

I AM HUMBLE

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And Moshe said to Aaron, 'this is what G-d has spoken, saying "among my dear ones will I be sanctified..." [10:3]

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki quotes the Talmud (Zevachim 115b): "Where did HaShem say this? 'And I will set a meeting there with the Children of Israel, and I will be sanctified through my honor.' [Exodus 29:43] Do not pronounce the word as 'my honor' but 'my honored ones.' Moshe said to Aaron, 'Aaron, my brother, I knew that the Tabernacle would be sanctified through those close to HaShem. And I thought it would be either you or me. Now I see that they were greater than we are.'"

How do we understand this? Moshe said "I thought it would be either you or me." "I thought we were the greatest, the closest to G-d, and now I see we're second best." Is this the same Moshe about whom G-d Himself said, "And the man, Moshe, was exceedingly humble, more than any man on the face of the earth?" [Numbers 11:3]

Rabbi Leib Chasman, in his book *Ohr Yahel*, asks the question this way: "if a human king were to announce that he planned to honor and offer tribute to one of his greatest ministers, and one minister were to loudly announce that it appeared that the king was thinking about him, would he not be considered tremendously haughty by his colleagues? If so, how could Moshe say 'I thought it would be either you or me?'" After reading the Megillah on Purim, as uncomfortable as it might be to mention both men in the same breath - doesn't this sound like Haman rather than Moshe? Could Moshe say such a thing?

Absolutely. And understanding why this is so may help us to pursue the advice of Maimonides, who said [as we mentioned two weeks ago] that unlike all other character traits, when it comes to humility we too should strive for the extreme.

Rabbi Chasman offers a comparison to a porter, carrying a large burden. Does the porter begin to think that the entire burden is his? Of course not! So we must think of wisdom, intelligence, and other traits in the same way.

A humble person is not one who does not comprehend her own value or potential - that's a fool. Rather, explains Rabbi Chasman, a humble person recognizes that everything she has is a gift from

G-d! And even more, the greater the recognition of her positive traits, and the recognition that all this comes through the kindness of Heaven, the greater the resulting humility. She recognizes all she has, and simultaneously that she is absolutely nothing without G-d's constant assistance and kindness - none of this is genuinely hers.

With this outlook, we can understand the Talmudic passage [Sotah] in which a teacher says: "Since Rebbe [Rabbi Yehudah the Prince, compiler of the Mishnah] passed away, humility and fear of sin have been lost." And Rabbi Yosef responds: "don't teach 'humility,' for I am here." Again, how can someone call *himself* humble? Isn't this something we say as a joke? Isn't it inherently contradictory?

If we understand humility as a recognition that positive traits are acquired only through G-d's help and kindness, rather than inherently ours, then it is possible for someone - although only one who truly has achieved the highest levels of humility - to describe himself as humble. For if this is truly so, then he will regard this as if he is talking about his friend's traits, rather than his own, for all the praise is not his.

Although a level such as this is a long way off, perhaps if we consider it for a moment, we'll be better prepared to receive some good traits ourselves!

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