



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

PEKUDEI / פקודי

FROM 1 – 10, HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOURSELF?

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A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

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ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman who loved and supported Torah learning.



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Recently I was asked if I had heard about a certain famous basketball player, LeBron James. When I inquired as to the reason for his special fame, I was told that one reason was that he was exceptionally tall – almost 7 ft.

This reminded me of a story I'd heard as a child in Cheder. Moses had to kill the giant Og. As the teacher was describing how giant Og was, he then added, "and Moses himself was ten *amos* (15ft) tall!"

My teacher then continued telling us about other unnaturally built biblical people. "Pharaoh," he said, "was only one *amah* tall!"

In my childish mind, I tried to picture the image of the fateful face-off between Moses and Pharaoh – begging "Let my people go..." I could see this giant Moses talking to a midget Pharaoh and I tried to reconcile these facts. Listen, if G-d can split the sea, turn water into blood and to talk to people who can't see Him surely he can create giants.

It was only a few years ago that I discovered what the commentaries explained about Moses' height. When the Talmud says, "How high was Moses; Moses was ten *amos*." it was not implying that he was 15 feet tall. This passage is meant to teach us something deeper. And when we're told that Pharaoh was only one *amah*, this too is not to be taken literally.



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The Rebbe explains that from the scripture it would seem that Moses was of average height. This he proves from three places.

a. Though Moses is a key figure in Torah and is discussed and described endlessly there isn't even a shadow of a hint, anywhere in Torah, that Moses was of extraordinary height.

b. When Jethro's daughters come running home after Moses saved them from the hands the shepherds in Median and they are asked by their father, "How are you home so early?" The girls answer simply, "An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds." Now, if Moses was 15ft tall the girls would have said something to the effect of, "A giant man saved us." This detail is much more conspicuous than being Egyptian.

c. In this week's parsha the Jewish people are trying to erect the walls of the Mishkan but no one is able to lift the beams. Moses turns to G-d and says, "These cannot be lifted by any man!" G-d responds, "You, Moses, you place your hands upon them as if to lift them and they will rise on their own." (-Rashi)

If Moses was in fact 15ft tall and we know that the beams of Mishkan wall were 15ft tall why was a miracle needed to lift the beams? Any man can lift objects that are the same height as them.

What then is the meaning of Moses being 10 *amos*? What is the meaning of Pharaoh's being one *amah*?



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These days everything can be measured on the "1-10 scale". You can ask, "On a scale from 1-10 how was our day?" or "On a scale from 1-10 how was the Rabbi's speech?"

When something was great we give it a 10, when something stinks we give it a sorry 1.

What gave us the idea that 10 is the perfect number?

G-d created the world with the Ten Utterances. Therefore completion in any area will be the number ten. A Minyan is only complete with ten men. The commandments are ten in number. There are ten levels of Jews from the heads and judges of the community until the woodchoppers and water carriers of our people. There are ten days of repentance. Israeli cities have ten levels of holiness, culminating of course with the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Thus, when the Talmud wishes to describe the greatness and holiness of Moses it says, "Moses stood 10 *amos* tall." He had reached the pinnacle of perfection; he was the greatest of men. In stark contrast, Pharaoh the king of Egypt who represents absolute evil, is given only a 1, the lowest mark on our spiritual 1-10 scale.

Jews were never the tallest in the class. You would never put stakes in a Jewish kid becoming a basketball superstar. But physical height is out of our control anyway, so let's not worry about that. Our spiritual height, on the other hand, is



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absolutely in our control. Any of us, in but a moment, can spring up from one *amah* to a perfect ten!