

THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON

by Rabbi Dovid Green

The Man Moshe is extremely humble, more than any person on the face of the earth. -(Numbers 12:3)

There will never arise another prophet like Moshe who knew Hashem face to face. -(Deuteronomy 34:10)

There seems to be a built in contradiction between these two verses. How could Moshe be both the most humble individual and yet be the greatest of all time?

I once asked a group of high school students "Who's the most important person in Jewish history?" After they exhausted all possibilities guessing Avraham, Moshe or Yehoshua for examples, I finally let them know...it is...Label Lam! They were shocked. Most of them had never heard of me till I'd walked into the classroom that day. I even told them I would prove it.

There can be no more reliable proof than an open statement from the Sages of the Talmud. When a witness is about to give testimony in a life and death trial he is strongly reminded about the potential consequences of his words. They ask him, "Why was man created singular?" (He could have been created as a couple, or a gaggle, or a corporation, or a synagogue or a not-for-profit organization) The answer the witness is told is: "a person has an obligation to say, 'the whole world was created (just) for me!'" . When Adam first stepped into the arena of the universe, every tree, breeze and ray of light was designed as a stage for his personal morality play.

There are several pinnacle ideas found in a statement by Hillel, "If I am not for myself who will be for me, and if I am only for myself who am I and if not now, then when?!" Hillel is telling us that nobody can play our assigned parts in the orchestra of existence better than (we) the assigned individual can. I have something unique to deliver to the universe that no other person could replace. However, if I am a puzzle piece separate to myself alone, then I suffer not from an identity crisis (WHO am I?) but rather, a humanity crisis (WHAT am I?). The true purpose for me to develop my SELF is to provide greater service to the whole of humanity and strive to be a more perfect thread in the total tapestry of life.

How does "if not now, then when?!" fit in here? The first two parts tell us that there is no extra human in the morality play of history and that everyone fits perfectly into the plot, adding color and texture to the living fabric of life. This third part tells us that there are also no repeat _moments_. There has never been or will ever be another spring Friday as this one. It is a moment in history which has or

will have no exact equal.

I remember telling the high school students that if they went home and asked their parents, "Who's the most important person in Jewish history?" and then gave the answer "Label Lam" then they hadn't understood the message. Everyone has to say himself! I am only another actor in the morality play you star in and you are the same in mine. So what is the most important moment in Jewish history? You guessed it! THIS moment! Now and now and now, beating on in it's non-petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time.

Part of a person's greatness is a person's smallness. Not only is it NOT a contradiction that Moshe was both the most humble and at the same time the greatest person...it's axiomatic! Humility and greatness and necessary companions.

The Kotzker Rebbe put it succinctly when he said that a person should have a piece of paper in each side pocket. On one should be written, "The world was created (just) for me". On the other, "I am (originated from only) dust and ashes". The trick in life, says the Rebbe is to know when to take out which piece of paper!

In most cases, when we are offended, or our car sustains a bump etc., our first instinct is to shout in our own defense, rattling the proverbial sabre. When a request for charity arrives or some other life saving endeavor avails itself of us our inner voice might speak up saying "What difference will my small contribution make?". We have taken out the wrong papers! The truth is, that when we are offended the ideal response, and I'm not saying it's easy, is to be as dust and ashes. What offense does dust and ashes take? We walk on it everyday and hear not a peep! On the other hand, when a mitzvah opportunity arrives we are to rise boldly to our feet shouting "I will do it, since the world was created solely for _me_ and _this_ is the moment!"

In order for Moshe to be the greatest person, the one who took the most responsibility, he needed to think less and little about himself. Whatever time and energy he devoted to himself was ultimately out of sense of duty to others. The more he was able to delegate his own ego to the background, the more he was able to serve the needs of others. More light can shine through glasses which are not tinted, rose or otherwise.

The greatest person is the one who focuses on the greatness of the goal and the tasks it brings. That person is less distracted by personal accomplishments and looks to what yet has to be done.

Good Shabbos!

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