



From the desk of  
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1

## Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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### TORAT

### Parashat Bamidbar

### HAMELECH

#### Deserted

*Parashat Bamidbar* classically comes just before *Chag HaShavuot*. What is the meaning of this juxtaposition? The opening verse reads, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, in the *Ohel Moed* (Tent of Meeting) etc."

Why do we have to be told that this instruction was given in the Sinai Desert? A desert is barren. A desert is bare. It is free-for-all. Anyone can come in and tread upon its sand. It is symbolic of humility. It represents the person who allows anyone to "step" on him. He never feels intruded upon.

Torah was given in a desert to teach that Torah resides upon a person who displays humility. Someone who is self-effacing will be able to make a genuine acquisition of Torah.

#### Sinai

When Hashem first spoke to Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe asked in which merit will Yisrael leave Mitzrayim. Hashem responded (Shemot 3:12), "This is for you the sign that I have sent you: when you take the nation out of Mitzrayim, serve Hashem upon this mountain."

At first, Moshe was reluctant to accept the task of being Hashem's emissary to take the Jewish People out of Mitzrayim. Moshe was a very

humble person. He did not view himself as worthy of such an important position.

Hashem was telling him that specifically due to his humility, that is exactly why he was chosen. Hashem was saying: When I give the Torah, many haughty mountains will jump at the opportunity to have the Torah given upon them. But I will put them all aside and reside My Presence upon Sinai, the humblest of mountains. That is my way of doing things. I endear the humble. And that is why I choose you, the humblest of men, to be My emissary.

#### Humility

This explains a puzzling wording at the beginning of *Pirkei Avot*. The opening Mishnah reads: Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua. What is meant by receiving the Torah "from Sinai"? He received the Torah from Hashem at Sinai, not from Sinai?

The *mishnah* is teaching in what merit Moshe was chosen to be the one through whom the Torah would be given from Hashem to the Jewish People. Once again, it was due to his great humility. This was a virtue which Moshe shared with Mt. Sinai. Thus, Moshe received the Torah due to his humility, which was represented by the humblest of mountains.



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2

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“And transmitted it to Yehoshua.” In that generation, there were numerous scholars who were intellectually wiser than Yehoshua. So why was Yehoshua chosen to be Moshe’s successor? Once again, it was due to his remarkable humility. Yehoshua used to arrange the benches in Moshe’s Beit Midrash. He would clean up the *Beit Midrash*. Most significantly, he would humbly escort his *rebbe* Moshe and serve him in every capacity which he could. He afforded himself no honor. He honored his revered *rebbe* and viewed him as the representative of the *Shechinah*, which he was.

### The Bank Teller

A person in this world is endowed with many gifts. The haughty man views himself as the true owner and cause of all of his wealth, strength and wisdom. The humble man always sees these assets as ongoing gifts, never attributing them to his own achievements. He views himself as nothing more than a bank teller who may have thousands of dollars pass through his fingers daily. Nonetheless, he does not feel one iota richer. He knows that the money is not his.

### Hate *Rabbanut*

In Pirkei Avot (1:10), Shemayah teaches: Love work and hate “*rabbanut*”. What is this *rabbanut* and why is it to be despised? Certainly, the commoners must admire their spiritual leaders.

This is a lesson to the leaders themselves, to always conduct themselves with humility. They should never take a position for the sake of personal aggrandizement.

Yosef Hatsaddik was certainly a righteous and pious individual. Nonetheless, his life was shortened ten years because he allowed his brothers to refer to their father as “your servant” ten times in Yosef’s presence. Yosef was not yet ready to reveal his identity, so he did not protest. But this was considered a breach of fatherly respect and an unwarranted display of conceit, and it cost him ten years. Regarding this, our Sages bemoan: Woe is to positions of authority, as they have the tendency to bury their occupants! (Pesachim 87b)

This does not mean to say that public office is to be avoided altogether. Someone who is fit for the job and can help Klal Yisrael perform *mitsvot* better should take the position. He just must know what is motivating him. He should do it for the right reasons: to increase *Kevod Shomayim*, and not for his own *kavod*.

### How Humble

*Baruch Hashem*, I was *zocheh* to meet with Maran Harav Ovadia Yosef *zt”l* on a number of occasions. On the final visit, just before he was hospitalized, I davened with him and then he



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3

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called me over. He wanted to tell me something, and his style was to do so via a *devar Torah*.

He posed the following question. On the one hand, we are told that Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest man on earth. The Torah calls him "Anav me'od." On the other hand, in Pirkei Avot (4:4), Rabbi Levitus instructs all people to be very very humble – "me'od me'od hevei shefal ruach". How are we to reconcile these two sources? If Moshe, the humblest of all men, only had one "me'od" attached to his humility, how can everyone else be expected to have two?!

Rabbi Ovadiah answered: Everyone is expected to have two *me'od's* of humility, and Moshe had three! One more dose than everyone else!

Isn't that a beautiful thought?!

### A Jewish Home

Where does the *Shechinah* reside? Amongst the humble.

Our Sages teach that the *Shechinah* resides in a home where there is marital harmony. Why? It is the same principle. A basic ingredient of *shalom bayit* is mutual humility, putting your spouse's needs and dignity before your own. A home built upon such foundations is indeed akin to a *mishkan*. An "Ohel Moed" is made when its occupants view themselves as insignificant as desert sand.

### What Do You Think?

Speaking of the Jewish home, years of experience in attempting to iron out creases and wrinkles and strengthening the bond between husband and wife have taught me that the root of 90% of *shalom bayit* issues is simply conceit! Hard to imagine, but true!

Well, what does the Torah have to say about that? Too many arguments are simply to show who is "boss" and who is making the decisions in the home.

Hashem teaches us the lesson of humility in the very creation of Man. Hashem addresses the angels and says, "Let us make man." Hashem does not need any angels. He asked for their opinion, and most of them discouraged the idea. He certainly knew that His plan would be met with opposition. But that did not stop Him from consulting with them and hearing out their opinion. Why? Just to show us that we should always act with humility and consult with others before making important decisions.

Gm. Bava Metzia (59a) teaches to consult with your wife. If she is short, the Gemara says, lean over and whisper to her.

One of the first terms used to talk about a wife in the Torah (Bereishit 2:22) is הצלע. Says the Chid"a: This is the same letters as לעצה – for counsel, to show that one of the main functions of a wife is to have someone to consult with and ask for advice!



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### Why Eat Hamantashen?

What do we eat on Purim? "Oznei Haman" – Hamantashen in Hebrew are called "Ears of Haman." Why, of all things, do we retain a yearly remembrance of Haman's ears? Perhaps because that is the only good thing about Haman: he never made decisions on his own; he always consulted with his wife!

### Water and Women

When Klal Yisroel were in the desert, they received water in the merit of Miriam Haneviah. Water is an absolute necessity for life, but too much of it out in the open is hazardous. A person needs water to live, yet in water a person could also drown.

Additionally, water is used in building buildings and in all cooking and baking. But in the final product, you can't even tell that it is there. So too, women are behind every good thing in this world, and the really good women succeed at keeping themselves hidden and out of the limelight.

### The Kotel

After the Six Day War in 1967, the *Kotel Hamaaravi* (Western Wall) returned to Jewish hands. Everyone was so excited to once again be able to visit this remnant of *Har Habayit*, where the *Shechinah* promised never to abandon.

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe came up with the following acronym. He said, "If you want to feel the *Shechinah*, go to the **כותל**." He explained, "**כותל** is an acronym for what we say at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* **לכל תהיה כעפר לכל תהיה** – may my soul be as dust to everyone. This is a thrice daily request uttered by all. And its **ראשי תיבות** form the acrostic of **כותל Kotel**. That is a *Kotel* worth visiting daily – three times a day. The *Shechinah* never left such a person who yearns for humility."

### Shlishi or Else

Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshitz was once in an unfamiliar town for *Yomim Noraim*. He found a place to daven in *shul* next to an older man who seemed to pray with great concentration. This man prayed audibly and Reb Yonatan overheard the special attention given to this phrase "*venafshi ke'afor lakol tehiyeh*." It was an uplifting experience. That was Rosh Hashanah.

Again on Yom Kippur, Reb Yonatan sat in the same seat, and could not help but be impressed by this Jew's prayers and confessions. *Maariv* and *Shacharit* went by. Then came *Kriat Hatorah*. The *gabbai* called up a certain person for *Shlishi* and then this elderly Jew for *Revii*. But he did not budge. The *gabbai* looked his way and said, "Nu," but he did not move.

The *gabbai* took a few steps in his direction, smiled and said, "It's your *aliyah*; we called your name."



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Then the man opened his mouth. In front of the whole *shul*, he shouted, "What! You gave him *Shlishi* and me *Revii*! What *chutzpah*! Do you know who he is and who I am?! No, I'm not going up! Next time you'll know to give me *Shlishi*!"

Reb Yonatan was astounded. How could it be that this man who prayed so sincerely could get so worked up over an *aliyah*. The *gabbai* had no choice but to get someone else for *Revii* and continue the *Kriah*.

After the services, Reb Yonatan quietly asked the elderly man, "How is it that you pray so humbly, yet get so indignant over an *aliyah*?"

The man explained, "When I pray, I stand before *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. Just the thought of that is very humbling. But compared to that fellow, ...who is he?! He's no one compared to me!"

This person did not acquire true humility.

### The "Humble" Priest

In the days of the Rambam, a certain priest earned a reputation for humility. The Rambam could not believe it. He decided to check it out firsthand. He went to visit him and found him to conduct himself quite humbly. He was quite respectful to the Rambam. The Rambam observed him for some time and could not discover a flaw in his character.

As he was taking leave of his host, the Rambam asked, "May I ask you a question?"

"Why, certainly," said his host.

"The Torah says that Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest man on earth. Now that I have seen you and your humility, this verse is quite puzzling. Is it not true that I am standing in the presence of someone even more humble than Moshe?"

The priest replied, "I have been troubled with this question for a long time now."

The Rambam now knew that the priest's outward display of humility was a guise for inner conceit.

### Work on It

Real humility takes years of perseverance. It is not acquired overnight. We pray for it three times a day. Let us pay attention to what we are asking for as we say, "*Venafshi ke'afar lakol tehiyeh.*"

Let us prepare ourselves for insults and attacks to our dignity. Let us be prepared to greet degradation with silence. If we yearn for success, we need Hashem's assistance, and Hashem accompanies the humble. He happily grants them riches, brains and brawn, as they view these qualities as obligations to carry out His will.

Let us view ourselves as bank tellers and time will tell as we reap the many benefits.

Fondly,

Mordechai Malka