

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

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was the paragon of humility, and he has gone down in history as the humblest man who ever walked the face of the earth. Does this mean that he was unaware of his remarkable, unprecedented and unparalleled achievements? Absolutely not! A humble person possesses a realistic awareness of his skills and achievements. He would otherwise be cognitively impaired. He just tends to downplay his achievements and abilities. He does not feel the need to flaunt, boast or even call attention to his successful exploits, knowing fully well what he is and what he is capable of achieving. He does not require constant validation or recognition. Thus, he adopts a modest and unassuming attitude and posture, in order not to call attention to himself.

Moshe lived during the *dor deah*, generation of knowledge, who witnessed the Revelation and received the Torah. The seventy elders, Aharon *HaKohen*, and Yehoshua, Moshe's successor, were all great men and, most certainly, all were humble. They had to be; otherwise, they could not have received the Torah. Yet, Moshe towered above them in the *middah* of *anavah*, character trait of humility. How? He achieved so much more than they did – speaking directly to Hashem, without intermediary or angel. To be so great, yet to consider oneself so insignificant, truly characterizes humility at its zenith. How are we to understand and learn from this?

The *Rizhiner Rebbe, zl* (quoted by *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*), explains this with a story that serves as an inspiration, as well as a guideline, for understanding humility as evinced by our *gedolim*.

The *Rizhiner* was the royalty of the *Chassidic* movement. He led a majestic court, with immense wealth and splendor, like a king. Indeed, his elegant court even roused the envy of the Russian Czar. Understandably, some individuals did not understand his demeanor and practices. They asked him, "How could you allow people to accord you the honor reserved for monarchs?" He replied, "Do not envy me. I am merely the king's emissary assigned to live in a distant province. As the king's representative, I have the power vested in me to provide anything to any subject with just a word. I order, and it is done. As such, people from all over come prostrating themselves, according me great honor, because, in their eyes, I am all powerful.

"One day, the king organized a trip that would take him to the far reaches of his kingdom. When he arrived in my province, I was trembling with awe. I immediately gave him a complete report of all my activities. The king said, "Let us walk through the province and greet the citizens. I insist on traveling incognito. I do not want anyone to know my real identity. In this way, I can have an objective view of all the improvements you have made to the province.

"Well, you can imagine what happened. We walked through the province, and everyone showed me the greatest honor, bowing down to me and kissing my hand. All the while, no one paid any

attention to the real king. Can you imagine how I felt? The true ruler is by my side. In his budget, he had approved every improvement. He paid for it all. I am merely a high-ranking employee. He is the one whom people should be showering with their gratitude – not me.”

This is how the holy *Rizhiner* described his position. He was only an emissary. Every bit of honor that he received made him feel ill at ease, because the real Benefactor was with him at all times. Likewise, Moshe *Rabbeinu's* humility stemmed from the fact that he was constantly in Hashem's Presence, knowing that the people were lauding the wrong entity. It was Hashem Who gave them everything. Moshe was merely the emissary.

Indeed, humility is the best barometer of preeminence. True excellence involves more than just personal achievements. True excellence connotes the ability to remain humble, despite success or accomplishments reflecting a deeper understanding of one's place in the larger context of his relationship with Hashem and with people. It is not so much how much you do, but how you present it. To see the verity of this hypothesis, one need only to open the biographies of *gedolei Yisrael* and read how they interacted with others. Every *gadol* is Hashem's emissary to provide a service for *Klal Yisrael*. He knows his position vis-à-vis the larger scheme of things, and he understands that whatever distinction he has should really be directed toward Hashem.

When one reads the biography of *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, he is rendered speechless by his humility – especially in contrast with his extraordinary distinction. *Rav* Chaim lauded the *middah of anavah*. He quotes his father, the *Steipler Gaon, zl*, who writes (*Chayei Olam* 1:27) that all doubts and confusion concerning matters of faith are to be found only among the arrogant. One who is truly modest, however, is not gripped by uncertainty or bewilderment. *Rav* Chaim intimated that the reason that *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, was the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, was his exemplary *anavah*. He would cite the *Mabit (Bais Elokim, Shaar Hayesodos* 55) who teaches that during *Techiyas HaMeisim*, the Resurrection of the Dead, people will arise in alphabetical order. Thus, one whose name begins with *aleph* (Avraham) will precede he whose name begins with *bais* (Binyamin). To this, *Rav* Chaim added that, based on *sefarim*, those who are humble will precede everyone.

A few months after his *Rebbetzin* passed away, *Rav* Chaim was asked to share some of her attributes. (The *Rebbetzin* was an extraordinary *tzaddeikes* in her own right.) He replied, “The fact that she compromised her elevated stature and agreed to marry someone as simple as me.”

Rav Chaim's patience and kindness with young children were unusual for a man to whom every minute had infinite value. A close *talmid* remembers visiting *Rav* Chaim and taking along his young bother who insisted on asking the *Sar HaTorah* a question. The child was waiting patiently and, shortly before he was to speak, an adult walked in and brushed the boy aside, as he addressed *Rav* Chaim. The boy gave up, knowing that he had just lost his place. He went downstairs to the *shul* where he met some friends. The boys were talking to one another on a bench when the young boy felt a light tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see who it was and was shocked to see it

was none other than *Rav Chaim*. “What is it that you wanted to ask me?” *Rav Chaim* said to the boy. He had gone in search of the boy to find out what it was he had wanted. To this very day, some fifty years later, this young boy – who is a distinguished *Rosh Yeshivah* – remembers that moment, which left an indelible impression on him. Greatness is measured by the little things one does.