

Shemini Holiness From Heaven, Holiness From Earth

A. Moshe's Insistent Refusal and its Consequences

On the eight day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Aharon was designated finally as the *kohen gadol*. Why wasn't Moshe chosen for the position of *kohen gadol*? The midrash explains: Rav Shmuel bar Nachman says this goes back to the original encounter of Moshe with Hashem at the burning bush. There, Hashem told Moshe to take the Jewish people out of Egypt. Moshe refused and spent seven days arguing with Hashem. He said he was not fit to be the messenger to redeem Bnei Yisrael. Finally Hashem got angry at Moshe, who then relented after seven days of resistance. Hashem sent Moshe together with Aharon to take the people out of Egypt. The midrash says that since Moshe argued for seven days with Hashem until He forced him to go, Moshe was punished. According to this midrash, Moshe was punished in two ways.

For the first seven days of the Mishkan's inauguration, Moshe functioned as the *kohen gadol*. However, on the eighth day, Hashem told Moshe that he would no longer be *kohen gadol*. Aharon would take this position instead. This was a source of disappointment for Moshe. He thought he would continue to serve as *kohen gadol* together with Aharon. This role was taken away from Moshe as punishment for his seven day long refusal to serve as redeemer from Mitzrayim. So Moshe served as *kohen gadol* for only seven days. After those seven days it was taken away from Moshe forever.

Furthermore, forty years later, Moshe experienced a second great disappointment. Starting on Rosh Chodesh Adar, he prayed for a whole week to gain entry into the Land of Israel. On the seventh day of Adar, Hashem told Moshe, "You will not be able to go into the land of Israel. You will die outside of the land." This, says the midrash, was also a punishment for Moshe for not accepting his mission to redeem the Jews forty years earlier. Here, Moshe *davened* for seven days, and Hashem refused his request. Just as Moshe refused Hashem for seven days, here Hashem refused a request that Moshe expressed for seven days.

Shem Mishmuel explains this midrash on a deeper level. How do these two punishments address Moshe's refusal, in line with the Torah's theory of punishment, *mida kneged mida*? How does the loss of the *kohen gadol* position and the refusal of entry into Israel relate to Moshe's hesitation to take on the role of redeemer of the people from Egypt? Of course we see the superficial seven day connection. However, as we have learned, Chassidus always prefers a deeper thematic explanation.

B. Moshe's Mission

What did Moshe Rabbeinu think originally when he was told by Hashem to redeem the Jews? He thought he was not *worthy* of the job. His first response to Hashem was, "*Shlach na b'Yad tishlach*. Send someone else other than me as the redeemer." What kind of audacious refusal is this? Moshe, even in his first experience as prophet, seemingly still should have been an *eved* Hashem, a faithful and obedient servant of God. Why did he deny God's request?

Moshe denied Hashem's request because he was very humble and thought he was unfit for this mission. He felt unqualified to inspire the people after centuries of slavery. He would need to convince them to

believe in Hashem, and then to develop the courage to stand up to Paro and the taskmasters. This meant he would have to lead a slave revolution. This would be a dangerous mission. He would then have to go Paro and convince him of the rationale to release the slaves. This mission would require someone with amazing qualities of leadership, to inspire the people, and to negotiate with Paro. Moshe felt inadequate. So he said I should not go.

But nonetheless, Hashem chose him. Hashem saw that Moshe had this potential to lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, even if Moshe himself was unaware of it. We understand Moshe's humility. But still, the question persists, why did he refuse a direct command of God?

C. Why Did Moshe Refuse?

Shem Mishmuel explains that Moshe Rabbeinu thought that Hashem was choosing Moshe *davka* because he was inadequate. Moshe thought that the Jews did not deserve a qualified leader. They were at the 49th level of *tuma*. Slavery had taken its toll and the Jews had sunk to horrible lows, including idolatry. Eventually, the time had come for redemption. But Moshe thought, “The Jews do not deserve an actually qualified leader. Why is Hashem choosing me? Only because I am truly inadequate to the task. If God is sending me of course I will succeed. But it will be a long and arduous process. As an unfitting and unqualified leader, I don't want to be the cause of more Jewish suffering that will probably happen along the way. Sure I am inadequate, and that's all the Jewish people deserve. Why should I be the one to do this? Let someone else be chosen.”

This is a pessimistic way of looking at things, but it was realistic. Moshe said to Hashem, “Obviously You have a reasoning for choosing me, but please let me not be the emissary for a painful redemption process. I'd rather not be part of a painful exodus.” This objection displayed the amazing qualities of Moshe. It reflected his humility and his honest self-appraisal. At the same time, it was a statement and a stance that he took in order to help the Jewish people. He wanted them to be redeemed without suffering any more pain.

But Moshe's mistake was that Hashem knew all of this. While he allows people to argue and to pray in general, in this case Moshe should have realized that if Hashem said to go, then Moshe's own logical and noble objections had no place. Even if the exodus would be painful, Hashem's will was for him to go do it, and Moshe should have accepted the difficult charge and painful mission.

D. When Hashem Gives us a Mission

Hashem sometimes sends us against our will to be agents of things that may cause pain along the way. Nevertheless, we must fulfill our mission.

As parents we sometimes need to punish our children. We have to do painful things to our children. It pains us as parents, but do we have a choice? No. Grandparents do have a choice, and none of us has to – or should – discipline other people's children. But as parents, we have to experience the sweet part of raising children as well as the bitter part. If a parent never disciplines his child, the child will surely be damaged. The bitter pill of punishment is part of being responsible, helpful and effective parents. *Chosech shivto soneh bno*. “Not to punish one's child is to hate the child,” said King Shlomo. Sometimes Hashem wants us to be the agent to deliver that bitter pill. We have to do it, no matter how uncomfortable we may feel.

Moshe knew he couldn't do an adequate job. He knew there would be many failures along the way with his inadequate talents. He wasn't a great speaker or negotiator. He wouldn't be able to convince the Jews to believe, or to convince Paro to free the Jews. He should have known though, that once Hashem chooses you, then you are chosen, no matter how unpleasant the mission will be under your leadership.

This was Moshe's unfortunate situation. He was told by the Master of the universe to be His agent to take Jews out of Egypt. But he knew, based on his awareness of his talents, that there would be many failures along the way. He wouldn't be able to inspire the slaves properly. This might bring disillusionment and other disasters to the Jews before redemption came. But since Hashem requested it of him, he should have acceded. He should have said, and so should we, "If Hashem wants me for this mission, I will accept it."

But Moshe argued for seven days. Generally, Hashem lets people disagree with Him, and try to persuade Him to do things differently. Hashem though told Moshe in the beginning that this decision was unchangeable. Once this message comes through, one is not supposed to argue or continue praying. It is God's unchangeable will, and it must be this way absolutely.

E. What Types of Prayer are Appropriate?

I once heard a *dvar torah* from Rav Soloveitchik, my rebbe. We are supposed to pray for Hashem not to do things that upset us. We pray for sick people to become well. We pray for people to have wealth, for Israel to have peace. But if Hashem decides not to answer our prayers and a tragedy happens, we don't pray to complain. We may pray to find out what we should do after the tragedy to fix it. Once a tragedy happens we don't ask "why?" We ask, "what?" "What am I supposed to do now?" What should we do to move forward? At this point we must bow our heads and accept God's will. It is a will that we cannot fathom, but that we must accept as His creatures.

Hashem's inexorable will was for Moshe to be redeemer, no matter how much trouble it would cause the Jewish people. So it was wrong for Moshe to pray to change this inexorable will of Hashem.

If Hashem doesn't say it in such an unalterable way, then man does have a right to question, to pray, and to try to convince God to do things in a different way. Chazal say that a person can pray even when the sword is against one's throat. Sometimes though Hashem's decision is etched in stone. The job of man then is to submit and accept. This was the case with Moshe and his God-given mission to lead the Jews out of Mitzrayim.

F. Moshe's Punishments

What were the punishments of Moshe? He was not allowed to go into Eretz Yisrael even after seven days of beseeching. He was also not allowed to be the *kohen gadol*. How do these punishments fit his sin?

The gemara in Sota (*daf* 14) asks, why did Moshe want to enter into the land of Israel? Was it because he wanted to taste the delicious fruits of the land? That reason is unbecoming of Moshe, it is not his level. Rather, says the gemara, he wanted to fulfill the *mitzvos hatlyuos baaretz*. He wanted to perform

the unique mitzvos that can only be fulfilled in the Land of Israel. Moshe wanted to build the Beis Hamikdash, he wanted to keep the laws of Shmita. He wanted to separate *trumos* and *maasros*, give gifts to a *kohen* and a *levi*, eat *maaser sheni* in Jerusalem, etc. Why did Moshe feel it was so important for him to do those *mitzvos*? We can assume that Moshe did *mitzvos* during all of his waking hours. Who knows how much he ever slept? He went to Har Sinai for forty sleepless days and nights, three times! He didn't ever sleep much. He was doing *mitzvos* all the time, especially the great *mitzva* of learning Torah. Why did he desire to do the *mitzvos* of Eretz Yisrael?

Rav Chaim Vital explain that according to the sages the human body has 248 limbs. Correspondingly, there are 248 positive *mitzvos*, *mitzvos asei*. These *mitzvos* correspond to the 248 limbs of the human body. Additionally, the soul of a Jew also has 248 spiritual parts, corresponding to the 248 parts of the body. When a person does all these *mitzvos* in the proper way, he creates spiritual energy for his body. Moreover, he creates positive spiritual energy for the limbs of his soul. The purpose of *mitzva* performance is to perfect the parts of the soul. Moshe Rabbeinu knew this secret. Without the *mitzvos* of Eretz Yisrael, he knew he would be missing the level of perfection of his soul that those *mitzvos* would endow him with.

Moshe's perfection would obviously be good for the Jewish people. He was their leader. His soul was a universal soul, which included all the Jews within him. His perfection would help the people. The kaballists and midrashim write that if Hashem would have allowed Moshe to enter into Eretz Yisrael, he would have been able to prevent the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash forever. He would have built the Beis Hamikdash and it would have stood for eternity. Without Moshe's entry into the land, it took more than 400 years just to build the Beis Hamikdash. Then it only lasted for another 400 plus years until it was destroyed.

G. The Positive Side of Moshe's Punishments

We lost a great thing once Moshe did not enter the land. Shem Mishmuel explains that this shortcoming though was a hidden blessing. Our sages say that while the Jewish people were in the land for over 800 years, they performed many horrible *aveiros*, like idolatry, murder, and sexual misconduct. God decided that the time had come to punish them and even abandon them. According to the scales in heaven, God could have allowed the nations of the world to destroy the Jewish people, like the Nazis *ymach shmam* decided to try to do. But since there was a Beis Hamikdash, Hashem decided to destroy it instead. Instead of destroying the Jewish people, God punished the Jews in a different way, by pouring out His wrath on the stones and wood of the Beis Hamikdash. Then, even though many Jews were still killed, the people as a whole survived. Had Moshe built the Beis Hamikdash, the building would not have been destroyed, but the people God forbid would have been obliterated. Because the Beis Hamikdash was not built by Moshe, though, it was short lived. The punishment of its destruction replaced the total annihilation of the Jewish people, who had sinned so badly in the land.

Moshe's inability to build the Beis Hamikdash or to go into the Land of Israel, though they seemed like punishments, turned out to be a blessing for Israel. Moreover, they reflect Moshe's original sin. Moshe originally refused the mission of leadership in Egypt because he didn't want to be a cause for the people's punishment. So he insisted, "I am inadequate to serve as leader. I will cause punishments to come to the people." Through his desire to prevent punishments, his sin was that he refused the mission. By not entering the land, Moshe did prevent an extra level of punishment from the Jews. Because he didn't enter the land, the Beis Hamikdash was only temporary. Ironically, the destruction of

the temple saved the Jews from personal and national destruction, which is what Moshe wanted to avoid all along, from the very beginning of his encounter with Hashem.

Moshe's original claim was that the interests of Israel is most important. Therefore, his losing the opportunity to go into the land and the loss of opportunity to perfect himself with those *mitzvos* turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the people. They were able to physically survive the catastrophic destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

H. Why Moshe Couldn't be *Kohen Gadol*

The second unattained request of Moshe was that he be the *kohen gadol*. He served in that position for seven days, but thereafter, Hashem granted Aharon the privilege of serving as *kohen gadol*. Why did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*? And why didn't Hashem allow him this position?

The Ari Hakadosh says that every Jew should ideally go through a *kohen*, *levi*, and *yisrael* lifestyle. The soul needs to perform all of the different *mitzvos*. Some *mitzvos* are only done by a *yisrael*, a *levi*, or a *kohen* respectively. A Jewish soul according to the Ari has to get some life experience as each one. Moshe was a *Levy*, he wanted to be a *kohen* in order to perform the *mitzvos* of a *kohen*. The *kohen gadol* has the most *mitzvos* of any *kohen*, such as the *avoda* of Yom Kippur. Moshe wanted to serve as the *kohen gadol* so that he could perfect his soul on every level. Hashem again turned him down. Why did Hashem turn him down?

I. Moshe – Holiness Too High?

Moshe attained a higher level of holiness than Aharon. Moshe was the mind and the *neshama* of the people. Aharon was the heart. Aharon represents the *ruach* and emotions of the soul. Aharon the *kohen* was a people person, *ohev shalom v'rodef shalom*. He didn't just sit in the Beis Hamikdash, he was running around talking to people, getting involved in personal and social issues. He helped make peace between people, between man and wife. For Moshe, to be *kohen gadol* would have been wonderful for his personal spiritual level. But being so high has a down side. It detaches a Moshe from the people in the street.

Aharon was not as great as Moshe. Because of that he was closer to the people. He could reach out to the people in a more effective way than Moshe could. In a striking paradox, the greatest of all people had a great flaw, that other people cannot relate to him so well. Aharon though, who was not so perfect, could better relate to people and they could relate to him. For Am Yisrael it was better for Aharon to be the *kohen gadol*, and not Moshe. Moshe would have been too spiritually high for them to relate to. The *kohen gadol* is supposed to perform the sacred service, but he also has to be the bridge to bring the people closer to Hashem. Aharon was able to accomplish this, but not Moshe. For the sake of the Jewish people, Hashem decided that Aharon should be the *kohen gadol* and not Moshe.

This was in line with Moshe's sin. Moshe's sin was that he held the Jewish people's interests at the highest level. He didn't want to bring pain and punishment upon them, even if it would be part of a redemption process. He thought his inadequacies would bring the people unnecessary pain. Now one of his precious dreams, to be the *kohen gadol*, was not granted. It was better for Israel that Moshe not be the *kohen gadol*. He had to give up one of his dreams for the betterment of Israel.

J. Shabbos and Yom Tov

Along these lines, Shem Mishmuel explains the different natures of two categories of holy days. Shabbos Kodesh is in a category by itself. The second category of holy days is Yom Tov, which the Torah calls *mikra kodesh*.

What is the difference between these two *kedushos*? The holiness of Shabbos can be compared to the holiness of Moshe. The holiness of Yom Tov can be compared to the *kedusha* of Aharon.

Shabbos is very holy. Hashem himself sanctified the Shabbos day before there were any Jews in the world, on the seventh day of creation. He made it holy so to speak with His own hands. The day of Shabbos is a holy day throughout every level of heaven. Our Shabbos experience in this world is a little touch of the sublime holy Shabbos in the higher worlds. Shabbos has the essence of God's holy presence, the *shechina*.

Yom Tov is a holy day, but not like Shabbos. The holiness of Yom Tov does not come directly from Hashem. It comes from the Jewish people. The closing *bracha* in the Yom Tov blessing in Shemoneh Esrei says *mekadesh yisrael v'hazmanim*. God sanctified Israel and Israel sanctifies the holidays. The holiness of Shabbos comes from above, it is the holiness of God himself coming down through all the different spheres into our world. Yom Tov holiness is *mikra kodesh*, it is “declared holiness.” It is holiness that comes from below – from Israel.

The holiness of Shabbos is much greater than Yom Tov. On Shabbos the restrictions of activity are much greater, both in the number of restrictions, and in the severity of their punishment. This reflects the higher magnitude of holiness of Shabbos.

Ironically, more Jewish people get inspired by a Yom Tov, by Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, and Simchas Torah, than by a Shabbos. This is puzzling. Shabbos has more holiness, more revelation of God. Why are people more inspired by a Pesach *seder* than by a Shabbos? Many more Jews celebrate the *seder* on Pesach, than keep Shabbos or make *kiddush* on Friday night.

Shem Mishmuel explains that the holiness of Shabbos is so high that not so many souls can reach it and appreciate it. A person needs to have a refined and sensitive soul to touch the Shabbos, and for Shabbos to deeply touch him or her. Yom Tov however, comes from the masses of Israel. It is a lower level *kedusha*. More people can thus connect to it. It is more accessible. Shabbos relates to the *moach*, *neshama*, intellect. Not many people have such a refined intellectual presence. But Yom Tov addresses the heart, it speaks to the emotional level of a person.

Many Jews have a Jewish heart. They may not know much Torah, but they still have the feelings of a Jew. Halacha teaches that Shabbos does not have the *mitzva* of *simcha*, joy, but Yom Tov does. Shabbos has *oneg*, it is a sweet experience. But it is not joy. It is higher than joy, it is at the *neshama* level. But Yom Tov is joy. Half of the joy of Yom Tov is *lachem*, “for you,” eating good meals, etc, and the other half is for Hashem. Shabbos though is completely for Hashem.

K. Triplicate Holiness: Moshe, Shabbos, Yerushalayim

Hashem used many different energies in creating the world, including the energies of people, places and time. In addition to the three dimensions of the physical universe, Einstein developed a theory of the 4th dimension, time. Kaballa and *Chassidus* add a fifth dimension, the dimension of the soul. Chassidus teaches that every aspect of holiness that we know of can be found in each of three dimensions: in place, in time, and in people's souls.

Shabbos in time, we know, comes every seventh day. In what place do we find the holiness of Shabbos? Yerushalayim is the place of Shabbos, it is the place of God's throne. The *shechina* in Yerushalayim is never *batel*. God's presence is never destroyed, even if the city looks destroyed. God is still a resident of Jerusalem. The *kedusha* of Yerushalayim is immutable and exalted, it is like the holiness of Shabbos. It is a heavenly, eternal holiness.

Where in the realm of human souls do we encounter the holiness of Shabbos? In Moshe. He had the joy and pleasure of Shabbos. As we say in the Shachris prayer of Shabbos, *yismach Moshe b'matnas chelko*. Moshe rejoices in his portion. It follows then that Moshe is also the soul of the city of Yerushalayim.

Had Moshe actually merited to build Yerushalayim, the city would never have been destroyed. If the soul of Moshe would have joined the city of Moshe and the time of Moshe, the temple would never have been destroyed. It would have been an amazing merger of these highest level energies. But the tragedy was that it never happened. God punished Moshe and did not allow him into Yerushalayim.

L. Triplicate Holiness: Aharon, Yom Tov, Eretz Yisrael

Aharon Hakohen, whose level of soul holiness was lower than Moshe's, is the holiness of Yom Tov. While Shabbos is a day that touches the developed and refined intellect, Yom Tov is a day of the heart, a day of emotions. It is a day of Aharon Hakohen.

The place of Yom Tov is Eretz Yisrael, the whole of the land of Israel. The whole land celebrates Yom Tov with the *mitzva* of *aliya l'regel*. The Jews would bring the produce of Eretz Yisrael to the Beis Hamikdash for *korbanos*, and for *maaser sheni*.

Aharon then is the spirit of the land of Israel, whereas Moshe is the spirit of the holy city of Yerushalayim.

M. To Be Like Moshe and Aharon

This is why Hashem in his infinite wisdom decided that Moshe could not enter Eretz Yisrael. And this is why Aharon would be the *kohen gadol*, and not Moshe. The Jews needed the heart of Aharon, combined with the mind of Moshe. This combination of heart and feeling is integral to the Jewish people.

This idea of the Shem Mishmuel is wonderful. We should try to apply it in our own lives. Sometimes we need to identify with Moshe. We must study Torah, keep Shabbos, identify with Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. Sometimes we need to identify with Aharon Hakohen, the emotions of the Torah. We need to reach out and connect with other Jews.

We must study Torah and teach Torah like Moshe, and we have to act like Aharon, loving and seeking peace. We must keep the *mitzvos bein adam lchaveiro*, keeping people together in service of Hashem.

Our deepest prayer is that as we go from here to Pesach in the next few weeks, may we merit the holiness of Shabbos at its highest level, and the holiness of the Yom Tov, the joy of the heart of Israel as Pesach comes. May we see in our days the great and final redemption with the building of the Beis Hamikdash. May we be reunited with our greatest Torah leaders Moshe and Aharon, when we celebrate the building of the eternal Beis Hamikdash. May we see it soon in our days!

Questions:

1. What two punishments did Moshe receive for resisting Hashem's mission for seven days?
2. How can we explain Moshe's rationale for refusing the mission?
3. How do the punishments fit the sin?
4. What are the different spiritual energies of Shabbos and Yom Tov?
5. What are the different spiritual energies of Moshe and Aharon?

Exercises:

1. Make a daily chart categorizing your activities as being like Moshe or being like Aharon.
2. Are you more like Moshe or like Aharon?