

what must be done. A humble person does not need the opinion of others to bolster him. As long as he is doing the right thing, he is satisfied. Objectivity and humility go hand in hand. *Horav Simchah Bunim, zl, m'Peshicha*, would carry two slips of paper, one in his right pocket and one in his left pocket. On one piece of paper was written, "The entire world was created just for me" (*Sanhedrin* 38a). On the other paper was written, "I am but dust and ashes" (*Bereishis* 18:27). In this way, he never lost sight of the times when one must take a leadership role and the times when he must hold back and remain in the background; it is not always about "me." The truly great leader never views himself as great. He is simply performing a function for which he has the talent and ability. He has been granted a gift (or he worked hard to earn it), and now he is doing what is asked of him.

The *Imrei Chaim, zl, (Vishnitz)* related that the *Baal Shem Tov Hakodesh* heard that a certain priest exemplified the virtue of humility. He had difficulty believing this, so he made the effort to meet with him. After spending some time in conversation with the priest, the *Baal Shem* left, only to have the priest run after him and ask, "What do you think of my humility?" When the *Baal Shem* heard this he was satisfied that while the man acted humbly, it was the greatest manifestation of his arrogance.

A truly humble person: goes where he is needed, is not oriented only to himself; believes in filling a role, not in forging for himself a new position. This idea is underscored by the *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, in his commentary to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* appointing leaders for the various segments of the nation. Yisro suggested that Moshe select leaders who had the following qualities: "Men of accomplishment; G-d-fearing; men of truth; people who despise money." They, in turn, would be appointed as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens (*Ibid* 18:21,22). The *Kotzker* wonders how men of such distinction, men of such outstanding virtue and achievement, would accept varied positions. Would not each one want to be a leader over thousands? (Imagine, offering a teaching position that does not require outstanding skills to someone who wants to be a *rosh yeshivah* – or a factory position to one who is capable of being the company's CEO).

The *Kotzker* explains that one of the required qualities for leadership was *anshei emes*, men of truth. An individual who is concerned with -- and adheres to -- the truth does not care about *kavod*, honor. An honest person does not concern himself with ego. He cares about the truth, and ego is false. Thus, if an individual, regardless of his spiritual status, was asked by Moshe to lead a group of ten, he accepted it gladly, because he understood that this is where he was needed. The position does not define the individual; the individual defines the position!

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, was more than the *Rav* of the *Old Yishuv* in Yerushalayim; he was a world leader, a

recognized and respected sage. Yet, on *Simchas Torah*, he would dance with the children. He would grab them by their little hands while dancing and swirl them around the *Sifrei Torah*, to the accompaniment of the rhythmic clapping and singing of Yerushalayim's elders. *Rav Yosef Chaim* was neither young nor healthy. Despite suffering from various infirmities endemic with old age, he would gather all the children of *Battei Machseh* (a religious development) and dance the *hakafos* with them on and on. Children were his life; he offered awards and rewards to those whose achievements warranted it. He did this in order to imbue them with the sweetness of Torah. He did not have to do it. He wanted to. He could have easily deferred this endeavor to others who were younger and did not hold such a distinguished position. He defied his position!

Va'ani Tefillah

וְהַחֲזִירֵנוּ בַתְּשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לַפָּנִיךָ – *V'hachazireinu b'seshuvah sheleimah l'fanecha.*

Chazal (Bava Metzia 31a) teach that, if one finds a cow running between the vineyards in such a manner that it is indicative that it is lost (from its owner), he must care for it and make every attempt to locate its owner. Even if the animal seems to become lost numerous times, it is still our obligation to return it to its owner. *Horav Moshe, zl, m'Korbrin*, observes that, if the Torah demonstrates such concern for an animal, how much more so should we care about a fellow Jew who is "lost" – and continues to "lose himself." We should not say, "It is not my business," or "How many times can I bring him back?" *Hasheiv teshiveim*; "You shall surely return it (them)"; we must make every effort to bring back our lost brothers and sisters to their Father in Heaven.

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Peninim is published weekly by *Peninim Publications* in conjunction with the *Hebrew Academy of Cleveland*, 1860 S. Taylor Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44118

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Parashas Yisro

תשע"ז

פרשת יתרו

כה תאמר לבני ישראל
So shall you say to *Bais Yaakov* and relate to *Bnei Yisrael*. (19:3)

Chazal (Mechilta) teaches that *amirah/somar/say* implies a mild form of speech, while *hagadah/sagid/speak/relate*, implies firmness or even harshness of speech. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* spoke with the women (*Bais Yaakov*), he expressed the commandments in a manner that was compatible with their compassionate, maternal nature. When speaking with the men (*Bnei Yisrael*), the tone changed, because the *mitzvos* had to be transmitted to them with firmness. While this may be true, it is surprising that *pasuk* 6 concludes with the following words, "These are the words that you shall speak (*tidaber*) to *Bnei Yisrael*." *Rashi* adds – *lo pachos v'lo yoseir* – "no more, no less," which indicates that, in the end, no difference existed between the manner expressed to the men and to the women. It was all the same.

Horav Yosef Leib Bloch, zl, explains that *lo pachos v'lo yoseir*, no more, no less, refers to the context of what Moshe was to say: *V'ata tiheyhu li mamleches Kohanim v'goi kadosh*, "And you shall be for Me a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation." That part did not change. Both men and women are obligated to hear and ascribe to the message. It is how the message has been expressed -- the manner in which it has been given over -- that varies between men and women. *Chazal* are teaching us that a lesson must be rendered in such a manner that is most conducive to the student's ability to learn, accept, and incorporate into his/her life.

Men must hear the harsh, brutal truth: "You saw what I did to Egypt. You were privy to the miracles and wonders that decimated the Egyptians. You saw the destruction of Egypt which I wrought at the Red Sea. Take this lesson and allow it to resonate within you, so that you develop an acute understanding of punishment."

The message rendered to the women focused, not so much on what Hashem did to the Egyptians, but rather on: how much Hashem loves the Jewish People; and how far He is prepared to go to protect them. In other words, the very same message, "You saw what I did to Egypt," can be viewed from the negative perspective, the punishment of Egypt, or the positive perspective, the love of the Jews.

Horav Yeruchum Levovitz, zl, offers the same idea, that it is all in the presentation. He adds that the distinctions,

which *Chazal* have made between men and women, based upon their nature and individual temperaments, apply equally with regard to the teacher, mentor, and parent. Teachers, mentors and parents are also obligated to be cognizant of the nature of the student or child to whom his message is directed. Some students are unable to handle a lesson imparted without feeling-- in a cold, dispassionate manner. Some require a smile to accompany the lesson. Some must hear how sweet Torah learning is, while others should focus on its profundity. It is all in the packaging. The individual who cares about the nuances of his presentation is the one who is ultimately successful with the wider audience. The individual who insists on maintaining a "one size fits all" attitude in delivering his lesson will succeed in reaching a select group of students. The question that we must ask ourselves is: May we be selective in teaching Torah?

Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl, distinguishes between explicit and implicit messaging. Moshe related to *Klal Yisrael* that the concept of reward and punishment can be derived from what Hashem did to the Egyptians, thereby demonstrating that Hashem has the power to punish those who do not follow His command. He also told the nation that, if they abide by the covenant, they will be a treasure to Hashem. By accepting the Torah, *Klal Yisrael* committed itself to the responsibility of bringing the world to its goal. They were, in fact, to become the essence of the world's existence. Hashem promised them that they would become the centerpiece of Creation, giving meaning and purpose to the entire world. Last, Hashem exhorted them to become a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation. They would be people of unparalleled importance and spiritual ascendance. Their goals and thoughts would sanctify their every endeavor, thereby elevating even their worldly pursuits to consecrated status. The entire world will see that *Klal Yisrael* is different as a result of their adherence to the Torah.

Men and women alike heard these three concepts. Yet, *Bais Yaakov*, the women, heard Hashem's soft words of encouragement, while *Bnei Yisrael*, the men, perceived harsh punishment from "words as tough as sinews." It was a question of identifying with either the positive essence of the Torah or the implication of the negative punishment for breaking the covenant. Women heard the explicit, the positive, which resonated stronger with them due to their natural affinity for spirituality. Veritably, they recognized the implications of severe punishment, but they did not dwell on it, because they accepted their obligations with extreme and intense commitment.

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The men, however, analyzed and probed the consequences implicit in, “You saw what I have done to Egypt.” To them, it was much more than a perfunctory announcement of the potential of punishment for one who missteps. They immediately relived the years of slavery, followed by the Ten Plagues that befell Egypt. As they probed the depth of punishment, they also were extremely cognizant of the heights of reward that one can achieve for acting appropriately.

Two people – same message – varied perceptions. Nothing changed but the listeners, each hearing what he/she was most attuned to hearing.

כה תאמר לבית יעקב So shall you say to Baïs Yaakov. (19:3)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was commanded to give precedence to the women when he delivered Hashem’s mandate to the nation. *Rabbeinu Bachya* explains that a “good” woman has the power to inspire her son to study Torah with zest and vigor. She creates the excitement, the passion, the inherent joy. This is why I used the word “good” to describe what every Jewish mother should be. It is only if she personally feels a strong affinity for Torah that she can imbue her son (and daughter) with such emotion. The love of Torah should resonate with her son, thus encouraging a long, committed relationship with it.

Horav Aizik Sher, zl, was a strong proponent of a woman’s/mother’s obligation to be a strong *akeres ha’bayis*, foundation of her home. A mother who is truly devoted to her children makes the difference in their ultimate success as *bnei Torah*. The *Rosh Yeshivah’s* deep appreciation of a mother’s function was manifest during an incident that took place late one morning. *Rav Aizik* had a heart condition that required him to take a daily walk, which he did, accompanied by one of his students.

As they were walking one day, a young woman pushing a baby carriage, in an obvious rush, almost bowled them over. Spectators were shocked at this. The young man accompanying *Rav Aizik* muttered, “What right does she have to walk like that? Does she think she is the only one on the street?”

The *Rosh Yeshivah* remained silent until his student had released all of his anger. He then said, “I am speaking now to myself. If you want to listen in, however, you may. I wonder how much I achieved today for myself and how much I accomplished for others! Rather than deteriorate in bed all day, I arose in the morning, and got dressed. After all, it was cold. I went to *shul* to *daven*, because I require a blessing for good health and livelihood. I ate to nourish myself. I studied Torah for myself. In other words, it is now 11:00 a.m., and I have done absolutely nothing for anyone but myself!

“This young woman, however, probably slept very little during the night, having gotten up numerous times to take care of her infant. By the time she fell back asleep, she had to get up, so that she could wake her husband for *davening*. She then prepared sandwiches for her children to take to school. She woke and dressed them, prepared breakfast, bid them goodbye, and then returned to her infant. As soon as things quieted down, she received a call from the school principal asking if she could come in to substitute for a teacher who was

absent. She needed the money to help support her family. So she said, ‘Yes,’ and ran to school. Now, should I, who have done nothing for anyone other than myself, criticize this woman who has already done so much for others? Can you imagine?”

Rav Aizik then continued, citing the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Shechitah* 13, who explains that, concerning the *mitzvah* of *Shiluach ha’kein*, the reason we first send away the mother bird and only then take the chicks for ourselves is that we should not take advantage of the mother bird’s natural maternal instincts to protect her offspring. Upon seeing a human being, every bird flies away – except for the mother bird, who never abandons her offspring. Therefore, we may not capture the mother. We send her away.

The *Ohr Sameach* adds that we accord extraordinary respect towards the mother bird, because she is occupied with raising the next generation. Her function precludes her from being captured. *Rav Aizik* concluded, “Surely, a Jewish mother who provides and cares for the future of our nation deserves a little latitude.”

ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים And (how) I carried you on wings of eagles. (19:4)

It is nothing short of amazing to observe how someone who had been introduced to Torah late in his life is able to grasp its profundities and, in almost no time, to grow in Torah to the point that it is almost difficult to believe that he had not been learning all of his life. How does this occur? *Horav Simchah Wasserman, zl*, attributes this transformation to being carried “on the wings of eagles.” Hashem sees a Jew who is sincere about his learning, who wants to grow in Torah, and He raises him up, so to speak, on the wings of eagles, granting him the ability to soar like never before. One cannot do it alone. With the support of Hashem, no challenge is insurmountable, no obstacle impedes one’s growth.

This is how Jews of the generation that was liberated from Egypt were able, in the space of seven weeks, to go from being lowly slaves to accepting the Torah from Hashem Himself. Hashem helps those who deserve it, who indicate by their sincere endeavor that nothing is more important than growth in Torah. Hashem places them on the “wings of eagles,” and they soar. To obtain a “ticket” for this extraordinary “ride,” one must earn it through devotion, commitment and hard work.

Essentially, like everything in life, it is Hashem Who really transports us. The “eagles” are only a medium by which He carries out His will. Why does the *pasuk* not simply say, “I will carry you?” Why employ eagles as a vehicle of transport? I think that the eagles are used as a *nisayon*, test. All too often, we pray for a form of salvation to materialize. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence understands that salvation comes only from Hashem. Yet, we often lose sight of our true Benefactor. In other words, we could be riding on “eagles” and lose sight of Who it really is that is moving us forward/upward. Hashem says to us: “You have come so far to be worthy of *siyata diShmaya*, Divine Assistance. Do not ruin it by attributing your salvation to the eagles. It is *Ani*, I, Who is sending and granting power to those eagles.” As long as we do not lose sight of this basic principle, we will encounter no turbulence during our trip.

משה ידבר והאלקים יענוו בקול Moshe would speak, and G-d would respond to him with a voice. (19:19)

The *pasuk* refers to the Giving of the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments. The people heard the first two *Dibros* from Hashem. The next eight were transmitted by Hashem to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, who would then repeat them to *Klal Yisrael*. Millions of people were gathered there. How could Moshe’s voice possibly extend to everyone? How could such a multitude hear his voice? *Rashi* explains that Moshe spoke and, in order to make it possible for his voice to be heard, Hashem responded by granting him a (loud) voice. Hashem magnified Moshe’s voice.

The *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Shmuel* 162) asks: We are taught that *Shechinah medaberes mitoch gerono shel Moshe*, “The Divine Presence spoke from the throat of Moshe.” In other words, Moshe opened his mouth and Hashem’s “Voice” emanated from within Moshe. How are we to understand this? A student is always secondary to his *rebbe*. According to the *pasuk*, it was Moshe who initiated Hashem’s response, thereby making Moshe the “lead” (so to speak) and Hashem “second” to him. Moshe *yedaber* – Moshe would speak – *v’haElokim yaanenu b’kol*, “And G-d would respond with a voice.”

Veritably (as explained by *Horav Yaakov Meir Shechter, Shlita*, who explains the *Yalkut Shimoni*), Hashem’s voice emanated from Moshe, thus allowing for “Moshe’s voice” to be heard at a distance (*mehalech arbaim yom*, forty-day travel); why does the Torah state that Moshe spoke (and Hashem responded)? It should be the other way around, with Hashem speaking and Moshe responding! We must explain (the *Yalkut*, as explained by *Rav Shechter*) that it was due to Moshe’s unusual humility. When Moshe acted towards Hashem with total humility, it catalyzed a Heavenly response, whereby Hashem acts toward him with humility. Thus, it appears as if Moshe was speaking (his humility initiating Hashem’s humility) and Hashem was responding.

The *middah*, attribute, which one manifests toward Hashem effects a reciprocal response. Hashem acts towards us as we act toward Him. We initiate the response. On a deeper (and more clarified) note, *Rav Shechter* explains the following: When Hashem spoke to Moshe at the Burning Bush, He revealed His Holy Name as *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*; “I will be as I will be”. According to the *Midrash* (*Rabbeinu Bachya Bereishis* 2:4), Hashem was telling Moshe, “Just as you will be with Me, I will be with you”. In other words, the way we relate to Hashem, He will relate to us. The *middah* that we use in our relationship with Hashem is the same *middah* with which Hashem deals with us. To the degree, that we struggle to overcome the challenges and obstacles set before us by the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, that is the extent to which Hashem shines His light upon us. In other words, success or failure is really determined by us.

Rav Shechter quotes from the *Kedushas Levi* and *Toldos Yaakov Yosef* who relate in the name of the *Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh, zl*, that man is compared to a ladder standing on earth with its head reaching up to the Heavens. This is what *Yaakov Avinu* saw in his dream. A human being joins Heaven with earth. Even when a person stands on earth, his head can soar and reach into the Heavens; thus, his words and actions

can have efficacy in all of the worlds.

This, explains the holy *Baal Shem Tov*, is alluded to by *David Hamelech* when he says, *Hashem tzilcha*, “Hashem is your shadow” (*Tehillim* 121:5). Just as a shadow mimics a person’s movements precisely, so, too, the way Hashem treats us is a reflection of our own behavior. Everything is a response to our actions and attitude. When we treat a family member or friend in a certain manner – be it with anger, negativity or criticism, – or conversely – with patience, kindness, a smile – we create a pattern which Hashem employs when dealing with us! Thus, when we treat our opponents with love (as difficult as it might be), when we show compassion (regardless of their infraction), Hashem treats us accordingly.

Now, we turn to try to understand Moshe *Rabbeinu’s* humility and how it brought Hashem “down” to him, so that Hashem was able to speak through Moshe. The Torah teaches that Hashem spoke with Moshe *Panim el Panim*, “Face-to-face” (*Shemos* 33:11). The *Baal Shem Tov* explains this with an analogy to a pool of water. When a person faces a pool of water and stares at his reflection in the water, his distance from the water determines how much and exactly what he sees. When he stands upright, he sees his reflection, but it appears somewhat distant. As he bends down closer to the water, his image moves closer. When he lowers himself all the way to the water, his reflection literally becomes “face-to-face.”

Hashem is elevated so far beyond our imagination that the human intellect can neither fathom anything concerning Him through the power of our own minds. He is simply incomprehensible. Nonetheless, Hashem, Who has boundless love for His children-- a love that we can neither understand nor explain, for it is beyond the realm of human understanding -- and because we were His first thought when creating the world -- grants us the possibility of seeking Him out and knowing something of His ways. In other words, whatever we know or perceive of Hashem is what He allows us to perceive. How does this transference take place? Hashem lowers Himself (sort of makes Himself accessible) to a level that is within the parameters of our understanding. Therefore, when we act with humility, when we humble ourselves, we awaken Hashem’s own “humility,” and so He descends from His true greatness to meet us at our level. Moshe was the *anav mikol adam asher al pnei ha’adamah*, humblest man on earth. Therefore, Hashem responded (to Moshe’s humility) by “humbling” Himself, and He spoke to Moshe, “face- to- face,” just as a person speaks with his good friend.

Thus, it is precisely by conducting ourselves with humility that we are able to bring Hashem into our lives. In order to achieve true closeness to Hashem, true spiritual greatness, one must accompany his quest with true humility. While none of us can even hope to achieve Moshe’s level of humility, we can bring Hashem closer by virtue of our attempt to become more humble.

Humility means not to think only of oneself, but to recognize that there are also other external to himself. One does not have to put himself down, but certainly not raise himself up. Know who you are and be cognizant of your abilities. Do not flaunt them, but, if needed, do not shy away from doing