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מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
 רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Chukat Benefitting the Public

Three Gifts in the Merit of Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam

In *Masechet Ta'anit* (9a) our Sages teach us that three good leaders emerged for the Jewish people. They were Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. They continue to teach that there were three good gifts that were given to the Jews in their merit: the well, the Cloud, and the *maan*. The well was in the merit of Miriam, the Cloud in the merit of Aharon, and the *maan* in the merit of Moshe. When Miriam passed away, the well departed as well. However, it eventually returned in the merit of Moshe and Aharon. When Aharon passed away, the Cloud departed. The Sages relate that when the king of Arad heard that Aharon had died and the Clouds of Glory that had previously protected the Jews had now departed, he thought that he could now wage war against the Jews. The Gemara then teaches that both the well and the Cloud returned in the merit of Moshe. However, once Moshe passed away, all three gifts departed from the Jews. This is similarly stated by the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Zacharyia remez* 578). The Midrash adds that in the Future World, all three gifts will be returned to the Jews.

Questions:

1) The *Ktav Sofer* asks that the Sages first state that each gift was in the merit of either Moshe, Aharon, or Miriam. But when Miriam died, the well returned in the merit of Moshe and Aharon. Ultimately, however, all the gifts returned in the merit of Moshe. If so, does it not indicate that all of the gifts were actually in Moshe's merit alone? 2) In the *parasha* (20: 1-3), we learn that upon Miriam's death, the Jews lacked water and complained. Why was the well not immediately returned to them in the merit of Moshe and Aharon?

Introduction to the Topic of Benefitting the Public

We will begin discussing the topic of benefiting the public by quoting the *pasuk* (*Daniel* 12:3), "*Ve'hamaskilim yazhiru ke'zohar harakia, umatzdikei harabim kakochavim le'olam va'ed*, The wise will shine like the radiance of the firmament, and those who benefit the masses will be like stars forever and ever." Our Sages explain (*Bava Batra* 8b) that the *matzdikei harabim* refers to the teachers of small children (a similar teaching is also mentioned in *Masechet Smachot* 3:8). Rashi explains that someone who teaches young children is considered one who benefits the masses, because he teaches them to tread upon the proper path in life.

Three Hundred Fasts to See Rebbi Chiya

Our Sages state in *Kohelet Rabba* (9) that Reish Lakish, and according to others R' Yehoshua ben Levi, desired to see Rebbi Chiya, who had already passed away. Despite his many merits, he was told that he could not see him since he had not taught Torah to the great extent that Rebbi Chiya had. He therefore fasted three hundred fasts and as a result, saw Rebbi Chiya in a dream. We see that to view Rebbi Chiya, who benefitted the public, he was required to fast three hundred fasts. If this was taught regarding Reish Lakish or R' Yehoshua ben Levi, how much more so would it apply in our times? This is how great a merit it is for any individual to benefit the public. We can therefore understand that benefiting the public in any way, whether it be by residing over Torah hearings, teaching children, ensuring that people eat kosher food – all the more so by studying and teaching Torah – one accrues a priceless reward.

One Who Benefits the Public Merits Outstanding Children

The *Chatam Sofer* once remarked dejectedly to a student that because of his heavy involvement with his congregation, he does not have time to oversee his children. The student responded that David HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 37:26), "All the day he is gracious and lends, and his offspring are a blessing." He explained that a money lender gives up his entire day for the sake of benefiting others, and one might therefore wonder what will be the lot of his children. Therefore, the *pasuk* continues by stating that his children will be a blessing. In the merit of his deeds on behalf of the public, even if he does not have time to look after his children, they will turn out fine. This is because Hashem will watch over them to ensure that they are truly blessed offspring. The student's words



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found favor in the eyes of the *Chatam Sofer*, and he repeated them in his name in his *Seudah Shlishit* address. Similarly, the Brisker Rav was asked for advice on how to raise outstanding children. The Rav responded that he did not know how to give advice, but one thing he had seen was that individuals who benefit the public have upstanding children. In a similar vein did the *Yismach Moshe* explain the Mishna, "All those who benefit the public – *ein cheit ba al yado*, he will not sin." He cited various proofs from *pesukim* to prove that the word *cheit*, oft translated as "sin," really means "lack." He therefore explained that anyone who invests a tremendous amount of time helping the *tzibbur*, *ein cheit ba al yado* – he will lack nothing, whether in the spiritual realm or the mundane. I also found this idea stated by the *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Rabba* (9). There it states that the prophet Elakana used to ascend to Yerushalayim four times a year, on the *shalosh regalim* and one other time on his own volition. Elakana would go, accompanied by his wife, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and all of the members of his household. He would take everything with him. The Midrash asks why he travelled in such a fashion, and answers that it was to benefit the Jewish people. When Elakana and his family would encamp in the square of a particular city, men and women would gather separately to speak with them. One man would speak to another and one woman to another. The adults would converse with the adults and the children with the children. Their presence was felt throughout the city, and people asked them where they were going. They responded that they were going to the *Mishkan* in Shilo, for from there emanated Torah and mitzvot. Elakana and his family then asked if they wished to join them. Upon hearing the suggestion, their eyes welled up with tears, and they agreed. The first year, five families joined them. The next year, ten families joined. The following year, the whole city, around sixty families, accompanied them to Yerushalayim. The following year, they travelled along a different road, to amass additional families. By doing so, Elakana placed the Jewish people on the side of merit on the Heavenly scale. He taught them mitzvot, and the masses benefitted because of him. Hashem, Who knows man's true intentions, recognized Elakana's pure motives. He therefore said to him, "Elakana, you placed the Jewish Nation on the side of merit, taught them mitzvot, and the masses benefitted because of you. **I will bring forth from you a son who will also place Israel on the side of merit, teach them mitzvot, and benefit the masses.**" It is clearly stated in the Midrash that due to benefitting the public, Elakana merited Shmuel Hanavi as a son.

Story About the Chafetz Chaim

Towards the end of the great Chafetz Chaim's life, he was requested by R' Chaim Ozer to travel from Radin to Vilna and speak to the community to strengthen them in observing the laws of family purity. Due to his old age and tremendous weakness, the Chafetz Chaim no longer went anywhere. However, this time he decided to go, saying, "If R' Chaim Ozer asks, I must go." His family knew how difficult the journey would be for him and felt that it perhaps would even endanger his health. After all, he would be travelling by horse and wagon, and due to the far distance, his health could be adversely affected. Hoping to dissuade him, they said that they would not assist him in any way. However, the Chafetz Chaim simply replied, "So I will go by myself." He slowly rose from his chair and stepped in the direction of the door. He was so weak however, that he could barely walk on his own. He needed to place both hands on the wall and lean on it, so as not to fall. Exerting great effort, he continued to take step after step. His family was shocked by his fierce conviction to make the journey. Seeing how important it was to him, they conceded and arranged everything he needed for the trip. The Chafetz Chaim travelled to Vilna. He was accompanied by a particular *talmid chacham* who had attended to him for a number of years. He spent the entire Shabbat in Vilna together with the Chafetz Chaim and related that when they arrived, there was great excitement over his visit. R' Chaim Ozer went out to greet him and thanked him for making the enormous effort to travel there. He arranged a place of lodging that was suitable for someone of the Chafetz Chaim's stature. On Friday, notices were hung throughout Vilna that on Shabbat night in the *beit haknesset*, the Chafetz Chaim would address the women, and on Shabbat morning he would address the men. The attendant related that on Shabbat night, the Chafetz Chaim spoke to approximately 6000 women. The next morning as well, he spoke to around 6000 men. It was a moving sight, and as usual, the Chafetz Chaim inspired his listeners and encouraged them to adhere to the laws of family purity. Shabbat afternoon, after the Chafetz Chaim had rested a little, he received a



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portion of the massive crowd that had piled into the courtyard of the house in which he was staying. They all wished to seize the rare opportunity to receive a *bracha* or word of advice from the Chafetz Chaim. Others simply wished to see his face. One of the visitors was an elderly man, who wished to receive a *bracha* and advice over a certain matter. The Chafetz Chaim answered his question, and when he concluded, grabbed the elderly man's hand. For the next several moments, he spoke to him about faith in Hashem. Once the Chafetz Chaim felt that his words had an impact, he finished speaking and blessed him. After the man had left, the Chafetz Chaim's attendant noticed that he was moved and heard him whispering something to himself. He listened closely and heard the Chafetz Cham whisper, "Indeed, it was worthwhile to make the effort to travel from Radin to Vilna and back, just to strengthen one Jew in faith." In other words, the lengthy *drasha* on family purity and the large crowd on hand were still not enough to validate the trip in the eyes of the Chafetz Chaim. For who knows if his words truly had an effect? However, when it was clear to him that he had certainly strengthened at least one Jew in faith, then the Chafetz Chaim said that it was all worthwhile just for that. All the more so, is this merit multiplied tenfold when one strengthens the masses.

Three Gifts Because of Benefitting the Public

Based on the aforementioned question of the *Ktav Sofer*, we can understand the previously mentioned statement of our Sages, The reason that Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam merited that the three gifts should be given to the Jews through them, is because they led the Jewish Nation. In the merit of benefitting the public and bearing the people's burdens, they merited that the Jews would receive the three gifts because of them. This burden was divided up into three parts: Moshe taught the Jews Torah and led them. Aharon loved peace and pursued peace, spreading peace amongst the Jews. Miriam led the woman in the desert. However, after Miriam passed away, the burden was divided amongst Moshe and Aharon. After Aharon passed away, the entire burden fell upon Moshe alone. Therefore, it was not only because of Moshe's previous merits which caused him to be the benefactor of the three gifts. Rather, only after he accepted the burden of the entire nation upon himself, *then* he merited it. However, when Aharon and Miriam were alive, the needs of the people were divided between all of them, and all of their merits were needed so that the Jews could receive the three gifts. But when Moshe and Aharon divided the job between themselves, and then Moshe alone, this enabled them to receive the gifts due to the merit of benefitting the public. This answers the previous questions we asked: It was not possible for the Jews to receive all the gifts in Moshe's merit alone as long as Aharon and Miriam were alive, since at that point, the community burden was shouldered by all of them. Proof to this, is that following Miriam's passing, it was not possible to immediately receive the water in Moshe and Aharon's merits. Only after they had shouldered the burden for a period of time did the water return to them.

Words of Mussar

We have learned a great fundamental in life, namely, that carrying the burden of the congregation only serves to increase man's merits. Generally, man's nature is to seek ways to remove the burden from himself and to place it on others, or at least to flee from it. But if man would realize that the yoke is being placed upon him because Heaven wishes to increase his merits, he would look at things differently. Even Moshe and Aharon only merited that the gifts should be given in their combined merit, due to the merit of helping the Nation and benefitting the masses. How much more so does this apply in our times! Anyone who benefits the masses and accepts the yoke of the congregation upon himself will certainly receive a great reward. Similarly, all those who support the Torah study of the masses or of the *chachamim* who benefit the public, will become partners in a very great merit.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka