

א ביסל תורה!

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How Humble is Humble?

By Joshua Jaffe '29

“וְהָאִישׁ מְשֻׁחַ עֵנָּה מֵאֲדָם מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה” “And the man was very humble, more than any other person in the whole world” (במדבר יב:). (במדבר יב:). “אֲנִי אֲנִי כִי אֶלֶךְ אֶל־פְּרַעֲה וְכִי.” “Who am I, that I should go to and free the Jews from Egypt?” (שמות ג:יא). If G-d appeared in a burning bush and said one has to free the Jews from America, could one even believe that they are the savior of the Jewish people? Surely, there is someone more righteous than them, so, why is G-d choosing to speak with them? One can hardly blame משה for reacting the way he does. Does it point to משה’s humility? Of course it does. But how humble is humble, really?

This is a difficult question to answer, but one can start by answering a parallel question: How arrogant is arrogant? Well, when משה was appointing the judges, per יתרו’s instructions, משה says: “לֹא־תִכְבְּרוּ פָנִים בְּמִשְׁפָּט בְּקֹטֶן בְּגֹדֶל” “You should not show favor in judgment, you should listen to important people and other people alike, do not fear anyone, for judgement belongs to God, and whatever case you are unable to resolve, bring it to me and I will hear it” (דברים א:יז). As יתרו suggested in the hierarchy of judges, whenever the previous level of judges does not know what the correct ruling was, the case should be brought to משה, who would listen to the case and resolve it, or ask Hashem if he did not know the answer. Does this point to משה’s humility? Maybe, maybe not. Does it present משה as arrogant? One would not think so; he is just explaining the way things will work.

The מדרש ספרי says that when Hashem heard משה say this, He got very angry. משה implied that he would know the answer to every question that was asked to him. Although משה actually did know the answer to every question that he was asked, since he was human, he should have made it

more clear that sometimes he would not know what to do. As a result of this, when the daughters of צלפחד asked whether daughters can inherit land, משה forgot the הלכה, and was forced to admit in public that he did not know the answer, and needed to consult with Hashem.

If one looks at the פסוק closely, משה never actually says that he would be able to resolve each case. He just tells the judges to bring him the case - and he would listen to it. After hearing the case, maybe he would resolve it, or maybe he would need to ask Hashem. But, clearly, even a minuscule level of arrogance is arrogance.

Perhaps the reason משה is punished for this tiny, insignificant phrasing, is because משה is known as the most humble person ever and as a big צדיק, and Hashem was so close to him and held him at such high standards, that this tiny difference of wording was significant enough on משה’s scale, that Hashem decided to teach him a lesson. Yet we see even people not at משה’s level getting punished for similar mistakes, like שמואל.

The story starts when קיש, the father of שאול, loses a few donkeys. This is before שאול becomes king. קיש sends שאול to look for the donkeys. שאול and his servant look for days, perhaps weeks, yet cannot find the donkeys. As a last-ditch effort, they visit the city where שמואל is, to see if שמואל can give them prophetic insight to help them find the donkeys. שאול and his servant have never met שמואל before, and, as a result, they look around to see if anyone knows where שמואל, called the ראה, the seer, was; lo and behold, the first person they meet happens to be שמואל. “וַיִּגַּשׁ שְׂאֹוֹל אֶת־שְׂמוּאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַשָּׁעַר וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה־נָא לִי אִי־זֶה בֵּית הָרֹאֶה וַיַּעַן שְׂמוּאֵל אֶת־שְׂאֹוֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי הָרֹאֶה עָלֶיךָ לְפָנַי הַבֹּמֶה וְאַכְלֹתֶם עִמָּי” “And שאול approached שמואל in the gateway, and he said, ‘Please, tell me, where does the seer live?’ And שמואל responded שאול, ‘I am the seer, come with me to the altar, and you will eat with me today, and I will send you off tomorrow morning, and whatever you want to know I will tell you’” (שמואל א’).

שואל wanted to know where the seer was. And שמואל responded that he was the seer. Rather than confuse שואל by choosing a different word to describe himself, or worse, deny that he was the person שואל was looking for, he responded in a quick, concise fashion, so that שואל would understand and not be put in an embarrassing situation. Is it possible to blame שמואל for his arrogance?

Apparently, yes. The ספרי דברים י"ד (ספרי דברים י"ד) says, Hashem heard what שמואל said, and said, "You called yourself the seer? Do you really think you see? As you live, I will make sure to inform you that you do not see." And when was this, that Hashem informed שמואל that he could not "see"? When שמואל went to ישי's house to anoint the next king for Israel. שמואל saw אליאב and said to himself, I should anoint אליאב as the king that Hashem chose. However, Hashem said, "Haha, you see? No, you don't, this is not the one." This is how שמואל was punished for calling himself the seer.

Part of the reason that שמואל and משה were punished is because they compared themselves to Hashem, so to speak, in a way they should not have. Nevertheless, we see from משה and שמואל that humility is not just about lack of arrogance. Being humble means being humble. It means avoiding implications of anything positive about oneself - or at least that is how it seems from the stories of משה and שמואל. While one may not be at the level of these צדיקים, one can learn from them to be humble and not to boast and show off. When one recognizes that one must act humbly in front of those greater than us and respect our teachers, mentors, and elders, then the משיח will come.

Finding Meaning in Disagreement

By Eva Wolfe '28

In this week's פרשה, משה is sent by Hashem to persuade פעה to free the Jews from slavery. משה tries to appeal to פעה to let the Jewish people venture into the wilderness for three days in order to pray and sacrifice to their G-d. However, not only does פעה reject משה's request, he imposes harsher punishments on the Jews - stopping provisions of straw for the making of bricks, yet keeps the

production quota the same. משה argues with Hashem for sending him on this fruitless journey: "למה הרעתה לעם הזה? למה זה שלחתיני? ומה אף באתי אלי-פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה? ומה אף באתי אלי-פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה?" "Why did You bring harm to this people? Why did You send me? Ever since I came to פרעה to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and You have not delivered Your people" (שמות 17:17-18). משה's choice of argumentative speech is shocking; how could he use such incredible language when speaking to G-d?

One may be compelled to think down on משה for his inappropriate outburst, yet it seems as though Judaism embraces arguments and criticism. For instance, אברהם disputes with Hashem when He is trying to wipe out סדום, the משנה and גמרא are full of conflicting opinions and fights, and the תנ"ך is laden with commentaries disagreeing. So why, then, does our religion encourage argument?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests an answer for this phenomenon in his book Judaism's Life Changing Ideas. He says that there can be no true justice in the world unless the views of all sides are heard. How can order be present if the prosecution and the defense are not able to both share their sides? Both need to be able to argue with each other. We can take this idea to heart: when someone has a different perspective than ours, we should view their opinion as an opportunity to enlarge our understanding of the situation we are in.



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