

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Rochel *bas* Ya'akov *a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Hands of Moshe

PARSHAS EIKEV 5775

Of course, we know that Moshe Rabbeinu attained greatness. Concerning his quality of *anivus* (humility), the Torah attests: וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עֲנִי מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה – “And the man, Moshe, was more humble than any man that was on the face of the earth” (*Bamidbar 12:3*). A few *pesukim* later, Hashem declares of Moshe that he is “the most loyal of My entire household” and that he is the only *navi* (prophet) “with whom I speak mouth to mouth” (v. 7,8). And we are familiar with the fact that one of the thirteen principles of faith states that there never was, nor will there ever be, a *navi* equal to Moshe.

Furthermore, the Torah grants him a title that is perhaps one of the most complimentary with which a human being can be bestowed: “*Ish Ha'Elokim* – A man of G-d” (*Devarim 33:1*). Interestingly enough, the *medrash* (*Shochev Tov 90:5*) quantifies this description, asserting that this Divine-like quality of Moshe applied only to the top half of his body. What appears to be a manifestation of this idea plays itself out in this week's *parshah* in a most interesting way.

Endurance

A significant portion of *sefer Devarim*, including this *parshah*, consists of Moshe's admonition to B'nei Yisrael. In the course of delivering this rebuke, Moshe recounts much of their past history, such as in this week's *parshah* when he recalls the episode of the *Cheit Ha'eigel* (Sin of the Golden Calf). In the midst of this narrative, however, he includes certain details that don't seem to fit with the admonishment theme. After relating how the original *luchos* (tablets containing the Ten Commandments) were destroyed on account of this idolatrous sin, Moshe tells of the fact that he was instructed to fashion an *aron* (ark) from wood to house the new set of *luchos*, which he proceeded to do: “And I turned and descended from the mountain, and I placed the *luchos* in the *aron* that I constructed; and there they resided” (*Devarim 10:5*). What place do these seemingly innocuous particulars have in the context of the national admonition?

R' Moshe Feinstein (*Darash Moshe*) explains how this notion is also a fitting part of the rebuke. The fact that the *luchos* were to be placed in an *aron* was itself a byproduct of the *Cheit Ha'eigel* – for that was not the original plan. Thus, by mentioning that this second set of *luchos* was to be hidden from view and housed in an *aron*, Moshe was underscoring the negative ramifications of their actions and the exalted opportunity they had lost.

What had been the original plan? If the first *luchos* were not to be stored in an *aron*, where would they be placed? R' Moshe asserts that, were it not for the sin, *Moshe Rabbeinu himself would have served as the aron*. Earlier in the *parshah*, Moshe Rabbeinu describes his original descent from the mountain bearing the first set of *luchos*: “And the two *Luchos* of the Covenant were upon my two hands” (*ibid. 9:15*). This was their intended destination – i.e., they would constantly be resting on Moshe's hands. This is no small feat, especially considering the fact that the *luchos* weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of half a ton (according to the *Yerushalmi* [*Ta'anis 4:5*], they weighed the equivalent of forty *se'ahs* worth

of water). Unfortunately, due to the *Cheit Ha'eigel*, this arrangement was not to be; instead of remaining constantly in full view, displayed on Moshe's arms, the *luchos* were essentially hidden from view in the confines of an *aron*. But the fact that Moshe would have been able to bear such a load, and was considered to possess significant sanctity to serve as an *aron kodesh*, seems to be a testament to the superhuman, "G-dly" quality of even his physical body (at least the upper half).

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This is actually not the first time Moshe's arms were singled out in connection with some extra-natural phenomenon. Another example took place during the war with Amalek. The Torah records how the outcome of the war seemed to follow the positioning of Moshe's arms. As the *passuk* states: וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וַגְּבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַאֲשֶׁר יִנִּיחַ יָדוֹ וַגְּבַר עֲמָלֵק – “And it was, when Moshe would lift his hand, Yisrael would prevail; and when he would lay down his hand, Amalek would prevail” (*Shemos 17:11*). There is an obvious question that arises with regard to this arrangement. If Yisrael's success in the battle depended on the uplifting of Moshe's hands – then why would he lay them down? Was it simply that he was too tired?

Insight into this issue can be gleaned by examining the well-known teaching of Chazal that addresses the other central point: Was the war really being controlled by Moshe's hands? The Mishnah states (*Rosh Hashanah 3:8*):

וְכִי יָדָיו שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה עוֹשׂוֹת מַלְחָמָה אֹדוֹת מַלְחָמָה אוֹ שׁוֹבְרוֹת מַלְחָמָה. אֲלֵא לומר לָךְ, כֹּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְסֻתְּפִלִים כְּלָפֵי מַעְלָה וּמְשַׁעֲבָדִין אֶת לְבָם לְאַבְיָהֶם שֶׁבַשְׂמִים הָיוּ מִתְגַּבְּרִים. וְאִם לֹא, הָיוּ נוֹפְלִין.

“Could the hands of Moshe really make or break a war? Rather, (the verse) is telling you: As long as Yisrael would gaze Heavenward and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they would prevail. If not, they would falter.”

In his comments on this Mishnah, the Maharsha makes an important and intriguing point. What, to be precise, is the Mishnah telling us? That it wasn't Moshe's hands after all that were controlling the war, but rather Yisrael's purity of heart and subservience to Hashem? So what role, exactly, did Moshe's hands play in the battle?

The Maharsha clarifies the Mishnah's intent. It was not that Moshe's hands determined the outcome of the war, but, to an extent, it was the other way around. The outcome was determined by the directing Heavenward of Yisrael's heart. *And it was this that had a direct effect on Moshe's hands.* The uplifting of Moshe's hands, as one does when beseeching the Almighty, symbolized the directing of their hearts to Him. And when Yisrael would in fact look Heavenward, Moshe's hands would automatically be raised. However, when the subservience of their hearts to Hashem would be interrupted, the force holding up Moshe's hands would fall.

In effect, then, Moshe's hands took on the role of a “weather vane” of sorts. Not that it showed which way the wind was blowing, but it indicated in which direction the hearts of Yisrael were directed.