

IF I WERE A RICH MAN

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"Place upon yourself a king...He shall not greatly increase silver and gold for himself." — Devarim 17:16-20

The Torah commands us to appoint a king to rule over the Jewish people. However, there are various warnings given to the king. He should not acquire too many horses, he should not take too many wives, and he should not amass too much gold and silver.

The *Daas Zakainim* explains that each of these excesses is singled out to protect the king from a particular danger. The danger of amassing too much wealth is that it leads to arrogance.

We are obligated to treat a king with great respect

This *Daas Zakainim* is difficult to understand because, as the Rambam explains, we are obligated to treat a king with great honor; it is vital for his effectiveness as a ruler. As a result, any individual, even the greatest *talmid chacham* or *Navi*, who walks into the chambers of a king must bow down full face to the ground. No person is allowed to sit down in his presence. Additionally, the king himself must guard his *kavod*. He isn't allowed to stand up for any man in public. He isn't allowed to use titles of honor for anyone else. If he commands a person to leave the room and that man refuses, the king has the right to have him killed.

At the same time, a king is expected to remain humble. The Torah isn't afraid that the great honor accorded to him will bring him to arrogance. He is capable of maintaining his sense of balance by understanding that honor isn't due to **him**, but rather his position. He is still a mortal human. As a servant of HASHEM, he plays his role as everyone else does.

Why is money more dangerous than honor and power?

The question then becomes obvious. If the king is capable of maintaining his humility despite the extraordinary honor accorded to him, why is the Torah so fearful that he will become arrogant if he amasses wealth? It's as if the Torah is saying, "Honor he can handle, but wealth? Impossible!"

Why would it be so difficult for him not to be conceited if he acquired wealth? The answer to this

question is based on a deeper understanding of the human personality.

The antidote to honor

Honor is a difficult life test. When a person is given status and accord, it is natural for him to feel different, apart and above the rest of the human race. Power, too, is a grave test. When a person feels that he can control the destiny of other people, he runs the risk of feeling self-important, significant, and mighty. However, these are situations that a person can deal with.

The antidote to honor is to remember **where I came from** and **where I am going**. I must understand that today I am being given great honor, but it will pass quickly. Very quickly. Today they sing my praises; tomorrow they will forget my name. That is the way of the world.

Power is also something that a person can learn to deal with. As I stand here now, I control the destiny of others. But do I? Do I really have power? I can't even control whether I will be alive tomorrow or not. When I lay my head on the pillow this evening, it is not in my control to will myself alive tomorrow. When my time is up, it'll be over, and there is nothing that I can do to change that. The **big, powerful, mighty me** can't even control whether I exist or not.

In that sense, honor and power are potentially dangerous, but a person can be humble despite them.

The danger of Wealth

Great wealth is different. Wealth brings a person to a much more dangerous sense of himself — a sense of independence. "I am rich! I don't need anyone! I don't need my wife. I don't need my children. I don't even need HASHEM! I can buy and sell the whole world!"

This seems to be the answer to the *Daas Zakainim*. Because this sense of independence is almost a natural outgrowth of wealth, the Torah warns a king of Israel not to amass too much of it. He may be a great man, and he might be able to keep his sense of balance despite many temptations, but wealth will almost certainly lead to arrogance, and it is something that even a man as great as a king in Israel will not be able to resist.

In our world

This concept has great relevance to us. Whether we are wealthy as compared to others or not, the reality is that we enjoy great *bracha* living in the 21st century. Today, we all enjoy material possessions, luxuries, and opportunities that were unheard of in previous generations.

One of the great dangers of living in these times is the sense of independence. "I am young, strong,

and healthy. I can forge my own way. I don't need anyone; I can make it on my own. I am independent."

While on one level, this sense is central to being an effective human being, it is also fraught with danger. A person must remain clear-headed in his understanding of Who is really in charge here. I am not the Master of the universe, nor even the master of my destiny. I am dependent. I depend on my Creator for my daily bread, my health, my success, and my existence. With this understanding, a man can enjoy great *bracha* and still remain humble.

When a person is humble, the rest of his character traits naturally fall into place. But when a person is arrogant, the rest of his *middos* are out of balance as well. An arrogant person becomes angry easily. A humble man doesn't. An arrogant individual doesn't feel the pain of others, but a humble man does. The pivot point of all good *middos* is humility.

Just as humility is the center of a person's character development, so too is it the cornerstone of his *avodas* HASHEM. The *Chovos Ha'Levovos* explains that just as a master needs a servant, a servant needs a master. One cannot exist without the other. Any sense of arrogance is a denial of my dependence upon HASHEM. It revokes my status of a servant of my Master.

This sense of dependence upon my Creator brings a person balance and internal happiness because he is in synch with his himself. He doesn't need to self-inflate and create illusions about his worth. Ultimately, it leads a person to success in this world and the World to Come.

For more on this topic please listen to Shmuz #58: Arrogance: Misdirected Greatness of Man, and #59: Humility: An Issue of Perspective

Rabbi Shafier is the founder of the Shmuz.com – The Shmuz is an engaging, motivating shiur that deals with real life issues.

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