



From Dust to Stars

I spoke to you at that time, saying, 'I cannot carry you alone. Hashem your G-d has multiplied you and, behold, you are like the stars of heaven in abundance. May Hashem, the Gd of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times more than you are, and bless you, as He has spoken of you' (Devarim 1:9-11). What a wonderful moment! Moshe Rabbeinu is proclaiming the fulfillment of the blessing that Hashem gave to Avraham Avinu over 400 years ago, as the verse states, "And He took him (Avraham) outside, and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them!' And He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (Bereshis 15:5). What a cause for celebration and rejoicing! However, Moshe Rabbeinu highlights a different aspect of Klal Yisrael's growth in numbers. "How can I myself alone bear your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?" (Devarim 1:12). The nation that was so blessed with numbers was not easy to govern.

The Kesav Sofer points out that this fact was also hinted to in Hashem's brocho to Avraham Avinu, as different verse states, "I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, then your offspring, too, can be counted" (Bereshis 13:16). The Almighty blessed Avraham Avinu at two separate times with two parables – like the stars of the heavens and like the dust of the earth. What is the difference between these two blessings?

The Kesav Sofer answers this question by pointing out the difference between Yaakov Avinu's two names – Yaakov and Yisrael. The root of the word Yaakov is "eikev" – the heel. The heel is the lowest part of the body. Being next to the ground, it is the epitome of humility. Contrast this with the name Yisrael, whose root is two words – "sar" "Kel" – a minister of Hashem. This is one of the loftiest titles that a person can earn – minister of the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He. When do the Jewish people, the children of Yaakov, earn the title of Yisrael – a minister of Hashem? When we lower our pride and conduct ourselves with humbleness, like the "heel" of Yaakov. That humility is our true greatness. It is recognized and held in high esteem. However, when we do the opposite and raise our heads in gaava (arrogance), then we are no higher than the lowly heel, for a haughty person has nothing.

And so it is with the two blessings. The dust of the earth is the lowliest creation. Everything and everyone treads upon it. Contrast this with the stars of the heavens. They are the loftiest objects in the universe, residing in the highest place.

When we conduct ourselves humbly, as the dust of the earth, then we become exalted, as the stars of the heavens. For humility is truly the greatest quality. However, when we inflate our egos and look at ourselves with conceit – "as the stars of the heavens," then we are no higher than the dust of the earth.

How did Moshe Rabbeinu view the middos of Klal Yisrael? As the stars of the heavens. Unfortunately, they had an inflated opinion of themselves. Therefore, he found them difficult to govern. "How can I myself alone bear your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels?" Moshe, in great love for Hashem's chosen people, prayed on their behalf. "May Hashem help you be as humble as the dust of the earth! May your false pride be lowered! Then you will achieve the



greatest spiritual heights. With that humility which breeds patience, cooperation, and unity, I will be able to continue to govern you." What a prayer! What a blessing! The dust of the earth! The stars of the heavens! May the exaltedness of humility be yours!

Kinderlach . . .
The Ramban, in his famous letter to his son, teaches him and all of Klal Yisrael how to be humble. "Accustom yourself to speak gently to all people at all times ... This will protect you from anger ... Once you have distanced yourself from anger, the quality of humility will enter your heart ... Let your words be spoken gently ... Let your head be bowed ... Cast your eyes downward, and your heart heavenward ... When speaking, do not stare at your listener ... Let all men seem greater than you in your eyes ... In all your words, actions, and thoughts – at all times – imagine in your heart that you are stand-

ing in the presence of the Holy One, Blessed is He ... Speak with reverence and awe, like a servant who stands in the presence of his master ... If someone should call you, do not answer with a loud voice, but respond gently – in low tones, as one who stands before his mentor." Kinderlach, conduct yourselves as the dust of the earth, and you will be as great as the stars of the heavens.

The Soft Touch

In the beginning of parashas Devarim, the Torah recounts many of the sins of the Jewish people. Oddly enough, it only mentions the places where he sins occurred, and not the sins themselves. Rashi comments that the sins were not explicitly stated in order to preserve the honor of the Jewish people. Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz zt"l adds that although the sins were well known, they were nonetheless only hinted at. We learn from this to be very careful not to hurt another's feelings even when we are correcting him. We also learn this directly from Hashem. He killed Bilaam's donkey the day after the donkey had spoken to Bilaam. Why? Because the donkey had humiliated Bilaam. Although Bilaam was a wicked person, Hashem was nonetheless careful about his honor.

What happens if we do not act with kavod (respect) and we embarrass the person? The gemora writes (Gittin 57a), "Rebbe Elazar says, 'Come and see how great the power of embarrassment is. Behold, Hashem assisted Bar Kamsa, destroyed His house and burned His sanctuary.'" Bar Kamsa was humiliated in public when he was thrown out of a large festive meal. The great Rabbis of the time were in attendance and they did not protest his disgrace. Bar Kamsa took revenge (and we see that Hashem helped him) by informing to the Romans and thereby causing the destruction of Jerusalem.

Kinderlach . . .
Whenever possible use the soft approach. People can be sensitive, easily embarrassed, easily hurt. Consider their feelings at all times. Say things as nicely as possible. Choose your words carefully. Speak privately whenever possible. Do not raise your voice unless absolutely necessary. Be soft. Everyone will be anxious to hear what you have to say.

Parasha Questions:

- Why was Moshe not able to govern the people alone? (Rashi 1:12)
- How did the people approach Moshe Rabbeinu with their request to send spies into Eretz Yisrael? (Rashi 1:22)
- What did Klal Yisrael do after they realized their mistake with the spies? (1:41-46)