

parties in a quarrel and between man and his wife. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* died, the Torah writes, "And *Bnei Yisrael* wept" (*Devarim* 34:8), implying that it was limited to the men. Are we to think that *Klal Yisrael's* outpouring of grief over the loss of their quintessential *Rebbe* and leader was limited, because he was less of a "people person" than Aharon?

The *Imrei Emes* suggests that Moshe's death was foreshadowed for some time prior to his actual passing. He had told them that his tenure on this earth was soon coming to a close, that he would not be accompanying the nation into the Holy Land. The people were able slowly to come to terms and accept the notion that the man who had taken them out of Egypt was not leading them into *Eretz Yisrael*. It was definitely a hard pill to swallow, but they had time to chew it through, to make it somewhat "palatable."

Aharon, however, took leave of them suddenly. One day he was here, and the next day he was not. They saw Moshe, Aharon and Elazar leaving for the mountain, and on their return they only saw Moshe and Elazar. They knew. While death is an unfortunate, yet inevitable, part of life that touches everyone at one time or another, it is very difficult to come to terms with when it is sudden and unforeseeable. Psychologists write that when there is no time -- or opportunity -- to say goodbye, to have closure in some way, life is forever altered. Upon hearing the report of a sudden passing (especially if it comes under unusual and tragic circumstances), the person is confronted with an array of emotions from numbness and disbelief to incessant weeping. Many remain in denial, while others feel helpless and overwhelmed.

A secular psychologist distinguishes between sudden, unexpected death and anticipated death. In sudden death, we experience an added sense of regret and loneliness when we look at the empty chair and think of all the things we should have said -- and did not. While no one is ever prepared to say goodbye to a loved one, or to anyone close for that matter, the coping mechanism is more difficult when it is sudden. Suddenly the world that was theirs has changed: no more certainty; no more "to be expected" -- all has vanished.

Veritably, the idea of certainty in our life is an illusion of which we convince ourselves, so that we function with greater ease. A Jew should live by the alternative, to live in the present and to accept the Divine gift of life as a constantly renewed opportunity, which can cease at any moment.

In addressing the distinction between the expression of grief for Aharon and that for Moshe, the *Bais Yisrael* explains that Moshe's power as *Klal Yisrael's Rebbe* is to be found in every generation. We certainly no longer have Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and we are very distant from the spiritual plane reached by the *Dor De'ah*, generation of knowledge. Understandably, with each ensuing generation, the people change, and its leadership changes commensurately. Yet, we have the *koach haTorah*, power generated by our Torah study, and our *rebbeim* all have a spark of leadership that comes with their ability to instruct Torah to each ensuing

generation. Moshe is gone, but the power of Torah which he represents did not die. It remains with us in every situation, under every circumstance.

Unfortunately the *middos*, attributes that Aharon exemplified: his power to reach out to people and bring them close; his love of peace and ability to seek and pursue peace -- were his alone. True, many people ascribe to his *middos* and devote themselves with great heart and effort to emulate his deeds -- but there was only one Aharon *HaKohen*. For this loss, everyone wept.

Va'ani Tefillah

אתה חזק אתה – כי גואל חזק אתה – Ki Goeil chazak Atah. For You are a powerful Redeemer.

What role does Hashem's power have in redemption? Since He put us in exile, He can redeem at any time that He sees fit. Why should power be a factor? One way to look at it is that the power is for us. It is difficult to be in exile without hope for redemption. At a given point, a person gives up, so that redemption no longer matter. He is a broken soul. We ask Hashem to infuse us with His power, so that we never despair of redemption. We must always believe that, at any moment, our exile will come to an end. As long as we maintain such faith -- it will happen.

Second, "power" is a reference to redemption which we have not earned. It takes a powerful Ruler to overlook our spiritual ineptitude, our lack of gratitude, our unworthiness -- and still grant us redemption; it takes the power and the love which Hashem has for us. We acknowledge our imperfection and rely on Hashem Who is Perfect.

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"Love and memories are gifts from G-d that death cannot destroy"

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Parashas Chukas

תשע"ז

פרשת חקת

את חקת התורה

This is the statute of the Torah. (19:2)

The *parsha* begins with the words, *chukas haTorah*, statute of the Torah, when, in fact, it is addressing the laws of *Parah Adumah*, Red Cow, which is a *chok*, statute whose rationale defies human logic. In other words, the *parsha* should have begun with the words, "This is the statute of the Red Cow." *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, takes a practical approach towards explaining this, saying that a corollary exists between Torah and *Parah*, in that the anomaly which distinguishes *Parah Adumah* as a *chok* likewise applies to the Torah. The primary *chok* of *Parah Adumah* (exclusive of the entire purifying process, which is a spiritual dynamic) is the fact that, *mitaheres es ha'tameim u'mitamaas es ha'tehorim*. The spiritually contaminated person becomes *tahor*, pure, when the mixture of water and ashes is sprinkled upon him, while the one who prepares the mixture himself becomes *tamei*, impure. Thus, there are two perspectives, vantage points, for viewing the *Parah Adumah*: purifying agent; contaminant. Similarly, concerning Torah knowledge, there are variant ways to view the knowledge one has amassed.

A *yeshivah* student is studying in the *bais hamedrash*. Before him on a table are a number of tomes of *Talmud*, each opened to a specific page. Also on the table are opened volumes of commentary on the *Talmud*, from the *Rishonim*, Early Commentators, to contemporary scholars. Their notes and insights are all before the student as he works his way through a *sugya*, topic. With each commentary, his insight becomes clearer, his understanding of the topic more profound, as he delves deeper, plumbing the depths of the various insights into the *Talmud*.

At that point, a young man who has just recently joined the ranks of the observant, whose erudition is limited to a few verses of *Chumash*, comes over and stares at this scenario. Not really understanding what is taking place before his eyes, and why so many books are open on the table, he takes note of the Hebrew script of the books and exclaims, "Wow! You can read *Rashi*!"

Is this not mind-boggling? Do we have an idea of the inestimable value of Torah knowledge? How fortunate we are to be proficient in reading *Rashi* -- and to be able to understand his commentary. Furthermore, we complete the entire Torah annually, while we all study *Talmud* with its many commentaries, *Shulchan Aruch*, and *Poskim*, etc. Do we ever take into consideration our overwhelming good fortune?

Another example of the Torah's purification process (which we do not even begin to appreciate) is related. *Rav Galinsky's* brother-in-law, *Rav Zalmen Astullin*, emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael* after living for years as a prisoner in the frigid

tundra of Siberia. Suffering physically from lack of food and the subzero temperatures was not as deprecating as the dearth of spirituality. Every *mitzvah* he was able to observe was carried out with the greatest *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, although he had no *minyan* for *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov*, *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*. Finally, he was allowed to emigrate to the Holy Land, broken physically, but spiritually intact. The joy of seeing Jews, observant, performing *mitzvos* in public, was overwhelming.

Rav Galinsky relates a story about taking his brother-in-law to the famous *Lederman Shul* in Bnei Brak. *Rav Galinsky* explained that the early (*Vasikin*) *minyan* was downstairs, with another *minyan* starting upstairs about thirty minutes later. As soon as the first *minyan* concluded their services, another started immediately. The same routine took place upstairs, with this process continuing on through part of the morning. *Rav Astullin* said he would remain in *shul* and take his time *davening*. When a number of hours had passed and he had not yet come home, *Rav Galinsky* began to look for him. The first place he searched was the *Lederman shul*, where he found his brother-in-law running back and forth from one *minyan* to another. Asking him what he was doing, his brother-in-law replied, "Can you imagine how fortunate you are? Every minute you have an opportunity to recite *Amen*, *Yehei Shmei Rabba!* I just could not bring myself to leave. This is a gold mine!"

Do we realize our gold mine -- or are we in too much of a rush to leave early? I have often said that the last *Kaddish* is called *Kaddish Yasom*, the Orphan's *Kaddish*, because no one is present to answer *Amen*!

The flip side of Torah erudition which contaminates the pure (so to speak), is obvious. We satisfy ourselves with learning measured amounts of Torah. In his *Shem Olam*, the *Chafetz Chaim* suggests that the *ben Torah* who thinks that he has achieved much in Torah should stand opposite a bookcase filled with *sefarim*, a *Shas*, a set of *Mishnayos*, and ask himself how many volumes he has completed and in how many of those does he have unsurpassed clarity? That should do the trick. On the one hand, we should never underestimate our knowledge of Torah. On the other hand, however, we should never overestimate our knowledge of Torah either!

והמת שם מרים והקבר שם

Miriam died there and was buried there. (20:1)

Though widely separated chronologically, the passing of *Miriam HaNeviah* is juxtaposed upon the laws of the *Parah Adumah*, Red Cow. This teaches us that, just as the offerings effect atonement for the nation, so does the death of a *tzaddik*, righteous person. This is an important lesson which should have been taught in *parshas ha'korbanos* at the beginning of *Sefer Vayikra*. Why of all the forms of sacrificial

atonement is the *Parah Adumah* singled out to be the standard bearer of atonement and the lesson most closely identified with the death of *tzaddikim*?

The *Panim Yafos* (*Horav Pinchas Horowitz, zl, Rav of Frankfurt* and author of the *Haflaah*) writes that, while *misas tzaddikim*, the death of the righteous, protects as it atones the sins of the wicked, it is not a positive portent for the righteous, decent, upstanding person. For as long as the *tzaddik* is alive, he serves as a protector, a shield for the generation. It is through him that Hashem sends His beneficence. Thus, when a *tzaddik* passes from this world, it is both good (for the *reshaim*) and bad (for the *tzaddikim*). We find that when Eliyahu *HaNavi* left this world, the level of *nevuah*, prophecy, received by the remaining *Neviim* decreased noticeably.

Thus, since *misas tzaddikim* has its (both) positive and negative points, it is a perfect fit for the *Parah Adumah*, which purifies those who are spiritually contaminated while it contaminates those who are pure.

In this context, let us attempt to explain why the death of a *tzaddik* atones. The passing of a *tzaddik* in its own right atones only if his death brings about a spiritual and moral awakening. If life goes on with business as usual, no atonement will occur as a result of the passing of that *tzaddik*. When a great, holy person dies, the survivors are inspired by the life that he has led. Unfortunately, we do not delve enough into the lives of our own leaders – when they are alive and well. When the *tzaddik* is alive, he usually conceals his greatness. No *tzaddik* is on a promotional tour to garner accolades for himself. Thus, it is not uncommon that we discover so much more about the *tzaddik* once the “biography” comes out, after the *tzaddik* has passed away and many of his purposely hidden virtues surface.

Learning about the great and mighty, the holy and erudite, inspires us to emulate them. Furthermore, we learn that their lives were not always beds of roses. They, too, had challenges – which they overcame. They had obstacles in their path – over which they triumphed. One does not have to become the victim of his challenges. On the contrary, his challenges can become the stepping stones upon which he climbs to achieve greatness.

The sinner realizes that he, too, could have been a *tzaddik*. The *tzaddik* confronts challenges similar to those that topple the *rasha*. Life is filled with ups and downs. The *rasha* rides the “ups,” but falters when it comes to the “downs.” The *tzaddik* views the ups and downs as windows of opportunity to determine his values and goals. He then builds upon them.

The *Parah Adumah* rite presents us with a similar scenario. A person who is originally impure has *Parah Adumah* ashes/water sprinkled on him, and he becomes spiritually clean. The individual who has occupied himself with the preparation of the ashes and water and the entire procedure that precedes it becomes ritually defiled. One becomes pure; the other becomes impure. Two individuals can attend the same school – the same class, have the same *rebbe* – one makes it, and the other does not. Why? Many reasons are possible, but the simple answer is attitude. One views life’s roller coaster of ups and downs as insurmountable challenges. The other looks at them as stepping stones of opportunity. Atonement comes when one realizes that it is up to him to change his life. No one will do it for him.

I came across what I believe is a powerful and inspirational quote which is very appropriate to this Torah

thought. At any given moment you have the power to say, “This is not how the story is going to end.” Obviously, everything is ultimately up to Hashem, and this includes the “end of the story,” but the message to be conveyed is: one does not have to become a statistic. We can learn from the lives of those *tzaddikim* who persevered and labored amid poverty and deprivation to achieve their goals. One thing is worse than not making it: not even trying. The failure at life is the individual who refuses to accept the challenge, who allows hardship to sway him from even competing. He truly does not have a chance, because one cannot win unless he actually enters the race.

**עַן לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתָּם בִּי לְהִקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael. (20:12)**

To use the word “sin” with regard to Moshe *Rabbeinu* is misleading and a distortion of our quintessential leader. Even the word “err” is deceiving, since Moshe neither sinned nor erred – on our relative level. On his supreme level of closeness to the Almighty, his action – or inaction – concerning the rock which brought forth water for the nation, is considered erroneous or, possibly, even sinful. This goes with the territory of leadership. So much more is expected of a person when he achieves such spiritual distinction; the exactitude that is demanded of him can be his undoing. Entering into *Eretz Yisrael* together with the people he led out of Egypt became a non-realistic goal. Hashem said “No, because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*.”

The commentators all grapple with the meaning of this *pasuk*. To say Moshe manifested a lack of *emunah*, faith -- or that he refused to provide the nation with opportunity to achieve even greater faith in Hashem -- is a most difficult statement to understand. This is why *Ramban* refers to the “sin” of Moshe as “a great secret of the mysteries of the Torah.”

Rashi takes the most basic view, that Moshe erred in hitting the rock, rather than speaking to it. Regardless of Moshe’s rationale – Hashem had commanded him to speak – he struck. This is a breach. In his *Shemoneh Perakim*, *Rambam* explains that Moshe’s error was in excoriating the people, becoming angry with them. Torah leaders are agents of the Almighty. To lose one’s cool (in the eyes of the people) is a poor representation of Hashem. The other commentators build upon these two thoughts.

The *Chidushei HaRim* offers a novel approach. He focuses upon the word *l’eineihem* (20:8), before their eyes. Hashem instructed Moshe and Aharon to speak to the rock in such a manner as to invoke a vision in the eyes of the people. It was important that they see something rather than merely know it. Obviously, this demands a transcendental sort of vision, since one sees activity and hears sound. To see sound goes beyond the norm – a level of transcendence reached by *Klal Yisrael* when they stood at *Har Sinai* and witnessed the Revelation. At that time, they were able to see what is normally heard. Here, too, Hashem wanted the nation to have unquestionable knowledge of Hashem’s ability to provide people with whatever is needed for them in order to serve Him properly. Since Moshe preempted this opportunity by striking the stone, he achieved providing water, but the perception that Hashem sought for them was unfortunately undermined.

Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m’Berdichev, suggests that the

variant explanations of *Rashi* and *Rambam* are actually one. Two types of *mochichim*, individuals who issue rebuke to people, indicate varied approaches towards conveying their reprimands. One takes a positive approach: exalting the people; reminding them of their illustrious lineage; their ability to come closer to the Divine through *mitzvah* performance, thus giving Hashem great satisfaction. The other *mochiach* employs the “how dare you” approach: settling on the negative effects of sin; our lack of appreciation and gratitude to the Almighty; our puny physical nature etc. One exalts, encourages, uplifts; the other focuses on the “black and white,” the stark truth, our obligation to serve the One Who gives us everything.

Let us now see how these divergent approaches play themselves out in the context of the command to “speak to the rock.” Had Moshe spoken to the people positively, recognizing their amazing potential, lauding their exceptional ability to elevate themselves to the level of the Ministering Angels, it would have been sufficient merely to speak to the rock and water would have flown freely. Since, however, Moshe became impatient with their insolence, saying to them, *Shimu na ha’morim*, “Listen now, o’ rebels,” focusing on their negative attitude, their lack of gratitude and respect, speaking to the stone was no longer an option. It was necessary to strike and force it to issue forth the water.

These two approaches each served our people in their battle against the scourge of *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, which attempted to destroy the spiritual fiber of our people, as it set its sights on reforming traditional Judaism. It began over two centuries ago in Germany and picked up speed in Russia and Eastern Europe. It claimed thousands upon thousands of Jewish lives. Two primary forces arose as a spiritual response to counter the malignancy that was metastasizing through our people. While this should not serve as a history lesson, I find it important to relate some of the background and rationale for the demographic growth of *mussar*, ethical character refinement, movement in Lithuania, and, by extension, the *yeshivah* world, and *Chassidus* in Ukraine, Galicia, southeastern Poland and part of Hungary. These two movements certainly overlapped and, at their onset, there were antagonists to both. They have in many ways, however, come together and have adapted each other’s positive approaches. There is no question that, had they not been on the scene, Orthodoxy would have suffered even greater spiritual casualties, having fallen prey to the secular strains of infamy that has devastated so many of our people.

Each of these groups had diversity from within their movement. Nonetheless, they were unified on a global sense. As much as *mussar* expositors were willing to acknowledge the positive aspects of intellectual pursuits, this was only if it did not in any way hamper religious values. This was quite possibly one of the strongest reasons to oppose the *Haskalah*, which was bent-set on doing away with religion altogether. *Chassidus* would have nothing to do with anything even remotely connected with *Haskalah*.

As explained by *Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl*, himself a student of Slabodka, the *Mussar* movement bespoke the psychological makeup of Lithuanian Jewry, which was engaged in a bitter struggle against materialism and skepticism. Survival was contingent upon a return to its pristine sources. They did not live in the past. They understood where the world was going and the danger to

Torah living that it proposed. They felt, however, that by restoring the focus of the individual Jew to the core principles of man’s relationship with Hashem, by focusing on the improvement of the soul and serious consideration of one’s ethical character, they would develop a stronger, more committed Jew, whose sense of pride lay in his closeness with the Almighty.

Careful introspection and unwavering commitment to the perfection of the mind are primary principles of the *mussar* approach. Thus, intellectual progression is the course to follow. *Chassidus* focuses on the heart, on joy and enthusiasm, on excitement in Jewish service. Hence, it is more preoccupied with the external – singing, dancing, celebrating the excitement of being a *Yid*. In contrast, *mussar* turned inward, toward the soul and the mind.

Horav Avraham Elya Kaplan, zl, who preceded *Rav Weinberg* as Rector/*Rosh Yeshivah* of the Hildeshaimer Seminary in Berlin, was himself also a Slabodka *talmid*, student. A brilliant *Talmudist* and intellect, he was a close disciple of the *Alter* of Slabodka, one of *Horav Yisrael Salanter’s* (founder of the *Mussar* Movement) close students.

He notes that, whereas *Mussar* demands intense, detailed work on one’s *middos*, a process that produces incredible, outstanding personalities, such as the *mussar* greats we have all come to revere and admire, *Chassidus* does not place extreme focus on personality correction. *Chassidus* teaches the importance of the ecstatic, transcendent personality, which gives one joy in living and pride in the opportunity to serve Hashem.

He points out that *mussar* is often satisfied with the Jewish strengths of *Chassidus*: its stalwartness in not submitting to the environment; its heartfelt openness *bein adam l’chaveiro*, between man and his fellowman; its readiness to dedicate itself to a lofty purpose, even to the point of self-sacrifice; its youthful exuberance in *mitzvah* performance – a fervor which extends into old age. In contrast, *mussar* views *Chassidus* as too external, too theoretical and abstract. As much as *Chassidus* certainly delves into the profundities of the greatest Torah problems in relationships of man to G-d and man to man, it hardly focuses on the self of a person, so that he might engage in introspection, to consider where does he stand in relation to his world and in relation to his obligations in this world. *Rav Kaplan* discerns between the *nigun/song/tune* (which is a primary act of *deveikus*/cleaving to Hashem, experienced by the *chasid*) that wells up from the heart and has its source in the soul, and the transient moods not associated with the true essence of the *chasid*.

In sum, these two approaches, although divergent -- with one focusing on positive, joyful expression, and the other placing emphasis upon negating and expunging all materialistic and skeptic tendencies in order to focus on increasing one’s fear of Heaven – both maintained the common goal of bringing the Jew closer to Hashem and increasing his observance of *mitzvos*.

**ויבכו את אהרן שלשים יום כל בית ישראל
And they wept for Aharon thirty days, the entire Bais Yisrael. (20:29)**

Rashi teaches that both the men and the women wept and grieved over the passing of Aharon *Hakohen*. This was because Aharon was the consummate *rodeif shalom*, pursuer of peace. He would instill peace and love between