

# The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

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## A DONKEY WITH THREE USES

When describing Moshe's return from Midyan to Mitzrayim, the *possuk* says, "Moshe took his wife and sons and mounted them on the donkey."

What was so special about this donkey (as denoted by the wording "the donkey," indicating that it was well-known)? Rashi explains that this was the same donkey that Avraham harnessed when traveling to sacrifice Yitzchak, and it will be upon this very donkey that Moshiach will be revealed, as the *possuk* says, "[Moshiach will be] humble, riding on a donkey."

Interestingly, we find a difference in the way the donkey was used by Avraham, Moshe, and Moshiach. Avraham *harnessed* the donkey (to carry the wood and slaughtering knife), but it doesn't say that he *rode* upon it. With Moshe, on the other hand, the donkey was used for *riding*. By Moshiach, although the *possuk* mentions that he will *ride* upon the donkey, Rashi's wording is that he will be *revealed* upon it.

What is the significance behind these changes?

Additionally, the *sefer* Tzror Hamor quotes from Chazal that from the day the world was created, no one had ever harnessed a donkey until the arrival of Avraham. What is the meaning of this puzzling statement?

### CONNECTING THE CHUMRIYUS

The word *chamor*, donkey, alludes to the *chumriyus* and coarseness of the physical body and the world around us. Although this physicality is initially disconnected from G-dliness, we must not let it hinder our service of Hashem, and furthermore, we must elevate it to *Elokus*. This connection between the world

and *Elokus* is accomplished in three stages, hinted to by the three men who made (and will make) use of this unique donkey.

The first stage was accomplished through Avraham. Great *tzaddikim* lived before Avraham's time as well, but they did not have an effect on the world. As the Midrash says: "Before Avraham the world was proceeding in darkness. Once Avraham arrived, it started to be illuminated." Avraham began the process of drawing down *Elokus* into the world.

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However, despite Avraham's accomplishments, the world and *Elokus* remained two distinct realities. The Divine decree separating the two was only abolished by Mattan Torah, when "those above descended below, and those below ascended above." This was Moshe's achievement, which began when he prepared to travel to Mitzrayim and redeem the Yidden from *golus*, so they would be

able to receive the Torah at Har Sinai.

The third stage will take place with the coming of Moshiach, when the ultimate fusion of the world and *Elokus* will be achieved.

### THE FIRST TO HARNESS

We can now understand the significance of the three distinct methods of using the donkey mentioned above (harnessing, riding, and being revealed).

Avraham didn't actually ride on the donkey; he *harnessed* it so that it should obey its master's commands. This symbolizes Avraham's efforts to keep the *chumriyus* at bay so that it would not hinder his *avodas Hashem*. He was the first individual to be successful in this task; "from the day the world was created, no

one had ever *harnessed a donkey* until the arrival of Avraham." Disregarding the obstacles that threatened to prevent him from heeding Hashem's command, he made his way to sacrifice his only son with alacrity ("Avraham *arose early* in the morning and harnessed his donkey").

In practical *avodah*, this is the idea of "כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים" – All of your actions should be for the sake of Heaven." Instead of viewing the world and *kedushah* as two disconnected realities, his physical actions are done with a holy objective in mind. For example, he is not engaging in business just to become rich; his goal in earning money is to be able to study Torah with peace of mind, to marry off his daughter to a *talmid chacham*, to give *tzedakah*, and so on.

This is the inner meaning of the claim cited in the first Rashi on Chumash: "You are thieves, for you have conquered the lands of the seven nations!" The "gentile" within each one of us argues, "*Kedushah* and worldly matters are two distinct realities that should not be mixed. Imbuing the physical with holiness is an act of thievery!" Avraham's *avodah* consists of silencing these claims so that the "gentile" keeps quiet.

## RIDING HIGHER

When acting *lesheim shamayim*, one has indeed influenced the world by utilizing it for a G-dly objective. However, his actions are (merely) "for the *sake* of Heaven"; there is no *kedushah* in them themselves. To use the above example of a businessman, although he has noble intentions indeed, it is not apparent within the actual business dealings how they differ from those of a non-Jew, *lehavdil*.

There is a higher level—that of Moshe. Moshe didn't merely harness the donkey; he used it for riding. When one rides a

donkey, he is able to travel a farther distance than if he were to go by foot. Not only does the *chumriyus* not get in the way, but through using it *lesheim shamayim*, one can reach a higher level than what he could have accomplished on his own.

However, this still falls short of infusing the physical itself with *kedushah*. The *chumriyus* is helping *him* reach a higher level, just as riding a donkey enables the *person* to reach a farther destination; however, it itself has not become holy.

## CHUMRIYUS EXPOSED

But then there is a higher type of *avodah*, the *avodah* of כלל דרכיך דעהו – "In all of your ways you should know Him." A businessman can see Hashem's intervention in his actual business dealings. He just happened to bump into an acquaintance, who just happened to mention a lead that enabled him to close a profitable deal. Hashem's Hand is evident every step of the way.

This reflects the ultimate perfection of the times of Moshiach, when we will see the depth that lies hidden within the *chumriyus*, that it is created with the *koach* of *Atzmus*. Presently, the greatness hidden within the *gashmiyus* is concealed; however, when Moshiach will come it will be revealed—"Moshiach will be *revealed* upon the donkey."

For further study, see *Lekutei Sichos*, Vol. 31, pp. 19 – 22, and Vol. 1, pp. 71–71

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