



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Shelach

HAMELECH

The Ants in the Tree

The Meraglim went to Eretz Yisrael and came back with a scary report. "The people of the land were giants!" they exclaimed. "We felt in our own eyes like grasshoppers and that is what we were in their eyes."

How did they know how the inhabitants viewed them? They overheard them saying, "We see people in the trees the size of ants."

But it all started from, "We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers."

If you think lowly of yourself, you cannot really expect others to think highly of you.

But is this correct? Are we supposed to think highly of ourselves or lowly?

Doesn't Rambam say that by most midot, we are to take the moderate road, whereas when it comes to conceit, we are to go to the other extreme and conduct ourselves with utmost humility?

That is true, but there is still something called "too much humility". We can call it *anavah* vs. *shiflut*. *Anavah* is healthy humility, the realization that all of our talents are endowments from Hashem to be used for a higher purpose. *Shiflut* is to view oneself void of any talents or capabilities. It is denying the fact that one has been endowed. It is actually a result of laziness and ungratefulness. It is used as an excuse to do

absolutely nothing, for if I am good-for-nothing, what am I worth and what can I do?

Hillel the Humble

A shining example is Hillel. In Shabbat 31a we find a number of examples of Hillel's excellent humility. On the other hand, in Suka 53a, we find Hillel announcing, "If I am here, everyone is here. If I am not here, who is here?"

Such a statement, on the surface, seems quite self-centered, putting himself in center stage, ascribing himself great significance. But if we think about it deeper, we will understand that Hillel was truly a humble individual. At the same time, he did not allow his humility to excuse himself from responsibility. If there was a job to be done, a mission to accomplish, he knew when he could be fit for the task. When no one else was up to doing what had to be done, he would rise to the challenge.

Rabbi Levitas

Now that we attempted to create this distinction between *anavah* and *shiflut*, we encounter difficulty with the *mishnah* in Pirkei Avot (4:4): Rabbi Levitas of Yavneh says: Be *shfal ruach* very very much etc. We just told you to be an *anav* and avoid *shiflut*. Rabbi Levitas advocates *shiflut*.

It seems reasonable to suggest that what Rabbi Levitas calls *shfal ruach*, we call *anavah*. It's just a matter of terminology. A person is to be aware of



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2

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his talents and capabilities. He just should not attribute them to his own brains or prowess. He should recognize them as endowments.

Bnei Aliya Are Us

Let us give a few more examples. In Suka 45b, Rashbi said: I saw Bnei Aliyah and they are few. If they are 1,000 – I and my son are amongst them. If they are 100 – I and my son are amongst them. If they are two, I and my son are they!

He was quite convinced of his spiritual superiority over the other members of his generation. He also had no hesitation sharing this assertion. Why is this not considered to be conceit?

We must explain that having an acute awareness of one's high spiritual level is not incongruous with humility.

Hey! What About Me?!

In Sotah 49b, the mishna states that upon Rebbi's passing, there is no more humility nor fear of sin. Rav Yosef corrected the tanna: Do not say that there is no more humility, for I am still around!

Rav Nachman told the tanna: Do not say that there is no more fear of sin, because I am here!

At first glance, Rav Yosef's objection appears to be an oxymoron. Is he boasting his humility?!

Rather, we are forced to conclude that you can know how great you are and still be humble.

Know Your Worth

Rambam (Sanhedrin chap. 12) says that man was created as an individual so as to give over the message that, throughout history, each individual is equivalent to all of mankind! One who eliminates one soul is as if he committed cosmocide. And one who saves one soul, it is like he save the entire world.

Each person should view it as if Hashem made the whole world for his sake.

Sometimes we see individuals whose actions and/or words affected the entire world.

Be Yourself

As he lay on his deathbed, R' Zusha began smiling from ear to ear. His disciples inquired, "Rebbi, why are you so happy?"

Reb Zusha replied, "When I go to the Supreme Court in Heaven, I will not be asked, 'Why were you not Moshe Rabbeinu? Why were you not Rabbi Akiva?'"

Reb Zusha then burst into tears.

"Rebbi, why do you sob so?" the *talmidim* expressed their concern.

Reb Zusha sighed, "Oy! They are going to ask me: Why weren't you Zusha?!"

Patience and Perseverance

Everyone knows the story of how Rav Preida had that one *talmid* who, for some reason, could not grasp the lesson until Rav Preida taught it 400



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3

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times. On one occasion, he even had to repeat it 800 times!

Now, Rav Preida was a busy man. He was a Talmudic scholar. I am sure that he could have accomplished a whole lot in that time which he dedicated to his student. Why did he give that slow boy so much time and energy?

Well, just like Rav Preida must have had a lot of patience, the student also displayed a great deal of perseverance. So Rav Preida was convinced that for such a student, no effort was wasted.

Yes, I remember a *bochur* who did not seem to grasp much, but he would review and review and eventually he finished *Shas*!

Perseverance Pays Off

A bachur came to the Yeshivah of the Chatam Sofer. He was 18 years old. He said, "I want to learn Torah."

He had not learned until that point. The *bachurim* laughed at him.

But the Chatam Sofer scowled and then scolded, "If he wants to learn, we will help him learn."

He arranged for the boy private tutors throughout the day. It was a slow process. The boy was quite forgetful. But he never gave up. Eventually he became an accomplished scholar, a *dayan* in Mattersdorf, a rav in Shleining and thereafter Av Beit Din in Niezaf. He would exchange letters of *divrei Torah* with the Chatam Sofer.

The Netziv

Who hasn't heard of the Netziv? How he became the Netziv, he recounted as he celebrated the publishing of his famed work on the *She'iltot* entitled *Ha'amek She'eilah*.

When Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin was a young boy, he overheard his father telling his mother that it seemed that Naftali was not successful in his learning; perhaps they should look into teaching him a trade.

At that, Naftali ran to his parents, embraced them and pledged to be diligent at his Torah studies.

"What would have happened had I not overheard that conversation?" asked the Netziv. "I would have gone to learn a trade. I would have been a good Jew, honest in business, supportive of Torah study, thinking that I'm doing my best.

"But after 120, I would have been shown the *Ha'amek She'eilah* and they would have asked me, 'Nu, Naftali, why did you not write and publish this *sefer*? We were waiting for you to do that!'

"I would not understand what they would be talking about! Who? Me? A simple craftsman? You wanted me to write a *sefer* such as this?!"

So, on the one hand, let's be humble. But, on the other hand, let us become aware of our endowments and utilize them for the honor of Hashem.

**Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka**