

Moshe would speak, and G-d would respond to him with a voice. (19:19)

The *pasuk* refers to the Giving of the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments. The people heard the first two *Dibros* from Hashem. The next eight were transmitted by Hashem to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who would then repeat them to *Klal Yisrael*. Millions of people were gathered there. How could Moshe's voice possibly extend to everyone? How could such a multitude hear his voice? *Rashi* explains that Moshe spoke and, in order to make it possible for his voice to be heard, Hashem responded by granting him a (loud) voice. Hashem magnified Moshe's voice.

The *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Shmuel* 162) asks: We are taught that *Shechinah medaberes mitoch gerono shel Moshe*, "The Divine Presence spoke from the throat of Moshe." In other words, Moshe opened his mouth and Hashem's "Voice" emanated from within Moshe. How are we to understand this? A student is always secondary to his *rebbe*. According the *pasuk*, it was Moshe who initiated Hashem's response, thereby making Moshe the "lead" (so to speak) and Hashem "second" to him. Moshe *yedaber* – Moshe would speak – *v'haElokim yaanenu b'kol*, "And G-d would respond with a voice."

Veritably (as explained by *Horav Yaakov Meir Shechter, Shlita*, who explains the *Yalkut Shimoni*), Hashem's voice emanated from Moshe, thus allowing for "Moshe's voice" to be heard at a distance (*mehalech arbaim yom*, forty-day travel); why does the Torah state that Moshe spoke (and Hashem responded)? It should be the other way around, with Hashem speaking and Moshe responding! We must explain (the *Yalkut*, as explained by *Rav Shechter*) that it was due to Moshe's unusual humility. When Moshe acted towards Hashem with total humility, it catalyzed a Heavenly response, whereby Hashem acts toward him with humility. Thus, it appears as if Moshe was speaking (his humility initiating Hashem's humility) and Hashem was responding.

The *middah*, attribute, which one manifests toward Hashem effects a reciprocal response. Hashem acts towards us as we act toward Him. We initiate the response. On a deeper (and more clarified) note, *Rav Shechter* explains the following: When Hashem spoke to Moshe at the Burning Bush, He revealed His Holy Name as *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*; "I will be as I will be". According to the *Midrash* (*Rabbeinu Bachya Bereishis* 2:4), Hashem was telling Moshe, "Just as you will be with Me, I will be with you". In other words, the way we relate to Hashem, He will relate to us. The *middah* that we use in our relationship with Hashem is the same *middah* with which Hashem deals with us. To the degree, that we struggle to overcome the challenges and obstacles set before us by the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, that is the extent to which Hashem shines His light upon us. In other words, success or failure is really determined by us.

Rav Shechter quotes from the *Kedushas Levi* and *Toldos Yaakov Yosef* who relate in the name of the *Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh, zl*, that man is compared to a ladder standing on earth with its head reaching up to the Heavens. This is what *Yaakov Avinu* saw in his dream. A human being joins

Heaven with earth. Even when a person stands on earth, his head can soar and reach into the Heavens; thus, his words and actions can have efficacy in all of the worlds.

This, explains the holy *Baal Shem Tov*, is alluded to by David *Hamelech* when he says, *Hashem tzilcha*, “Hashem is your shadow” (*Tehillim* 121:5). Just as a shadow mimics a person’s movements precisely, so, too, the way Hashem treats us is a reflection of our own behavior. Everything is a response to our actions and attitude. When we treat a family member or friend in a certain manner – be it with anger, negativity or criticism, – or conversely – with patience, kindness, a smile – we create a pattern which Hashem employs when dealing with us! Thus, when we treat our opponents with love (as difficult as it might be), when we show compassion (regardless of their infraction), Hashem treats us accordingly.

Now, we turn to try to understand Moshe *Rabbeinu*’s humility and how it brought Hashem “down” to him, so that Hashem was able to speak through Moshe. The Torah teaches that Hashem spoke with Moshe *Panim el Panim*, “Face-to-face” (*Shemos* 33:11). The *Baal Shem Tov* explains this with an analogy to a pool of water. When a person faces a pool of water and stares at his reflection in the water, his distance from the water determines how much and exactly what he sees. When he stands upright, he sees his reflection, but it appears somewhat distant. As he bends down closer to the water, his image moves closer. When he lowers himself all the way to the water, his reflection literally becomes “face-to-face.”

Hashem is elevated so far beyond our imagination that the human intellect can neither fathom anything concerning Him through the power of our own minds. He is simply incomprehensible. Nonetheless, Hashem, Who has boundless love for His children-- a love that we can neither understand nor explain, for it is beyond the realm of human understanding -- and because we were His first thought when creating the world -- grants us the possibility of seeking Him out and knowing something of His ways. In other words, whatever we know or perceive of Hashem is what He allows us to perceive. How does this transference take place? Hashem lowers Himself (sort of makes Himself accessible) to a level that is within the parameters of our understanding. Therefore, when we act with humility, when we humble ourselves, we awaken Hashem’s own “humility,” and so He descends from His true greatness to meet us at our level. Moshe was the *anav mikol adam asher al pnei ha’admah*, humblest man on earth. Therefore, Hashem responded (to Moshe’s humility) by “humbling” Himself, and He spoke to Moshe, “face- to- face,” just as a person speaks with his good friend.

Thus, it is precisely by conducting ourselves with humility that we are able to bring Hashem into our lives. In order to achieve true closeness to Hashem, true spiritual greatness, one must accompany his quest with true humility. While none of us can even hope to achieve Moshe’s level of humility, we can bring Hashem closer by virtue of our attempt to become more humble.

Humility means not to think only of oneself, but to recognize that there are also other external to himself. One does not have to put himself down, but certainly not raise himself up. Know who you

are and be cognizant of your abilities. Do not flaunt them, but, if needed, do not shy away from doing what must be done. A humble person does not need the opinion of others to bolster him. As long as he is doing the right thing, he is satisfied. Objectivity and humility go hand in hand. *Horav Simchah Bunim, zl, m'Peshicha*, would carry two slips of paper, one in his right pocket and one in his left pocket. On one piece of paper was written, "The entire world was created just for me" (*Sanhedrin* 38a). On the other paper was written, "I am but dust and ashes" (*Bereishis* 18:27). In this way, he never lost sight of the times when one must take a leadership role and the times when he must hold back and remain in the background; it is not always about "me." The truly great leader never views himself as great. He is simply performing a function for which he has the talent and ability. He has been granted a gift (or he worked hard to earn it), and now he is doing what is asked of him.

The *Imrei Chaim, zl, (Vishnitz)* related that the *Baal Shem Tov Hakodesh* heard that a certain priest exemplified the virtue of humility. He had difficulty believing this, so he made the effort to meet with him. After spending some time in conversation with the priest, the *Baal Shem* left, only to have the priest run after him and ask, "What do you think of my humility?" When the *Baal Shem* heard this he was satisfied that while the man acted humbly, it was the greatest manifestation of his arrogance.

A truly humble person: goes where he is needed, is not oriented only to himself; believes in filling a role, not in forging for himself a new position. This idea is underscored by the *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, in his commentary to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* appointing leaders for the various segments of the nation. Yisro suggested that Moshe select leaders who had the following qualities: "Men of accomplishment; G-d-fearing; men of truth; people who despise money." They, in turn, would be appointed as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens (*Ibid* 18:21,22). The *Kotzker* wonders how men of such distinction, men of such outstanding virtue and achievement, would accept varied positions. Would not each one want to be a leader over thousands? (Imagine, offering a teaching position that does not require outstanding skills to someone who wants to be a *rosh yeshivah* – or a factory position to one who is capable of being the company's CEO).

The *Kotzker* explains that one of the required qualities for leadership was *anshei emes*, men of truth. An individual who is concerned with -- and adheres to -- the truth does not care about *kavod*, honor. An honest person does not concern himself with ego. He cares about the truth, and ego is false. Thus, if an individual, regardless of his spiritual status, was asked by Moshe to lead a group of ten, he accepted it gladly, because he understood that this is where he was needed. The position does not define the individual; the individual defines the position!

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was more than the *Rav* of the *Old Yishuv* in Yerushalayim; he was a world leader, a recognized and respected sage. Yet, on *Simchas Torah*, he would dance with the children. He would grab them by their little hands while dancing and swirl them around the *Sifrei Torah*, to the accompaniment of the rhythmic clapping and singing of Yerushalayim's elders. *Rav Yosef Chaim* was neither young nor healthy. Despite suffering from various infirmities

endemic with old age, he would gather all the children of Battei Machseh (a religious development) and dance the *hakafos* with them on and on. Children were his life; he offered awards and rewards to those whose achievements warranted it. He did this in order to imbue them with the sweetness of Torah. He did not have to do it. He wanted to. He could have easily deferred this endeavor to others who were younger and did not hold such a distinguished position. He defied his position!