

And He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him. (1:1)

The well-known *Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 1:15)* derives an important lesson from Moshe *Rabbeinu's* behavior: "Any Torah scholar who lacks *daas*, wisdom, decorum, conduct, and manners is worse than an animal carcass; *neveilah* is better than he is." Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the father of wisdom, the father of prophets, who took the Jews out of Egypt and was the medium through whom many miracles were wrought and who concerned himself with all aspects of the building of the *Mishkan*, did not enter the innermost chamber until Hashem called him. *Rav Yitzchak Hutner, zl*, explains why *Chazal* state that a *talmid chacham* who lacks *daas* is less than an animal carcass. Regardless of how offensive the carcass is in its present state, no one will posit that it would have been better had it not been created. It had value in life and is still presently worth something. The *talmid chacham* who lacks wisdom, who does not know or does not care how he acts publicly, is potentially damaging. Indeed, people will say it would have been better had he never studied *Torah*. In this respect, the flawed scholar has a lower value rating than a carcass. Obviously, we can explain much more about this comparison. In simple terms, the foul-smelling carcass is offensive to one who comes into its immediate proximity. The flawed scholar who lacks *daas* has a toxic effect on a larger and more far-reaching milieu.

I would rather focus on the meaning of *daas* in the sense of *derech erez*. This term has different connotations but, in the end, it all amounts to proper character traits, which are the foundation for spiritual growth and *Torah* learning. Respectful behavior, proper manners, and ethical interpersonal conduct are all prerequisites for *Torah* observance. I must add that societal norms and values do not define our *Torah* standards. The *Torah* does. In other words, just because a certain behavior is acceptable in contemporary society, in no way means that *Torah* values coincide with it.

The *Baal HaTurim* teaches that the *roshei teivos*, first letters, of the word *Vayikra el Moshe*, *vov*, *aleph*, *mem* allude to the word *Imo*, his mother. He cites the *pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim (3:11)*: *B'atarah sheitrah lo imo*, "Adorned with the crown the nation his mother made for him." (*B'yom chasunasu*, on the day of his marriage, which is reference to the day when we accepted the *Torah*). Why does *Baal HaTurim* cite this *pasuk*? How is "his mother" connected to Moshe being an extraordinary *baal derech erez*?

Horav Meir Tzvi Bergman, Shlita, posits that Moshe *Rabbeinu* learned the importance of *derech erez* from his mother, *Yocheved bas Levi*. The *Torah* attests to *Yocheved's yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, in her refusal to harm the Jewish infants. *Yocheved* was closer in lineage to *Yaakov Avinu* than her husband, *Amram*. She was a granddaughter and one of the seventy members of *Yaakov's* family who descended to Egypt to establish the Patriarchal family there. Despite *Yocheved's* incredible distinction, when *Amram* decided to divorce her, as did all men of that generation, she did not protest or argue; she did not dissent. She could easily have demurred, but that would have demonstrated a lack of *derech erez*.

This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is what the *Baal HaTurim* is teaching us. *Yocheved* taught

Moshe the significance of *derech erez*. Our quintessential leader was a good student, and he followed his mother's lead. Thus, he hesitated, waiting to enter the Mishkan until Hashem summoned him. The Rosh Yeshivah relates that Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, Rav of Yerushalayim, would spend his days learning in the bais ha'medrash in Batei Machseh.

Indeed, a number of elderly Jews would spend their days learning. One wintry day, when the weather was especially damp, an elderly *Yid* opened up a window in the *shul* because it was a bit warm. One of the elderly participants believed that it was Rav Yosef Chaim who had opened the window, and he began to berate him in public. He went on and on, but Rav Yosef Chaim withstood his blistering abuse. The man, however, wanted a response. Finally, Rav Yosef Chaim, told the man, "This is the house of Hashem. What right do I have to open a window in His house?" This was the spiritual plateau that Rav Yosef Chaim had achieved. Such refined *derech erez* can only be the result of learning Torah 24/7.