

G-D MADE MILLIONAIRE

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Guard yourself, lest you forget HaShem your G-d, not to keep his commandments, judgements, and enactments, which I command you today. Lest you eat and be satisfied, build nice houses and live in them... and you become haughty, and forget HaShem your G-d who brought you out from Egypt, from the house of slavery... and you say in your heart, my own might and the strength of my hand have made me all of this wealth." [Dev. 8:11-12, 14, 17]

The trait of haughtiness is considered one of the very worst characteristics that a person can have. Maimonides says that there is a place and time even for all bad traits -- with this one exception. There is no time when haughtiness and excessive pride are appropriate.

"All who make themselves high, G-d casts them down" [Eruvin 13b].

"Any person who is haughty, is as if he served idols, as if he denied G-d, as if he participated in immorality, as if he built an altar [to idols]... the Holy One, Blessed be He, says 'he and I cannot live in this world'" [Sota 4b, 5a].

But really -- what is so horrible about a little pride in ourselves? How can we avoid it, if we really do have certain talents or skills?

In order to answer this question, we need to better understand the difference between having a talent, and becoming haughty because one has that talent. We need only look to our teacher Moshe. Did Moshe not realize who he was? Did he somehow forget that he was the only person in history to ascend Mount Sinai and speak with G-d with completely clear prophecy? Did he attempt to avoid haughtiness by abandoning the leadership of the Jewish people? Of course not. Once G-d insisted that Moshe was the right person, he led the people out of Egypt and through the desert.

Yet the Torah testifies about Moshe that not only was he humble, he was the most humble person in the entire world! The leader of the entire Jewish nation, chosen directly by G-d, was the most humble person in the world. Obviously there is a connection, and it is fundamental to eliminating the trait of haughtiness from our own personalities.

The best way to eliminate haughtiness is simply to recognize the source of everything that we have. Everything Moshe had, everything we all have, is a gift from G-d. Moshe teaches us that the appropriate reaction to a talent, to wealth, to any other good fortune -- is more humility. He was privileged to speak with G-d, he had developed into a holy person, and therefore it was incumbent

upon him to be grateful, and to realize that he owed HaShem even more gratitude than others. He was grateful for the intelligence and wisdom which enabled him to recognize HaShem so clearly. He was grateful for the privilege of speaking directly with G-d and receiving His Torah.

There is nothing wrong with being a "self-made millionaire," as long as you realize that there's really no such thing. G-d makes it possible. G-d can take that wealth away as well, and it is our responsibility to serve as G-d's custodian over the money that He has given us.

This is why the Torah says that haughtiness is tantamount to denying G-d's existence -- it is directly connected to the thought that "my own might and the strength of my hand have made me all of this wealth."

All bad traits have a profound impact on interpersonal relationships. This one, though, not only makes a person completely insufferable to those around him -- it directly affects his or her relationship with G-d as well. If a person makes too much of his or her own beauty, skill or talent, then the person forgets Who gives everything to him or her. He or she denies the true nature of the gifts which G-d has given, and instead behaves as if, forgive the expression, he or she is "G-d's gift to humanity" instead. It is the ultimate in *kafui tova*, rejecting a kindness, paying it back with evil.

Pride doesn't only destroy the wealthy. By over-emphasizing self-sufficiency, our culture encourages excessive pride. None of us are truly self-sufficient; we all need others. And most important of all -- we all need help from time to time. There is nothing wrong with asking for help when you need it. People who are too "proud" to ask for help destroy themselves and destroy their families.

Let us recognize that we are never truly self-sufficient, and that we need His help at every turn. Let us be grateful, rather than haughty, for what we have -- and let us not be ashamed to ask for what we don't!