

PARASHAS EMOR

Over the Top

How long would it take for a single person to lift twenty-two thousand full-grown men off the ground one at a time? It is exhausting even to think about such a daunting endeavor. You lift a few. You take a rest. And then you lift some more. One would imagine that it would take weeks or even months to complete the task.

But what if it had to be done in one day? What if a single person was required to begin lifting twenty-two thousand full-grown men off the ground, one by one, at sunrise and to complete the task by sunset? This would entail lifting one man every four seconds, without a moment's respite from morning until night. It seems like an impossible undertaking.

And yet, this is exactly what Aaron the High Priest was required to do at the dedication ceremony of the Levite tribe in a process called *tenufah*. And he did it! It was an incredible feat, and it earned him the honorary title High Priest. According to the Midrash, he was called High Priest, because he was greatest of all the priests in physical strength. No one else among the priests could have managed this astonishing feat, but he did.

But was Aaron's extraordinary feat really proof of his extraordinary physical strength? Is it humanly possible for one person lift twenty-two thousand full-grown men in a single day? Surely, there must have been miraculous intervention. And if so, how do we know that Aaron had great physical strength.

The commentators explain that the key to human strength is focus and concentration. We all have the ability to muster far more strength than we think we possess. The difficult challenge is to harness that strength.

From time to time, we hear news reports about young mothers, slender women without bulging biceps, who lift automobiles to save their trapped husbands or children. Apparently, the normal human body has the innate ability to generate enough energy to lift an automobile, but it takes a crisis such as an automobile accident to bring that energy into focus.

The normal reaction when face with a task requiring extraordinary strength is to say, "I can't. It's too hard." It takes an extreme crisis to spark the will and determination that can bring out all that hidden strength.

For Aaron, God's command was more galvanizing than the greatest personal crisis. When God told him to lift the Levites, He did not say it would be accomplished by a miracle. He told Aaron to lift, and Aaron ran to do it. And as he was lifting the Levites, achieving physical feats that staggered the imagination, God decided to perform a miracle to help him complete the task in one day. A lesser man would have declared, "This is an impossible task" and thrown up his hands in defeat. God would not perform a miracle for such a man.

A famous sage traveled to the premier center of learning to find an outstanding scholar as a husband for his gracious and talented daughter. Many young men, eager for this exceptional match, came forward to meet the sage.

In order to test the suitors, the sage posed an extremely difficult and perplexing question to them. The one who offered a solution would clearly be the outstanding scholar he sought. A day went by. The young men pondered long and hard, but no one could discover the solution.

Disappointed, the sage declared that he was leaving. Apparently, he had would have to continue his search further afield. The young men hung their heads dejectedly and walked away.

As the sage was walking out the door to resume his journey, a young man came running up to him.

"Sir, I need to know the solution," he said breathlessly. "I've been wracking my brains, and I cannot figure out. It would have been nice to marry your daughter, but even if not, I must have the answer to the question. I will not sleep otherwise."

"Ah!" exclaimed the sage. "You are the one I was seeking. You are the perfect husband for my daughter."

"I am?" said the young man. "But I thought you . . ."

"You have the desire, my son," said the sage. "I can help you with the skills."

In our own lives, we sometimes tend to be overwhelmed by daunting tasks. But in actuality, we probably have the strength and ability to complete them successfully. All we are lacking are the will and the determination. If we are focused and try hard enough there is practically no limit to what we can accomplish. And if we come up a little short, God is always there to give us that last little boost to get us over the top.