

So now – please come and curse this people for me. (22:6)

Humility is much more than a positive character trait. It is a characteristic which is absolutely vital to one's success in life. It is an indicator of adherence to the truth. One who is arrogant is simply not a truthful person. Indeed, life is one long lesson in humility, without which life would be a sham, with the greatest fool being the one who lords himself over others. At the end of the day, he knows that he is only fooling himself.

Having said this, we turn to the *Haftorah* in *Parashas Balak*, which recalls Balak's attempt to curse the Jews and cause them to sin with the Midyanite women. To catalyze his nefarious plans, he attempted to hire the evil pagan prophet, Bilaam, a man whose jaundiced "eye" – which looked for the negative in everyone and everything – was the result of, and superseded by, his voracious quest for honor. His arrogance was a lesson in how much and how far one who lacks humility can delude himself.

The *Navi Michah* (6:6) says: *Ba'meh akadem Hashem*, "With what shall I approach Hashem?" This *pasuk* serves as a basis for a thesis on humility rendered by **Horav Avraham Pam, zl**, and redacted by Rabbi Sholom Smith in his collection of Torah thoughts from the venerable *Rosh Yeshivah*. The *Talmud Chullin* 89 compares the humility manifest by Avraham *Avinu* to that expressed by Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*. Avraham refers to himself as *V'anochi afar va'eifer*, "I am but dust and ashes" (*Bereishis* 18:27). Moshe and Aharon indicated an even greater sense of humility when they said, *V'nachnu mah*, "For what are we?" (*Shemos* 16:8). Avraham viewed himself as dust and ashes which, after all, is a substance, an entity. Moshe and Aharon viewed themselves as nothing – no substance – no entity – nothing at all.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains the concept of *v'nachnu mah*, we are nothing. In *Sefer Iyov* (41:3), the *pasuk* states: *Mi hikdimani vaAshaleim*, "Who can precede Me, that I will reward him?" The **Yalkut Shimoni** explains this *pasuk* practically. Everything that man does, regardless of its difficulty or ease, is facilitated by Hashem. Man cannot do anything on his own. This applies equally to *mitzvah* performance. A man performs a *mitzvah*, for which he anticipates a reward. Does it ever enter his mind that it was Hashem Who gave him the opportunity and ability to execute this *mitzvah*? An individual is blessed with a son, for whom he performs the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*. Indeed, this is a *mitzvah* for which one should receive reward. Does the father, however, realize that it was Hashem Who blessed him with fatherhood? This idea applies to all *mitzvos*. *Tzitzis* and *Tefillin* are *mitzvos* we perform daily. Likewise, a *Mezuzah* placed on the doorpost of our house is a *mitzvah* that, once it is in place, is fulfilled regularly. How did he obtain the *Tefillin*? The *Tzitzis*? How did he earn the money to purchase a house? Without Hashem enabling us, we simply cannot perform the *mitzvos*. Thus, *Iyov* says, Who can precede Hashem? Whatever we have, whatever we do, is all empowered and enabled by Hashem. He precedes us!

This is a wonderful and pragmatic understanding of *mitzvah* observance and the correct attitude we should have maintained toward our "expectance" of reward. Whatever we receive is beyond the

scope of what we deserve, since, without Hashem, we could not have performed the *mitzvah*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites the *Chida* in his *Nachal Sorek* commentary to the *Haftorah* of *Parashas Balak*, who observes that, indeed, it is possible to apply the power of “*mah*,” “what,” as in *ba’mah*, “with what I will precede Hashem.” We note that Moshe and Aharon embodied the character trait of humility, as indicated by their reference to themselves as, *V’nachnu mah*, “We are nothing.” The *Chida* explains this in the following manner: It is true that the house upon which one places his *Mezuzah* is given to him by Hashem. Let us say (for argument’s sake) that a person says, “I can live without a home. I can sleep in a tent, on the hard ground, on a bench in a *shul*. I require a house for one purpose: to have a domicile on which I can place a *Mezuzah*. Otherwise, I need nothing! Thus, the power of *mah*, “nothing,” actually enables a person to precede Hashem. Such a person, who lives only for *mitzvah* performance, deserves his due reward.

Moshe and Aharon were like that. They had achieved the pinnacle of spiritual service, feeling a sense of nothingness. They asked nothing of Hashem for their personal needs. They lived only to serve Him. Anything that they acquired was used for one purpose: to serve Hashem. Otherwise, they had no use for it.

Rav Pam comments that while this level is a bit extreme – and a difficult one for most people to achieve – one can (and should), however, aspire to attain it. For example: who does not have “some” desire to have money, to somehow become liberated from financial worry. All this is not unusual, and even an expected human impulse. Nonetheless, if a person were to seek money for the sole purpose of giving *tzedakah*, charity, or performing acts of *chesed*, kindness, it would conceivably reflect a level of *ba’meh akadem Hashem*, with *mah* I will precede Hashem. Such character development takes time to evolve, but, if a person focuses his efforts towards achieving such an elevated spiritual goal, he can quite possibly realize its fruition. In any event, he will see marked improvement in every aspect of his spiritual service to Hashem, and this is, in and of itself, an exemplary accomplishment.