

Moshe went and spoke all these words to all of Yisrael. (31:1)

Ramban writes that, on the last day of his life, Moshe *Rabbeinu* went from camp to camp to comfort the Jewish people (individually) concerning his leaving this world. He said, "I am already of an advanced age, and you have very little benefit from me." (Moshe was in perfect health, but he wanted to play down the void that would be left with his passing.) *Horav Meir Tzvi Bergman, zl*, observes the unparalleled level of *derech erez*, proper conduct/common decency/respectful behavior/courtesy, manifest by Moshe. It was the last day of his life, the day on which the punishment preventing him from going into *Eretz Yisrael* went into effect. He certainly must have had more important things on his mind that day. Yet, his primary concern was to assuage the feelings of his nation, that they not despair over his passing. This is what exemplifies *gadlus*, greatness: selflessness. Moshe thought only of the feelings of his people. He went to pay his respects to each and every Jew. This was humility at its apex.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes *Chazal* (*Sotah* 14A) who teach, "The Torah begins with an act of *gemilas chesed*, kindness (when Hashem prepared coverings for Adam and Chavah), and ends with *chesed*" (when Hashem buried Moshe). Moshe's leadership, likewise, began with an act of *chesed*, when he refused to accept the position of leader until he first was certain that it would not infringe on his older brother, Aharon *HaKohen*. It also ended with *chesed*, when, on the last day of his life, our quintessential leader bid farewell to each Jew, comforting them concerning his upcoming demise. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* leadership was founded on the principles of *chesed*, and it ended on these same principles of care and empathy for the feelings of others. This is how a true leader leads.

Horav Moshe Shapira, zl, exemplified such leadership. He understood the feelings of others. This applies equally to those covert emotions a person purposely conceals for various reasons. He not only understood them; he searched for and ferreted them out, because he was acutely aware that, in order to reach someone, you must understand what makes him tick. He explained that *kavod* has two aspects: First, is the honor we accord to another person. Imagine a king riding into town in his royal carriage, surrounded by footmen, soldiers and dignitaries. The pomp and ceremony of such a visit is thrilling. Second, the community's leadership comes out and welcomes the king to a background of powerful trumpets. Is anything more honorable than such a public display of adulation? Clearly, such a regal welcome is over the top in paying homage to the king.

Rav Moshe explained that, indeed, another possibility is even more profound and provides more significant honor for the king. Somewhere lost in the crowd stands a simple villager who has travelled quite a distance to get a glimpse of his king. Clearly, his contribution to the king's honor is insignificant, in contrast with that of the others. The king, however, is a wise person. Thus, he views things from a different, more understanding and empathetic perspective. He sees what the villager went through in preparation for the trip. He pulled out his finest clothes, despite their comparative simplicity. With whatever money he had, he made the trip. He did not fly first class. He went via the most economical manner, because that is all that he had. He arrived exhausted –

but excited; the trip meant so much to him. While the villager did not pay homage to the king in the manner of pomp and circumstance exhibited by the dignitaries whose budget for such ceremonial displays had no bounds, he was sincere. He really cared and wanted to honor his king. The sublimity of his adulation is more profound, because subtlety goes hand in hand with sincerity.

Sometimes giving *kavod* means listening to people. Everyone has a story. To some, the story may be boring and negligible, but, to the person relating the story, it is his life. Rav Moshe Shapira's father had a brother who was murdered in Auschwitz. The brother, Rav Shraga Feivel, had been a *Rosh Yeshivah* in a suburb of Antwerp. When Rav Moshe made a trip to Antwerp for a speaking engagement, his father asked him to research whether anyone knew how his brother had been murdered. [Sadly, we have no record of *yahrzeits* for many of the Holocaust's victims.] While he was in Antwerp, Rav Moshe discovered that a Jew who was living in Monsey, N.Y., had travelled with Rav Shraga Feivel on the train to Auschwitz. This man was one of the fortunate survivors of the infamous death camp. While it would have been easy for Rav Moshe to make a long-distance call to Monsey, he felt it was improper *kibud av* not to go to meet the man, listen to his story and, perhaps, piece together the last moments of Rav Shraga Feivel's life.

Rav Moshe went to Monsey. (This was probably during his tenure as a *Rosh Yeshivah* in Stanford, CT.) He met the man, who was now an elderly widower living in a small, shabby basement apartment. The story the man related was captivating: "The Nazis took us away shortly after *Sukkos*, 1942. We clung to one another, reciting *Tehillim* in the misery of the cattle car. We arrived at Auschwitz at noon, and we were immediately sent to the *Selektzia*. He was immediately sent to the left side and, within, two hours, his holy *neshamah* returned to its Heavenly Source. I was sent to the right, resulting in three years of pure *Gehinnom*. It was through *chasdei Hashem* and miracles from Above that I survived."

The man related a number of miracles by which he was spared death. He spoke for a few hours, and Rav Moshe listened intently: an elderly survivor and a brilliant *Rosh Yeshivah*. The stories were not new, but the *Rosh Yeshivah* sat there reverently, on the edge of his chair, treating the survivor with the respect that he deserved. At that moment, the survivor no longer felt like a relic, a burden to be tolerated. He was alive and vibrant. Indeed, a *Rosh Yeshivah* was listening to his story! He was now a teacher, a carrier of the flame that had been kindled in pre-World War II Europe, which he was transmitting to the next generation via this *Rosh Yeshivah*. When Rav Moshe listened, he gave the man back something which the Nazis tried to take from him: his humanity, his voice. Rav Moshe Shapira gave it back to him by according him the *derech erez* he deserved.