

Rabbi Frand answers that Moshe Rabenu nearly gave his life for the *luhot*. He didn't eat or drink for forty days and forty nights while Hashem taught him the Torah. He also had to do battle with the angels in order to receive the Torah.

Human nature would dictate that after investing such superhuman effort into receiving the *luhot*, Moshe would not be so fast to destroy them. Would we have the strength to destroy something for which we had sacrificed so much? Moshe overcame the natural human tendency to want to protect his investment. That strength is indeed a crowning achievement.

Parashat Ekeb is read each year when we approach the month of Elul to prepare for the High Holidays. In order to continue growing throughout our lives, we have to be willing to examine our lives and ask ourselves: Am I compromising on my values? Am I making good choices in my life or am I making excuses for wrong behavior?

Some questions can be extremely tough to ask yourself! "Is the way I act among secular colleagues acceptable for a religious person? Should I continue to work in a place in which my spirituality is being tested on a daily basis? Is running my business requiring access to forms of media that I shouldn't be viewing or reading?"

These are hard questions to ask, because it could mean walking away from something you've invested tremendous to achieve.

But as we prepare for Rosh Hashanah, we have to show Hashem that we have the strength that Moshe Rabenu displayed, so that we, too, can wear the crown of achievement even when there is destruction.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Reuven Semah

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## *The Summary of all Fear*

Moshe presents the Children of Israel with a simple request - fear G-d. Though it may sound simple, we all know that it is not. The problem is that Moshe presents the petition as if it were a simple feat. He says, "What does G-d want of you? Only that you fear G-d your Lord." He makes it sound like the fear of G-d is only a minor matter.

The *Talmud (Berachot)* asks what we all might ask: Is the fear of G-d such a small thing? The *Gemara* relates how Rabbi Chanina said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: The Holy One, blessed be He, has in His treasury nothing except a stockpile of the fear of heaven, as it says, "The fear of G-d is His treasure" (Isaiah 33: 6). Obviously if fear of G-d is so cherished by the Almighty, it must be very difficult to attain.

The *Gemara* answers: True! For it was Moshe who said this verse, and for Moshe fear of G-d was a small thing. But just because it was easy for Moshe, who says it is easy for us?

Rav Yitzchok Zilber, founder of *Toldos Yeshurun*, an organization that re-educates estranged Russian Jews about their heritage, is known as the Father of Russian Jewry. Rav Zilber was born just before the Russian Revolution in 1917, but was discreetly taught Torah by his father and not only completed Shas several times in Russia, but also taught Torah to many others. During World War II, he was imprisoned in Stalin's gulag, yet he managed to keep Shabbat despite the inhumane conditions. He later had to flee from the KGB, which wanted to arrest him for his Torah activities in Russia. In 1972, he emigrated to Israel. As he walked off the airplane on his arrival in Israel, he embraced the custom agent.

"My dear one!" shouted Rabbi Zilber. "It is so wonderful to be here and talk to a Jew like a Jew!" The man offered a polite smile and a pleasant Shalom.

"Please tell me," pleaded Rabbi Zilber with an intensity that seemed to announce a question whose answer would solve all the problems facing Jews for the millennia. "For years I am struggling with this problem. Please tell me, how did you understand the *K'tzot haChoshen* on the subject of *Areiv*?" (The *K'tzot haChoshen* is a classical commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat*, Code of Jewish Law.)

"What is a *K'tzot haChoshen*?" came the reply.

Rav Zilber was puzzled. He tried another query. "Maybe you can explain how you understood the *Mishnah* in (tractate) *Uktzin* in the last chapter."

"*Mishnah? Uktzin? K'tzot?* What are you talking about?"

Rav Zilber, recalling the difficulties he had endured trying to teach and study Torah in Russia, was mortified. In honest shock, he asked the man, "How is this possible? You mean to tell me that you live here in Israel and have the ability to learn Torah. And you don't know what the *K'tzot* is? You never heard of *Mishnah Uktzin*?" Rav Zilber began to cry.

They say that the customs agent was so moved by Rabbi Zilber's simple sincerity, that he began to study Torah.

Perhaps the *Gemara* is telling us the simple truth. It was important for an entire nation to see the man to whom fear of heaven was considered the simplest and most rudimentary aspect of life. To Moshe, fear of Heaven was natural. As a leader, he had the imperative to impress the nation, with his sincerity. To us simple Jews, it is important to see someone whose Jewish observance is as simple and graceful as if it is second nature. To us it may be a struggle, but it is imperative that the benchmark of our goals is someone to whom fear comes natural.

In this country, we say anyone can become president. In Moshe's vision, the one he imparts to his people, anyone can fear Hashem. (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky)

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## *Giant Enemies*

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲתָה עֹבֵר הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבָא לָרֶשֶׁת גּוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְעֲצֻמִּים

מִמֶּנָּה עָרִים גְּדֹלֹת וּבְצֻרֹת בְּשָׁמַיִם" (Debarim 9:1)

"Listen, Israel, today you are crossing the Jordan, to drive out nations greater and more powerful than you, with great cities fortified to the sky.

Why did Hashem place such powerful nations in Israel for us to fight? Wouldn't it have made more sense to have weaker nations, or less fortified cities there so we could defeat them more easily?

The answer can be found by analyzing the *berachah "Boreh Nefashot"* which we recite after drinking something. Here we are thanking Hashem for quenching our thirst, but one may also ask why Hashem didn't simply create us in such a way that we wouldn't even become thirsty in the first place!

The *Hatam Sofer* explains that we can understand from this that even when we lack something, it is for our own benefit. Hashem makes us thirsty, so that we can recognize how much we constantly need Him for sustenance. We will then come to praise Him in the proper way. This is the reason for the wording of the *berachah*, בָּרַכְתָּנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, וְעָלֵינוּ חֲסָדֶיךָ - He created many souls with deficiencies..." which help us recognize Him.

This concept can also be applied to our original question. Hashem was about to bring the Jewish nation into Israel. Rather than lead them into battle against weak nations, he set them up against large and mighty warriors. *B'nei Yisrael* would thereby truly realize when they are victorious that it was not their own doing, but rather it was Hashem's great *hesed* which led them to victory. (*Lekah Tob*)

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