

PARSHAS SHEMOS: PROPER EXPRESSIONS OF HUMILITY

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

While grazing the sheep of his father-in-law Yisro, Moshe Rabbeinu encountered the Shechina (presence of Hashem) at the burning bush and began his ascension to the leadership of Klal Yisroel, albeit reluctantly. Hashem called to Moshe and instructed him to appear before Pharoh and begin the process of taking the Jews out of Egypt. Moshe Rabbeinu, the most humble of all people (see Bamidbar 12:3), responded by questioning his own qualifications to appear before Pharoh and lead the Jews. He asked Hashem (Shemos 3:11), "Mi anochi ki alech el Pharoh, V'chi otzi es B'nei Yisroel Mi'mitzrayim"?

Rashi explains that he presented Hashem with two logically-connected, sequential arguments - a *âlo zu af zu'* form of reasoning: 1) Am I fit to appear before Pharoh?

And, [even if I am worthy], 2) are the B'nei Yisroel deserving of being taken out of Egypt? What special merits do they possess to deserve such a miracle? (See Ramban for an alternative explanation of Moshe's second question)

Rashi explains that Hashem answered both questions of Moshe in the order that they were asked. In response to Moshe's first question - his ability to represent the B'nei Yisroel, Hashem answered, "Ki ah'yeh emoch" - I will be with you." Hashem assures Moshe that he will not be going alone, and that He will accompany Moshe as he faces the most powerful man on Earth. The Midrash comments that Moshe initially thought that Hashem delegated this task to him and expected Moshe to shoulder the responsibility of taking the B'nei Yisroel out of Egypt on his own. To this, Hashem responded that He would remain with Moshe and support him every step of the way. Rashi adds that Hashem offered Moshe the analogy of the burning bush that did not become consumed as it burned. So, too, promised Hashem, that you will not be in danger, as long as you fulfill my mission.

At first glance, however, Hashem does not seem to be responding to Moshe's question. After all, Moshe claimed that he was unworthy to appear before Pharoh (he seemed to infer that Hashem should select someone else who is more appropriate). Yet, even after Hashem promised Moshe that He would remain with him, Moshe could have responded that Hashem should accompany someone else who is more worthy of leadership. How did Hashem address his question?

Hashem's response to Moshe's second query is even more difficult to understand. Hashem offered Moshe a *âsigna*l' - "V'zeh lecho ha'os" (Shemos 3:12) - this will be a sign for you that I, in fact, sent you [on this mission]; "... ta'avdun es HoElokim al ha'hor hazeh" - [As proof that I am sending you] when

you take the Jews out of Egypt, you will worship Hashem on this mountain.

Why did Hashem categorize this promise as an *âos'* - a *âsign'*? Generally, an *âos'* would be a miracle of sorts that takes place immediately. This would be an indication that Hashem's divine intervention would protect Moshe during his courageous appearance before Pharaoh. In fact, later in the parsha (Shemos 4:1), when Moshe was concerned that the Jews would not believe him, Hashem instructed him to perform three miracles for them; and referred to the miracles as *âosos'*. A miracle is a sign of Hashem's support; how can a promise of future activity be considered a *âsign'*?

In response to these difficulties, I would like to suggest that both questions were addressed by Hashem simultaneously. Moshe was questioning the ultimate success of his mission. He considered himself, a lowly shepherd, unfit to lead. He also questioned whether his people, in the forty-ninth degree of impurity, were worthy of a miraculous redemption from Egypt.

In order to support a wavering Moshe, Hashem informed him that He placed the highest level of trust in Moshe Rabbeinu - and in the potential of Klal Yisroel. He informed Moshe that self-respect is crucial to personal growth and that not believing in your own ability to achieve success is a destructive form of humility. Hashem offered Moshe the greatest compliment - "*Ki ah'yeh emoch*" - I will always be with you and support you in your sacred mission. I am placing my trust in you despite your current stature as a shepherd and the speech impediment (see Shemos 4:10) that is a source of such concern to you. Klal Yisroel may be in the 49th level of impurity, said Hashem, but I foresee them rising to the highest level of kedusha and accepting the Torah in the not-so-distant future.

Hashem, the Melamed Torah l'amo Yisroel, offered Moshe Rabbeinu a visual aide to His shiur about proper expressions of humility. Hashem instructed Moshe to reflect upon the location of the *s'neh* (the burning bush, where an *os* had already taken place); the future site of Kabbolas Hatorah. Har Sinai was selected due to the fact that it was the smallest mountain in that area. If that was the case, however, why did Hashem not give the Torah in a valley? The answer is that proper acceptance of the Torah requires the blend of the majesty and presence of a mountain - and true humility, which was represented by giving the Torah on the smallest mountain in the range.

As we grow through adolescence and strive to achieve our goals, it is of utmost importance that we maintain this blend of self-respect and modesty. Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. True humility begins when we become aware of the gifts that we possess. It manifests itself when we understand that these blessings come from Hashem. They must be shared with others in a selfless manner. We need to care and share, and make a positive contribution to Hashem's world.

Best wishes for a gutten Shabbos.

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