

MOSHE'S INCREDIBLE HUMILITY

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

In this week's parsha of B'shalach, we see a glaring example of Moshe's incredible humility.

When Bnei Yisroel approached Moshe, complaining that they would die of hunger in the wilderness, Hashem told Moshe that bread would rain down from the heavens in the form of manna. Moshe and Aharon then approached Bnei Yisroel and said: "In the morning you will see the honor of Hashem that He has heard your complaints, v'nachnu mah [and we are what] that you are causing everyone to complain against us. [17:7]"

The Talmud [Chulin 89A] contrasts Moshe's self-deprecating term compared to the one used by Avrohom. "What is said by Moshe is greater than what is said by Avrohom. Avrohom said: 'I am earth and ashes.' Moshe said: 'And we are what'."

At first glance we understand that Avrohom compared himself to something. Almost devoid of value but something, nonetheless. Moshe, on the other hand, compared himself to absolute nothingness. What are we? We are 'what'--nothing at all.

Rav Meir Shapiro zt"l explains further based on the following story.

Before the High Holy Days, Rav Yonasan Eibishitz zt"l would seek a Jew who'd pray in a brokenhearted manner. He wanted to stand and pray next to such a person during those crucially important t'filos [prayers]. One year he felt confident that he had found the right person: a simple, elderly man who literally wet the pages of his siddur [a prayer book] with his tears. He overheard this man concluding his t'filah with heartfelt words saying: I am 'earth' in my lifetime, how much more so in my death. He knew that he had found the right person.

That night, the night of Yom Kippur, he arrived at the synagogue early to get a seat right next to this person. The t'filos that night and the next morning were beautiful and the devotion and humility of the person next to him contributed greatly. However, when it came time for the reading of the Torah, Rav Yonasan's happiness with his choice turned to shock. When this man was called to the Torah, he turned angrily, demanding to know why someone else had been called for the more honorable aliyah [reading]. "Am I less deserving than he?" he said with rage.

Rav Yonasan couldn't believe his ears. "Didn't you say last night that you are like earth in your lifetime?" he challenged the elderly man.

"Of course!" he answered, still fuming. "When I was praying before Hashem, I said and felt that I was

like earth! But compared to that guy . . . I'm much better than he and I should have gotten that aliyah!"

Rav Meir Shapiro zt"l explained that Avrohom negated his self-importance when he was speaking to Hashem. Moshe's statement was that much greater because he negated his self-importance when he was responding, not to Hashem, but to the lowly people who were complaining against Hashem.

An indelible impression was made on me when, as a young child, I would accompany my father, z"l, to Long Island University where he was a professor and the Director of Health Services. He would greet and introduce me to other professors and department heads in the very same way that he greeted and introduced me to the custodial workers.

The highest humility manifests itself no matter whom one is standing before.

Good Shabbos,

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