

# A SELFLESS SELF-ESTEEM

by Rabbi Label Lam

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

Humbly walks the duck but its eyes are turned to heaven. (Bava Kama 92B)

How do we reconcile the trait of humility and the need for a healthy self esteem? The Chovos HaLevavos-Duties of the Heart claims that someone at the peak of humility, like Moshe, remains unmoved by either compliments or insults. How is it possible that a person should be unaffected by the attitudes of others? Two simultaneous perspectives are necessary.

1) Imagine you are readying yourself for a special event. You've just purchased a brand new tie for the occasion. You affix the tie with perfection and look on with a last look of admiration at having made such a tasteful choice of matching attire. Then a voice is heard, "The tie doesn't match at all! That style is coming back soon!" You look around. It's a moth on the ceiling. You think to yourself, "Should I change my tie? Nah! What does a moth know about current fashion?" Similarly, if the same moth had spoken admiringly, it would not have been cause to celebrate. What does a moth know?

2) A joke is told about a fellow about to tee off on a round of golf. He lifts the club behind his head for the driving swing and a voice thunders from the heavens, "Halt! Put a new ball on the tee!" He does. A moment later and in great awe he's about to strike the ball when a loud heavenly voice interrupts with further instructions. "Take a practice swing!" He backs off and swings his best practice swing and then approaches the ball. Again he is interrupted from on high and told to take another practice swing. He does. As he steps up one more time and is ready as ever to hit the ball a voice parts the sky again and soberly commands, "Put the old ball back!"

One of the Chassidic Masters explained that any number, no matter how large, is still infinitely shy of infinity.

A) A truly humble person, like Moshe, looks at himself in that most objective of all mirrors. He is humble before HASHEM. Why should he then be overly responsive to the opinions of mortal men?  
B) He knows his successes are not without assistance from HASHEM and he is therefore eternally grateful.  
C) He recognizes that whatever he has in talent and wealth is only temporary. It is his to use

but not to keep. D) He feels obliged to use his gifts the way they were ideally meant to be used. E) He feels it is a privilege to perform his Creator's biddings and not a burden at all. E) He realizes his obligation to act on behalf of others. He therefore places the needs of the needy at the center of his universe. F) He is painfully aware of his shortcomings and to what extent he has failed. In his mind he has not yet reached a fraction of what is due. G) He therefore recognizes his place and is jealous of no one else. H) He expects nothing and is appreciative of everything. I) He only wishes to be an instrument of Divine will, like a clean window that lets the light through adding no color of his own.

The secret of the humble one described by the Chovos HaLevavos is not that he forcefully resists public opinion. No! Rather, he is more so yielding to a Higher Source that overwhelms his sense of being. Every other singer in the chorus of his mind therefore is drowned out by the din of that singular voice that resonates beyond all. In that giant truth revealing mirror alone he continually checks his tie, takes practice swings and hopes to gain some day a selfless self-esteem. Text Copyright &copy 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.