

Within a few days, all the chassidim residing in Yerushalayim had their peyos hanging down.

This method of leadership is rooted in the attribute of Malchus – Kingship. Malchus is vested in the mouth. The tzaddik who is imbued with Malchus will - with the words of his mouth only - have his will fulfilled by masses of Jews.

Gevurah can be found both in holiness and its opposite. However, there is no evil counterpart to Malchus. Leadership of Malchus is found only in holiness.

Moshe's Philosophy of Humility

All of the miracles and wonders performed by Moshe were through his stick. He had the water hit by the plague of blood, the earth by the plague of lice, the sea before it split etc. Moshe's repeated usage of his staff symbolized something deeper.

In Moshe Rabbeinu's mind, a great contradiction could have been raging. On one hand, being the most humble man to have graced the earth, he considered himself to truly be the least worthy person alive. On the other hand, he knew that the purpose of creation – that the Jewish people should receive the Torah - was fulfilled through him. He was also the one to perform the

great wonders in Egypt, which demonstrated to the entire world for all time that Hashem is G-d and is completely in control of nature. How did this reconcile with his self-perception as the least worthy man that ever existed?

The answer is – a stick. Moshe did not merely perform the miracles through his staff, he considered himself the scepter of G-d.

The wood that is fashioned into the royal scepter has no inherent advantage over any other rod. It was merely chosen to serve as the expression and conduit for the kingship of the monarch.

Moshe considered himself to be the smallest and most insignificant of all people. If the argument, “You were chosen for the greatest task imaginable,” would arise in his mind, he would explain it as, “There are some things which cannot be understood.” No one can explain why a particular rod merited serving as the royal scepter. So too, Moshe attributed his assignment of the greatest task that ever existed to no special credentials of his own.

Hashem allowed Moshe to conduct himself with his philosophy of humility, and therefore commanded him, “Take this stick with which to do the miracles¹.” You can use your philosophy - that you are merely a stick chosen inexplicably - to do My wonders.

The Insurmountable Difficulty of Talking to the Stone

The miraculous stone that supplied water for over a million people in the arid desert for forty years was given to the Jewish people in the merit of Miriam. When Miriam died, the well dried up. It was returned to the Jewish people in the merit of Moshe and Aharon.

Moshe was commanded by Hashem to speak to the stone and tell it to give water. This is in contrast to forty years earlier, when he was commanded to hit the stone so that it should give water.

At that time, when Moshe was to obtain water from the stone in Miriam’s merit, he was to *hit* it. Now, that Moshe was to derive water from the stone in his own merit, he was to *talk* to it.

The first time Moshe was to command the rock to give water he presented himself as the soldier who raps on the door and announces, “Open up in the name of the king!” The soldier knows that he himself has no authority; only the royal command vests him with authority.

Now, however, when the well was returned in his own merit, Hashem commanded him to *speak* to the stone. He was no longer allowed to remain with his philosophy that he is merely a scepter in the hand of the king. He himself was vested with the attribute of Malchus, not mere Gevurah; he himself was king. The words of his mouth had the power to compel nature.

We can empathize with the tests that Yosef HaTzaddik faced in Potifar’s house, and that Daniel faced in the lion’s den of Balshatzar. We can appreciate the difficulty of overcoming temptation, because we are also filled with temptation, and we also have the instinct of self-preservation that Daniel had to overcome.

However, the test of Moshe is incomprehensible to us. We cannot understand how extremely difficult it was for Moshe to overcome a lifetime of self-nullification and accept the fact that he was a great man vested with the attribute of Malchus. This is because we have no inkling of what true humility feels like.

This was an excruciatingly difficult test for Moshe and one which he was destined to fail. He could not see himself as a person who could rule over nature with Malchus Peh alone. Moshe had to be denied entry into Eretz Yisrael, and he was therefore faced with an ordeal that he could

not overcome. (The reason why Moshe could not enter Eretz Yisroel was explained at length in Parshas Beha'aloscha.)

Thus, the greatest sin of his life highlights the perfection of his character.

Already at the dawn of his career as leader of the Jewish people, Moshe was informed by Hashem that his extreme humility would be the cause of his sin and resulting denial of entry into Eretz Yisrael.

For days Moshe had refused to assume the task of redeeming the Jewish people, because he viewed himself as unworthy. Hashem told him, "Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh²." Now you will see, but later - the miraculous victory over the Canaanite kingdoms – you will not. The extreme humility you portray by refusing to assume the task of redeeming the Jewish people will one day be the cause for your sin of hitting the stone, and you will therefore be denied entry into Eretz Yisrael.

Humility is the Essence of the Mitzvah of Parah Adumah (the Red Heifer)

This week's parsha begins with the mitzvah of Parah Adumah. The Torah declares it the 'Chukas HaTorah' – the paradigm of the non-understood commands of the Torah. The rationale behind this mitzvah is completely concealed. No one understands how the ashes of the red heifer remove the impurity caused by contact with a dead corpse. Additionally, there are many laws which seem to be contradictory.

The only one to whom the meaning of this mitzvah was revealed was Moshe Rabbeinu. The Midrash relates that Hashem told Moshe, 'To you I reveal the reason for the mitzvah of Parah Adumah, but for others it is a Chok.'

The essence of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is humility.

An integral component of the procedure was to throw a cedar wood and grass - tied together by wool, dyed with the blood of a worm - into the fire. Rashi quotes Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan who explains that this teaches us that one who was haughty like the tall cedar tree should lower himself like the lowly grass.

Moshe as the epitome of humility was very connected to the mitzvah of Parah Adumah. Every Jew has a mitzvah which he is uniquely connected to. He feels particularly passionate about this mitzvah and fulfills it with extra alacrity. Of the Rebbe of Ropshitz it is said that his soul was rooted in the mitzvah of sukkah. He was perpetually engaged in studying the laws, speaking about, or preparing something for the sukkah. The soul of Moshe was connected to the mitzvah of Parah Adumah, which teaches humility.

Only Moshe Understood the Reason for the Mitzvah of Parah Adumah

Just as Moshe's philosophy was that he had no rationale to explain why he was chosen, his mitzvah has no rationale by which we can comprehend it. In his eyes, his greatness was a Chok, an inexplicable phenomenon, like the mitzvah of Parah Adumah.

His modesty was tied up in Chok. Humble people use the concept of Chok to explain why they merit goodness in their lives. It is simply the unexplainable will of Hashem.

If the essence of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is that it is a Chok, it was a Chok to Moshe, too. However, only he understood the lesson of Chok completely. Only Moshe Rabbeinu considered himself so completely nothing, that the only way to explain the goodness bestowed upon him was through the rationale of Chok.

We can intellectually toy with this idea, but we cannot really grasp it. Only one who truly considers himself to be nothing and honestly wonders how he merits all the good he receives in life, could understand the humility that the mitzvah of the Parah Adumah teaches and the concept of Chok that it is a paradigm of.

¹ שמות ד:יז

² שמות ו:א