

Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble. (12:3)

Humility is built upon a person's assessment of himself. It has nothing to do with his being able to speak up or take a stand on behalf of what is right. A humble person is well aware of his personal ability and successes in life. He just feels that he could have done so much more. As far as his ability is concerned, he considers himself lacking in achievement. With his G-d-given talents, he should have been that much greater. As a result of this self-assessment, one carries himself in a manner incongruous with that of a person who is as distinguished as he is.

This is perhaps a characterization of the saintly *Chofetz Chaim*. An individual who achieved distinction and reverence far beyond his personal opinion of himself, he still – until this very day – is considered the paradigm of humility. We live in a time when donning rabbinic garb has become cheap, and demanding undeserved honor has become a way of life for some. The *Chafetz Chaim* never felt himself different than the average Jew. Thus, he dressed in a regular Polish *hittel*, or *kashketal*, bent-down brimmed hat; he did not wear a frock which was the recognized garb for rabbinic leadership. This in no way demeans those who did wear rabbinic garb. Most were deserving of the title and, thus, wore what one would refer to as the “uniform” of rabbinic leadership. It was important for the average Jew to make note of the distinction between himself and the *Rav* – even if the only obvious signs were the differences in mode of dress.

When *rabbanim* would issue approbations for the *Chafetz Chaim's seforim*, he insisted that plaudits about the author be omitted. However, he did ask them to emphasize the significance of the *sefer* and its intrinsic value for the community. As much as possible, he insisted on minimizing his image. While many refer to themselves as *Ani ha'katan*, “I, the small one,” as reference to their diminutive level of scholarship and G-d-fearing nature, the *Chafetz Chaim* meant it. He believed that he was unworthy of both the public and private accolades that were accorded to him. In the preface to his *Likutei Halachos*, a compendium of laws on *Kodoshim*, Sacrificial service, etc. the *Chafetz Chaim* writes: “I, the low, poor one in Torah erudition and the performance of good deeds, do not know Torah; I really know neither one *halachah* properly, nor (perform) one *mitzvah* in its entirety. I am null and void in comparison to the *Rishonim*. I am not more than a diminutive *shamash*, sexton, in a *bais ha'medrash*, who carries over the *sefarim* of the *Rif*, *Rambam* and other *Rishonim* for others to study from them.” (The *Chafetz Chaim* apparently considered his compendium as nothing more than a collection of authors which he has cited – something he feels that even the simplest Jew could have done. This is, of course, not correct, since this work is an indication of the author's encyclopedic knowledge and depth of understanding of the *halachos* and their sources in the *Rishonim*.) The above gives us a small window into the *Chafetz Chaim's* extreme humility. It is perhaps for this reason alone that his *seforim* have been accepted the world over as setting the standard for excellence in *halachic* and ethical opinion.

Otzros HaTorah quotes an episode that took place in 1915 between *Horav Shimon Rosovsky, zl*, *Rav* of Aishishuk and the *Chafetz Chaim*. The venerable sage had decided to leave Europe for *Eretz Yisrael*. He was getting on in years, and he wanted to spend his twilight years in the Holy

Land. To this end, he traveled to Aishishuk where he had studied for quite some time, to take leave of its residents, individuals who had befriended him earlier in his life.

When news of the visit of the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader, to the community became public, the whole town awaited excitedly for his arrival. On the auspicious day, the entire Jewish community came to greet the sage. Before the *Chafetz Chaim* alighted from the coach, he requested that *Rav Shimon* enter alone. When the *Rav* entered the coach, he discovered the *Chafetz Chaim* bent over, crying bitterly.

"*Rebbe*, why are you crying?" *Rav Shimon* asked. "I cry because of the undeserved *kavod*, honor that is being accorded to me." The *Chafetz Chaim* then quoted a *Yerushalmi*, that posits if a person is granted honor on account of two *mesechtos*, Tractates, of *Talmud* which he has mastered, but, in truth, he has only mastered one of them, he must reveal the truth – that he is unworthy of the distinction. "What should I say?" asked the *Chafetz Chaim*.

It goes without saying that the *Rav* made every attempt to assuage the feelings of the *Chafetz Chaim*, but to no avail. The sage kept on repeating that he was undeserving of all the laurels. *Rav Shimon* was determined to give it his "last shot." He said, "When we *bentch Rosh Chodesh*, bless the New Month, on the *Shabbos* prior to *Rosh Chodesh*, we supplicate Hashem to give us life... a life of wealth and honor. Why is this? One would think that honor is not something that is beneficial for a person. It catalyzes haughtiness – so why ask for it? The answer is that immediately following this ambiguous request we ask Hashem for a life in which we have *ahavas Torah* and *yiraas Shomayim*, love of Torah and fear of Heaven. The juxtaposition of these two requests is to emphasize that when people take note of the reverence accorded to Torah scholars, it will cause an increase in their personal love of Torah and fear of Heaven. Thus, *chaim shel kavod*, a life filled with honor, is motivation for others to respect and love Torah and create an increase in *yiraas Shomayim*.

"Therefore, I am asking our revered *Rebbe* to act joyfully and not weep, because the *kavod* that is generated by his presence will elevate the love of Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*."

When the *Chafetz Chaim* heard this explanation of the passage in the prayer, he ceased his weeping and went out to greet the people – with a smile on his face.