

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Parshas Chukas - Our Impure Garments Cover Our Soul - Support through examples for Changing our Sense of Self as Neshama covered by a Garment

After the Kohen Gadol prepares and offers the Parah Aduma, the red cow, he becomes impure and must immerse his clothing and flesh in water before entering the camp (of the Shechina). The irony is that the ashes of the red cow are used to make others pure. But the Kohen Gadol is impure. The words clothing and flesh are clearly garments over the Kohen Gadol, Hashem instructs that he must clean his garments, clothing and flesh, which became impure in the act of touching the ashes of the sacrificed Parah Aduma, red cow. Whatever lessons the Parah Aduma has, the reality that the Kohen Gadol must clean his garments after doing it reflects something crucial for every person striving to fulfill Hashem's Will – that we are constantly attempting to bring tahor from the tamei and to do so, we inevitably have to clean our garments that get soiled in the process.

Further in the Parsha, after Miriam dies and the well of water that had been in her merit is lost, the Jewish People bitterly cry to Moshe. The bitterness of their cry has a tone of rebellion, as we see in other sections of the Torah where "mem raish" -bitterness - implies rebellion (see Rashi on Toldos 26:35 referring to the bitterness that Yitzchak and Rivka felt because Esau married idol-worshippers, implying that their sadness was in seeing a rebellion in Esau's spirit).

Moshe sees the people crying. He has davened for them for the Golden Calf, for the crying for meat, for the sin of the spies, for Korach, for the plague that struck them when they complained about Korach, and now, the well disappears and the people are complaining. What is Moshe experiencing? As humble as Moshe was, what is going on inside his emotions? "Moshe and Aaron went from the presence of the congregation to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and fell on their faces." The Me'am Loez explains that Moshe took the staff and began to look for the rock. He intended to address the rock in accordance with Hashem's instructions, but that rock was uprooted and lost among the other rocks. Moshe could not locate it. He actually spoke to another rock and since it was not the designated rock, it did not bring forth water. Moshe ventured further, in search of the rock. The Me'am Loez continues by saying that there were in the generation scoffers and cynics and when they saw Moshe ranging about in search of the designated rock, they said to the other Israelites that if Hashem truly wants to perform a miracle for them by bringing forth water from a rock, can he not produce water from the rock right here! What difference is there between this rock and any other? Moshe had thought up to this moment that the Jewish People were accompanying him. But when he turned around and saw them instead grouped about the various rocks, he shouted Listen now, you rebels! Take heed you who foolishly challenge your leader. do you expect to produce water from a rock that has not been designated for this purpose! It is only regarding that one special rock that Hashem has commanded us!" Moshe spoke to every rock which he came across. Only when he saw that his words did not cause it to produce water would he conclude that it was not the rock Hashem had intended. but when he saw the Jewish People stubbornly insisted that he should bring forth water from the rock to which he had just been speaking, he began to think that perhaps he had been mistaken about what Hashem had told him. He remembered back to when they left Egypt, that Hashem had told him to strike the rock with his staff in order for water to issue forth. As Moshe raised his arm to strike this rock, however, the rock which Hashem had designated appeared on the same spot and as Moshe struck it, drops of blood came out instead of water."

Before we look at Moshe and how the yetzer hara had to work so hard to confuse him, let us consider the Jewish People. The people who stand complaining have made it through all the previous tests! They didn't die in the previous episodes! Thus their own spiritual growth must have been developing to some degree. What is their next step in serving Hashem?

Hashem tells Moshe to speak to the rock and He will bring forth water. Moshe, after a long search for the rock and speaking to many rocks remembers that previously to bring water he struck a rock and he strikes the rock instead

and Hashem reproves Aharon and Moshe saying "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring the congregation to the Land that I have given them."

How are we to comprehend Moshe and Aharon's error? Was it not totally understandable that Moshe acted based on a lack of clarity regarding the rock as well as in a situation with people who appeared to be rebelling against the spirit of Hashem?

Is it not understood generally that a reference to a well in the Torah is one of waters, of spiritual waters? We recall that Avraham dug wells and Yitzchak re-dug the wells. And now the well of Miriam that was given to the Jewish People by Hashem is taken away – exactly what well are the Jewish People in need of, actual water well or access to an inner, deeper well of connection to Hashem, or both? And does this help us understand why Moshe and Aharon were rebuked by Hashem for not having total clarity and patience despite the challenges?

The Sfas Emes in Flow from the Source comments on Parshas Chukas:

"The paradox of the Parah Aduma opens our eyes to two wonders. The world was founded on the Ten Statements in Parshas Bereshis, which uphold creation to this very day. If the world stands only through Hashem's continual desire to create, how then can any force that opposes His will exist? From youth, man is in the midst of a battle; the yetzer hara entices him to violate the very Force that upholds creation. This is certainly a wonder. ...Yet despite the yetzer hara, the Jewish People have the power to draw spirituality into the world; this too is a wonder! As the Midrash asks 'Who commanded so?' by reflecting on these wonders, one must come to the conclusion that only Hashem could command those two conflicting realities....Hashem's will is engraved into the physical matter of creation that seems to oppose it. By recognizing that everything originates with Hashem's decree we return creation to its Creator. This brings tahor, from the tamei, returning the universe to its pure, spiritual source." (p.271-272)

The Sfas Emes (p. 271) says:

"It seems illogical for purity to be derived from an impure substance. ..The taharah brought by the Parah Aduma is not due to some purifying factor within it, but by connecting to the pure words of the Torah and fulfilling Hashem's decree (The Kotzker Rebbe asks why a woman who gives birth becomes impure –after all, Chazal say that the key that opens the womb is in Hashem's pure hands. The child born from that impure place is also tahor, which would seem to be a paradox. Ohr Gedalyahu answers that the baby's purity shows that it comes from Hashem, and has no real connection to its impure physical source. So too with the Parah; the one who touches the ash becomes impure and the one on whom it is sprinkled becomes pure, showing that the purity comes from Hashem)."

How many of us can fathom ourselves standing in the shoes of Klal Yisrael at that very moment, after all that had happened to them. What blockages are we facing inside of us that make us cry over the loss of Miriam's well? Do we not see how our experience of lack for something as basic as water is causing our neshamas to falter in connecting to Hashem? Yet we have made it through all the previous tests, so we have the concept and have shown ourselves to comprehend Hashem's greatness and our service to Hashem. Hashem instructs Moshe to speak to the rock and water will come forth. What a great visual demonstration of hisbodidus that an individual can do – speak to Hashem about the garments that cover over our pure neshamas and He helps us to clean them and we can reach inward to an inner wellspring inside our neshamas and bring out Hashem's attributes of mercy – loving-kindness, overlooking faults, bearing insults, casting sins into the sea, and giving blessings. Would seeing water come from a rock out of a mere word have brought the Jewish People to a new level of comprehending that this is a spiritual world run by Hashem?

We who are alive today and know Hashem's response to Moshe and Aharon have a huge advantage – we are not suffering from having to be in the moment and considering the matter, experiencing frustration and searching for the designated rock as Moshe was. Instead, we see two important expressions of the simple unity of Hashem and the role that the Jewish People can play. Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it – did he have "dirty garments" from this being the fifth iteration of the Jewish People's spiritual journey in trying to reach a connection to Hashem? Is that the lesson we are to take from Hashem's decision to not allow Moshe to enter the land of Israel? Perhaps.

But we can try to imagine ourselves in the place that the soul of the Jewish People stood, in a desert, without water, with the experiences behind us – experiencing lack – are we or are we not going to, with the power of thought recognition, comprehend how a person is created with a yetzer hara snaking around our subconscious and are we or are we not going to ask Hashem to rescue the strength of our neshamas from attaching to that apparent lack and instead deepen and strengthen our emunah, our connection to Hashem, so that we can clean for ourselves OUR negativity, OUR painful emotions, OUR dirty garments that obscure the pure spiritual well within through which if we can reach down inside we can tap spiritual waters of Hashem's attributes that could then gush into the world – loving-kindness, tolerance, patience, casting sins into the sea- and thereby bring forth from within us the geula shelama?

May we be strengthened to comprehend that within the subconscious of man lies a powerful super-glue attaching the strength of our neshamas to appearances of lack - a glue that by virtue of recognizing its strength and desiring it to bring us to a place of loving Hashem instead of our normal negative places, a glue we can apply free will to by asking Hashem to switch our attraction from negativity TO ahavas Hashem, yiras Hashem and emulating Hashem - thereby seeking an inner place of soul as our real self, cleansing our natural dirty garments into eternal garments of emunah, and may we be zocheh to see the geula shelama in a peaceful and good way very soon!