

Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth! (12:3)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was the quintessential leader of our People. He was replete with and exemplified, every positive character trait. Yet, the one *middah*, character trait, with which the Torah defines Moshe is *anavah*, humility. This teaches us the significance of humility as being the one *middah* which towers above all the rest. The **Shlah HaKodesh** states that the word *ha'adam*, person, is an acronym for the three pillars of humility – Avraham *Avinu*, David *HaMelech* and Moshe *Rabbeinu*. *Aleph* – Avraham, *daled* – David; *mem*- Moshe. Three giants of humility, of which Moshe was the greatest.

Moshe's humility is indicated from his remaining silent and not seeking to defend himself against the statement made by his siblings. How do we know that his silence was due to humility? Perhaps, he was simply a refined human being who – either because of his incredible *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven; or his total lack of envy – was able to accept derogatory remarks made about him without responding to his offenders. **Horav Tzvi Shraga Grossbard, zl**, explains that Moshe's response to these comments was no response whatsoever. It is not as if he was offended, and it did not bother him. He was not offended at all! He was so humble that he did not even feel any form of humiliation.

He quotes a similar idea rendered by the **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, in explaining Aharon *HaKohen's* response to the tragic death of his two sons. *Vayidom Aharon*, "And Aharon was silent" (*Vayikra* 10:3). *Vayidom* is commonly translated as silence. The *Chafetz Chaim* explains that Aharon's silence was much more profound. Aharon was totally mute. He did not react whatsoever. It was as if nothing had happened. Aharon was mute. No facial expression. No soft weeping. No moving of his lips. It never took place. So powerful was his deep faith and belief in Hashem. No questions. Total acceptance. It never happened.

Likewise, Moshe was not affected. He did not defend himself because there was nothing to defend. He was so humble that he did not feel that anything happened. This is the meaning of true humility. Not silence. Not laid back. Nothing whatsoever. It never happened.

What was the nature of Moshe's humility? What caused him to be so humble? Was he unaware of his distinctiveness as the Torah's lawgiver, the man who stood up to Pharaoh, who spent forty days in Heaven learning the Torah from Hashem before bringing it down to *Am Yisrael*? Does humility mean unawareness? *Bina L'Itim* explains that Moshe was acutely aware of who he was and what he had achieved. He felt, however, that every person was greater and more worthy than he was. Thus, he showed deference to everyone.

Humility refers to someone's personal assessment of himself. He may be aware of the esteem in which others hold him, but he himself feels – no, knows – that he has not yet achieved his potential.

So whatever he has done is nothing in comparison to what he is capable of doing.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, quotes from the *Chafetz Chaim* who asked why the wealthy arrogate about their material bounty. Their money is not readily available. They are not necessarily liquid. True, their assets and holdings are worth an incredible fortune, but most of it is not accessible. The banker, however, has oodles of money, conveniently securable in his possession at all times. Why does this accessible wealth not go to the banker's head? The answer is obvious: It does not belong to him. It is deposited in his bank and must be made available to the depositor whenever he so desires.

The *Chafetz Chaim* continues. Why should the man blessed with wealth feel any different than the banker? Hashem has deposited His money with him – not because of his wisdom or acumen, not because of his strength or charisma – only for one purpose: to perform the will of G-d. When Hashem indicates that it is time to give some of it up, he must do so immediately, without question. Wealth begets responsibility; responsibility engenders humility.

There is a well-known story concerning the founder of the *mussar*, ethical, character refinement, movement, **Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl**, which demonstrates the meaning of humility. *Rav* Yisrael was a brilliant Torah scholar who had achieved mastery in all areas of Torah erudition. He devoted his life to an area of spiritual development that, at the time, was greatly deficient. He focused on *yiraas Shomayim*, increasing one's fear of Heaven and his ethical character refinement. He felt, and rightfully so, that with increased fear, Torah knowledge would also be elevated. The medium for this development was through the study of *mussar*, ethical discourse. When people focus on their character traits and attempt to repair their shortcomings, they acquire the skills for greater devotion, diligence and perseverance in Torah study.

Rav Yisrael devoted his life towards teaching the masses this new approach to growth and development. Essentially, it was a new way of life, an entirely different approach in Torah study. *Mussar* had its dissenters and *Rav* Yisrael had his critics, but he overcame the challenges and moved on. He was unwavering and tenacious, accomplishing alone what would have normally required an army. He once commented, "I am fully aware that I have the brilliance and talents of one thousand *gaonim*, eminent scholars. Because of this, however, I must achieve what it would take one thousand *gaonim* to accomplish. I have no idea if I am capable of this." He threw his entire life into spreading the teachings of *mussar*. He had no material means to speak of; he was too occupied with his and everybody's spiritual dimension.

His wife once purchased a lottery ticket and asked him to pray in her behalf that she win the prize. *Rav* Yisrael asked her, "What is it that you want to win?" "I would like to win the grand prize of 10,000 rubles," she replied. He said, "No problem. First, I need two witnesses to attest that I relinquish all rights to any part of your winnings. If you purchase a new home with the prize money, I will not be able to enter it. If you buy food with the winnings, I will not be able to eat from it." The *rebbetzin* understandably asked, "Why?"

Rav Yisrael explained. “You should be aware that Heaven does not dole out gifts. For every quality that a person receives, he must produce commensurate with his newly-acquired ability. Hashem blessed me with exceptional *kishronos*, talents. I must, therefore, work very hard to be deserving of them. This is why I work feverishly to excel, to achieve, to reach out to as many people as possible. I have an enormous responsibility because of my outstanding gift.

“Now you want me to win 10,000 rubles. For what? Do you realize what all of this material wealth will oblige me to do? Why do I need so much money? A person can eat only so much. Even after he stuffs himself, he will have so much money left over of which he will have no idea what to do with it. Imagine that he decides to become a philanthropist to support the many poverty stricken Jews in Kovno. What happens if he misses one poor man, who, as a result, dies of hunger? He is punished! What if a poor man has no money to go to the doctor – and he dies? The philanthropist is culpable! What about the young boy who cannot afford to go to *cheder* – and, as a result, strays from the correct path of serving Hashem? Who is guilty – the philanthropist! Do I need more headaches? If you want the money, it is yours, but I don’t want any part of it. I cannot undertake another obligation.”

A humble person is acutely aware of his qualities and also of his concomitant obligations resulting from it. The responsibility is overwhelming. He is humbled by the enormity of what he must accomplish. This awareness provides sufficient reason for being humble.