

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PARAH ADUMAH AND THE GOLDEN MEAN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand On Parshas Chukas

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #467, Detached Limbs and Tumah. Good Shabbos!

The Connection Between The Parah Adumah and the Golden Mean

The Shaloh haKadosh writes that it is impossible to fathom the secrets of Parah Adumah [Red Heifer]. Nevertheless, he says, a person should try to understand whatever lessons he is able to derive from this quintessential 'chok' [non-rational law] of the Torah.

The most perplexing aspect of this procedure is that on the one hand it purifies those who are impure, and, on the other hand, it contaminates those who were previously pure. [Certain methods of handling the mixture result in the Kohen and/or his clothing becoming tameh.] The Shaloh links this paradox of the Parah Adumah to a principle that Maimonides introduces regarding a person's character traits.

The Rambam writes that a person should always try to follow the "Golden Mean" in every human emotion and character trait. In general, extremes are not good. However, the Rambam qualifies this rule by stating that if a person has a particular character defect which causes him to deviate from the "middle road" in one direction, the way to correct this deficiency is to overcompensate in the other direction -- by going to the opposite extreme for some period of time.

For example, if a person is overly miserly, the way to correct that is to go to the other extreme and temporarily be overly generous. If a person is overly frivolous, he should compensate by acting overly serious for a time.

The Shaloh restates this prescription of the Rambam by noting that if a person had been a "tahor" -- namely one who was behaving properly along the middle road -- and then he went to an extreme, such a practice would contaminate him. However, a person who was not behaving properly and had deviated in one direction, may in fact become "purified" by going to the opposite extreme for a time, and thus reestablishing his equilibrium.

The Parah Adumah is an example of something that can be poison to a "healthy" person, but is nevertheless therapeutic to a person who is "ill". The person who is tameh needs the ashes of the Parah Adumah. He is "sick" and this is therapeutic for him. But a person who is healthy who engages in something which is therapeutic for an ill person, may in fact contaminate himself.

This exactly parallels the Rambam's advice regarding character traits: Extremism may be appropriate for someone who is already dysfunctional but extremism is destructive for a healthy normally functioning individual.

Effective Leadership Requires Being Able To Move Out Of The Picture

The parsha contains the "Song of the Well" [Bamidbar 21:17-20]. This song is symmetrical with the "Song of the Sea" in Parshas BeShalach.

Two weeks ago, we read Parshas Shlach, which includes the sending out of the spies. This week we read Parshas Chukas. The common perception is that from the point in the Biblical narration of Parshas Chukas, the sending out of the spies happened "just two weeks ago." In reality, 38 years transpired between the narrations of the two parshiyos. This is something we often fail to recognize. Parshas Chukas is discussing a totally new generation of Jews, since the entire generation (aged 20 - 60) of Jews from Parshas Shlach had already died. The last few Parshiyos of the Torah, from Chukas onward, all occur during the last year of the 40-year sojourn in the wilderness.

The beginning of the sojourn in the wilderness began with a song: "Then sang Moshe and the Children of Israel this song..." [Shemos 15:1]. The song recounts the miracles that happened to them at the beginning of the sojourn. Almost 40 years later, the sojourn in the wilderness is about to end, with another song. The Song of the Well recounts the miracles that happened to the Children of Israel at the end of their 40-year sojourn. We clearly have symmetry between the two songs. They even both begin with the same words: Az Yashir (Then sang). However there is one glaring difference. "Moshe and the Children of Israel" sang the first song. The Song of the Well was only sung by "Israel", not by Moshe.

The Rishonim mention this. They explain that Moshe's name was not mentioned in conjunction with

the Song of the Well because the Well was a "sore spot" for Moshe. The Well was related to his sin at Mei Merivah, for which Moshe was denied entry into Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, it is better for Moshe not to be mentioned in connection with the Well.

The Shemen HaTov provides another reason for the omission of Moshe's name from this song. It was not to protect Moshe Rabbeinu. On the contrary, Moshe's name is omitted as the greatest "silent" testimony to the effectiveness of Moshe as a leader.

The greatest accomplishment that a leader can claim for himself is that he has left his people, and yet they are able to function on their own. A leader who has created a situation that without him, his nation does not know how they will be able to function, has not been totally effective. No one lives forever. There must be some kind of provision for what will be after the leader. The leader must light the candle so that the flame can then rise up and burn on its own.

At the beginning of the sojourn, the Jews were like children who needed to be held by the hand. Without the active participation of Moshe, they were lost. They grew and accomplished during those 40 years. They no longer needed Moshe to lead them in song praising the Almighty. They were spiritually mature enough to sing the song on their own.

In a certain sense, this is not only the job of a leader, this is the job of a parent as well. Truly effective parenting is creating a situation where parents instill in their children the capability to grow on their own. When a parent sees that his child is self-sufficient, that he has absorbed good character traits as his own -- then a parent can see that he has been effective. If even after they have grown up, the parent is still the one who has to remind them and prod them and push them, then to a certain extent the parent has not been fully successful.

The Torah is hinting to Moshe's success, by indicating that the Children of Israel were now capable of singing the Song of the Well, without help.

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