

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

How should we understand the concept of *anivus*, humility? Should a person ignore his positive attributes? Should he hide his successes? The *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, explain that one who ignores the reality of his wisdom, scholarship, positive character traits, is sorely lacking in the commodity of *seichel*, common sense. It is similar to a body builder, strong man, ignoring the fact that he can bench press four-hundred pounds. Reality is reality. *Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl*, offers a powerful insight into how one should relate to his strengths, while concomitantly not having a deleterious effect on his humility. He should view himself as if he were looking at a mirror. A mirror is basically clear glass with a coating of mercury. If, for example, one who is a *gaon v'kadosh*, saintly scholar, were to view himself in a mirror, he would see a carbon copy of himself. Now, let us imagine that the mirror would come alive and think of "itself" as a brilliant, saintly scholar; it would be utter foolishness, since the mirror is only a reflection of the person who stands before it. The "mirror" would surely have no reason to arrogate itself, since essentially it is nothing more than a reflection. If the mercury were to be removed, it would be nothing more than a pane of glass.

Likewise, with regard to a person who possesses positive attributes. He is a mirror who reflects – but who essentially is nothing. What should he be arrogant about? Everything that he has, is a reflection, a gift from Hashem. What one sees is a reflection of Hashem's kindness to this person. Thus, he is no different than the mirror which replicates the image that stands before it. This is what *Moshe Rabbeinu* meant when he declared, "*V'nanchnu mah*, "And what are we?" (*Shemos 16:7*). Surely, our greatest leader was aware of his attributes and success. However, he knew that it was nothing more than a reflection of Hashem's *chesed*, kindness, towards him.

Rav Pincus takes the mirror analogy one step further. Imagine that the mirror no longer wants to merely serve as a reflector, but, instead, desires a self-image of what it is. It will go and smear various paints over itself, so that it establishes its own identity. Since the mercury is now covered, the mirror is self-transformed into a piece of glass. This is the essence of humility. As long as a person maintains his meekness, he reflects the qualities that he possesses, which are *chasdei Hashem*. When he decides to boldly assert himself, he turns into a piece of glass that has little to no value.

When I want to write about *gedolim*, Torah giants, and their humility, I am hard pressed to select one story over another. Indeed, in one way or another, a common idea courses between them. Our greatest *gedolim* certainly knew their distinction, but it played no role in their lives. They carried out Hashem's will to the best of their G-d-given ability – and sought neither credit and accolades, nor thought they were doing any more than they were supposed to do. For some, their entire lives were symphonies of humility. It was not merely an added character trait in which they excelled. It was indeed the root of their character – their very essence.

Humility consists of two aspects: One, in which a person lives meekly and modestly, takes no credit for himself and seeks no acclaim. He is even prepared to transfer what should rightfully be his to someone else. When he sees someone else in the position of – or taking credit for – what he demurred from accepting – will he have a twinge of envy? A man came to *Rav Aryeh* a day before *Rosh Hashanah* and asked for a *brachah* for the coming year. The *tzaddik* replied, “Who am I that I should bless you? Since you are already here, however, it would be to your advantage to visit my neighbor, *Horav Chaikel Miletzki*. I, myself, seek his blessing. He is a man who has suffered greatly (one of his feet had been amputated) and achieved distinction in Torah scholarship.” Not only did *Rav Aryeh* refuse to accept accolades, he instead gave them to someone else.

A soldier in charge of the helicopter squad, who, together with his men, would continually fly his helicopter into the range of enemy fire in order to rescue wounded soldiers, petitioned *Rav Aryeh* for his blessing. *Rav Aryeh* looked at the young man and asked, “Why would you come to me? Who am I to bless you? I truly believe that your merit before Hashem is greater than mine!”

Rav Aryeh did have a touch of pride. He took joy in the upholstered chair in the *yeshivah* (*Eitz Chaim*) where he worked. It was the very same chair upon which *Horav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, zl*, sat years ago. The *Tallis* in his house was the very one *Horav Shmuel Salanter, zl*, the acknowledged head of the religious community of Yerushalayim, had worn. It was *Rav Salanter* who conferred *semichah*, ordination, on *Rav Aryeh*. His was no ordinary *semichah*. In his deep humility, *Rav Aryeh* tore up the certificate, lest someone see the praises that were accorded to him. This is what is meant by humility as the root of one's character.