

“WHAT” IS BEYOND OUR REALM!

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshe and Aaron said to all the Children of Israel, "In the evening you will know that HASHEM took you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of HASHEM, that He has heard your complaints against HASHEM- for what are we that you should incite complaints against us?" (Shemos 16:6-7)

Greater is that which is said about Moshe and Aaron than what is said about Avraham. Regarding Avraham it is written, "I am dust and ashes...." However by Moshe and Aaron it is written, "What are we...? The world is only maintained because of Moshe and Aaron. It's written here, "What are we...?" And it's written there (Job 26:7), "The world is suspended on bli-mah - silence. (The world hangs in the merit of those who make themselves without-"what"-nothing) in the midst of a fight. (Chulin 89A)

How did Moshe and Aaron maintain their composure? The Rambam describes a pious teacher whose students once challenged him with the question, "What was the proudest day of your life?" He answered: "Once I was sailing on a boat bound for a certain city. I had bought the least expensive berth, the bottom of the deck where baggage and other cargo are stored. On board were a number of wealthy merchants who traveled in more elegant style on the deck directly above me. One day, one of the merchants, a conceited young fellow, was standing on the top deck when he apparently felt the call of nature. He simply raised his garment and relieved himself directly upon me. He did not think of me, a lowly traveler on the bottom deck, worthy of his consideration. I testify that I did not feel insulted, nor did I feel angry toward this man. On the contrary, I felt great joy. With help from G-d, I had attained a proper level of patience and humility even though I am not placid by nature."

How does one begin to reach that level? Maybe it's not so inconceivable. Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berdichov had said, "A person should have a piece of paper in each of two pockets. On one paper is inscribed, "I am dust and ashes!" On the other should be written the words of the Mishne in Sanhedrin, "A person is obligated to say that the whole world was created for me". The secret is to know when to take out which piece of paper."

The usual natural response when someone affronts our honor is to get all huffy and litigious, and yet when the charity box floats beneath our noses we may automatically exempt ourselves with the thought, "What difference does my small contribution make?!" Rather, when insulted we should be as dust, which does not shout back. When a Mitzvah presents itself, duty calls and then we should see ourselves as the protagonist of history living center stage.

Moshe and Aaron went beyond "dust and ashes" and declared themselves "what", essentially nothing. What "what" had they in mind? Perhaps it was the "what" of "And now Israel MAH -"what" does HASHEM your G-d request from you except to fear HASHEM your G-d?" (Devarim 10:12): Namely to know the boundaries of our task. Or perhaps the "what" is like the humbling perspective of an astronaut staring at that tiny globe suspended in silence, "MAH-What is man that you You remember him?" (Tehillim 8:5)

How were Moshe and Aaron both the most accomplished and simultaneously the most humble of men? It must have been that those two pieces of paper were removed precisely in the right times. There can be no confusion about "what" - is a call to action and "what" is beyond our realm! Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.