

After the death of Aharon's sons... This shall be to you an eternal decree to bring atonement upon Bnei Yisrael. (16:1,34)

The *Yalkut Shemoni* (*Shmuel* 2:155) teaches: "On the first of *Nissan*, the sons of Aharon (*HaKohen*) just died. Why does the Torah record their passing juxtaposed upon the laws of the *Yom Kippur* service? This teaches that just as *Yom Kippur* serves as an atonement, so, too, do the deaths of the righteous (expiate the sinful acts of *Klal Yisrael*). Why is the death of Miriam *HaNeviyah* juxtaposed upon the laws of *Parah Adumah*? This teaches that just as the ashes of *Parah Adumah* purify one from ritual contamination, so, too, does *missas tzaddikim*, the death of *tzaddikim*, atone." What is the relationship between *Parah Adumah* and the death of a *tzaddik*? *Parah Adumah* does not atone; it purifies/cleanses one of *tumah* – not sin. A *tzaddik*'s death atones; it does not purify.

How can one best define a *tzaddik*, righteous person? Certainly, a number of definitions are valid, all of which maintain a commonality. What is the core of his righteousness? In his eulogy for the *Steipler Gaon, zl*, *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, asked: "Imagine if we were asked to eulogize Moshe *Rabbeinu*, our quintessential *Rebbe*: who brought down the Torah; who put up with us for forty-years of traveling in the wilderness; who yearned so much to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, but did not! What would we say? How would we describe the man who was probably the archetypical Jew, who had no peer? The answer is found in the conclusion of the Torah. Hashem coined two words which comprise the definitive, consummate description of Moshe *Rabbeinu*: *eved Hashem*, "servant of Hashem." These two words say it all.

Likewise, when *Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl*, was asked to eulogize his *Rebbe*, the *Chafetz Chaim*, he began (and ended), "And Moshe, the *eved Hashem*, died." One could render no better tribute to the man who altered the way we learn *Halachah* and the way we speak than the words, *eved Hashem*. What is the meaning of *eved*, and how is it uniquely applied to a *tzaddik*? The answer may help us shed light on how a *tzaddik*'s death atones.

Chazal (*Shemos Rabbah* 35:4) relate Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s dialogue with Hashem concerning the future of *Klal Yisrael*. Moshe asked, "They are destined one day not to have a *Mishkan* or *Mikdash* (to serve as collateral for them). Hashem will 'collect' His loan, be appeased to the extent that He does not pursue the borrower [the Jewish people] by taking away the *Mishkan* (*mashkon* – collateral/*Mikdash*) and *Bais Hamikdash*. What will serve as the Jewish people's collateral?" Hashem replied, "I will take from them a righteous person and make him their collateral, and, with this act, I will grant atonement for all of their sins." *Chazal* are teaching us that only Hashem atones. The *tzaddik* is the collateral which He takes because the "borrower" is overwhelmed with "debt." Understandably, the *tzaddik* must not only be free of personal debt; in addition, he must not have any personal obligations. He has no "self." This idea of abnegated selfhood defines *eved Hashem*, servant of Hashem. A servant has no self. Everything that he has belongs to his master,

whom he serves unequivocally. Only one who is totally subservient to Hashem can achieve collateral status and, thus, catalyze the process of atonement. Likewise, the *Parah Adumah*, which never came in contact with anything that had been ritually contaminated, expiates sin. It has no obligations. It belongs to Hashem.

There is a well-known story (I say well-known because it has been changed numerous times) concerning an early *Gerrer chassid* whose business fell on hard times. From the way things were going, in a few months he would be totally bankrupt. He went to visit his *Rebbe*, the saintly *Chiddushei HaRim* (first *Gerrer Rebbe*) to seek his sage advice and petition his blessing. If he did not get help soon he would end up in debtors' prison. It was *Erev Rosh Chodesh*. What better time to approach the *Rebbe*? The *Chiddushei HaRim* listened to his *chassid's* tale of woe and responded, "Tomorrow, during the recitation of *Hallel*, say *Ana Hashem*, 'Please Hashem,' with extra *kavanah*, devotion/concentration."

The next day, the man stood for *Hallel* and concentrated on the words, *Ana Hashem hoshia na*, "Please Hashem, save!" For good measure, he added, *Ana Hashem, hatzlicha na*; "Please Hashem, grant success." The *chassid* was certain that he had recited these phrases with sufficient fervor. Hashem would surely come to his rescue.

A few days passed, and the man's bank account descended to a dangerous low. If something did not happen soon, he would be in serious trouble. He did not understand. He had followed his *Rebbe's* advice to the letter. What could have gone wrong? He would return and ask the *Rebbe*. As he was about to enter the *Rebbe's* home, he encountered the *Rebbe's* grandson, the young Yehudah Aryeh Leib (the future *Sefas Emes*). The *Rebbe* had raised his orphaned grandson who would one day become his successor. He explained his predicament to the young man, "I do not understand. I heeded the *Rebbe's* advice, and nothing happened." The young man replied, "You do not understand. My grandfather did not mean: *Ana Hashem hoshia na* or *hatzlicha na*. My grandfather wanted you to concentrate on *Ana Hashem ki ani avdecha*, "Please Hashem – because I am Your servant!"

The man had the correct *Ana Hashem*, but the wrong request.