

Pinchas: Creating the Clouds

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

Moses spoke to the Lord, saying: "Let the Lord, the God of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go forth before them and come before them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep without a shepherd." The Lord said to Moses, "Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, a man of spirit, and you shall lay your hand upon him. And you shall present him before Elazar the kohen and before the entire congregation, and you shall command him in their presence. You shall bestow some of your majesty upon him so that all the congregation of the children of Israel will take heed (Bamidbar 27: 15-20)."

Over the course of the last few Parshios, Moshe had experienced the passing of his sister, Miriam, his brother, Aharon, and had accepted the reality that he would not enter Israel. As a devoted leader, Moshe beseeched God to appoint an able shepherd to lead, care, and love the flock. Moshe would not lead them into the Promised Land, but he did all he could to ensure they would be cared for.

But with the passing of Miriam, Aharon, and ultimately Moshe, the Jewish nation fundamentally changed. An era would come to an end, and a new chapter was to be written. On a purely practical day to day level, it was the merit of these holy individuals which actively sustained the nation.

"Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Yehuda said: The Jewish people had three good leaders(providers); Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. In the merit of these three leaders, three gifts were given to the Jewish people; the well, the cloud, and the manna. The well was in the merit of Miriam, the cloud in the merit of Aharon, and the manna in the merit of Moshe (Taanis 9a)."

Each gift was uniquely related to the individual personality. Miriam was a matriarchal figure for the Jewish people. She showered them with love, concern, and care. Water represents *chesed* (kindness), and therefore, the miraculous well was given to us in her merit. Moshe gave the people spiritual life by bringing down and then teaching the Torah. Just as he gave them spiritual nourishment, in his merit they were physically nourished with heavenly bread. But what is the connection between Aharon and the clouds? Why was it Aharon's merit that brought about this Divine protection?

The great Chassidic master Rav Yisroel of Ruzhin (1796-1850) provides a beautiful insight. In *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers) the great sage Hillel tells us, *"Be of the disciples of Aharon, love peace, pursue peace, love people and bring them closer to Torah."* Aharon's entire life mission was to create bonds of brotherhood and friendship between man and his fellow. He took it upon himself to settle disputes, help with relationship dynamics, and attempt to restore equilibrium to the familial structure. *"Aharon was a pursuer of shalom (peace) and made every attempt to amplify the feelings of shalom throughout the nation. It was through his influence that people came to truly love one another. From the breath (of the kind and loving words they said to one another) that emanated from their mouths, the clouds of Glory were created."* The clouds weren't simply given to us; they were a result of the kind words, compassionate actions, and loving care that we exhibited towards one another. We must exhale to speak. It was the breath created through kind and harmonious speech which created the clouds. This is the meaning of the Gemara. In the merit of Aharon's lifework of creating shalom, love, respect, and harmony, we, the Jewish people, engaged in the type of speech and behavior that created the clouds.

We can create clouds even when we don't travel together as one camp. We can create *Ananei HaKavod*, clouds of glory, through our actions. By going out of our way for one another, performing acts of *chesed* for the other, and refining our interpersonal behavior, we create magnificent, majestic clouds that can shield our people. The Talmud explains that the clouds served three purposes, to protect us from the elements, to protect us from our enemies, and to level mountains and other obstacles which stood in our way. When we blanket ourselves in *shalom*, we are shielded from our enemies. When we blanket ourselves in the performance of *chesed*, we need not worry about the elements. When we are united as a people, no mountain stands in our way.

We lost our beautiful and holy *Bais HaMikdash* (Temple) because of internal strife, hatred, and animosity. During these weeks when we mourn all that we have lost, we must bolster the clouds. Each and every day, we must do something to contribute to building and sustaining *shalom* in *Klal Yisroel*. We must work harder on our relationships. We must strive to do something meaningful for another at least once a day. We must learn how to interact with dignity and respect towards our fellow Jews who may not share our personal beliefs or practices. We must be careful and appropriate regarding how we speak to and about our gentile neighbors of all races and colors. We must make sure that our Shuls are not only holy places of learning and prayer but also bastions of *chesed* and kindness. We must try to avoid infighting and *machlokes*, and when we do clash, we must figure out ways to make *shalom* and restore harmony. We yearn for redemption and salvation, yet we forget that we hasten this process with a kind word to someone whom we may not know; a *"gut Shabbos"* to a visitor in Shul, a phone call to someone who is struggling, or reaching out to someone who may not be socially connected.

We must remember that we need each other because it is only together that we can create the clouds. Let us hope that our words and actions over the coming days and weeks will forge, cement, and bolster our magnificent and eternal *Ananei HaKavod*. May these beautiful clouds shelter and protect us until the coming of *Moshiach*.