



## הרב הראשי הרב מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, דרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד  
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, ת"ת דרך המלך,  
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### Parashat Shlach

#### Man Must Recognize His Abilities and Utilize Them

Our *parasha* states (*Bamidbar* 13:33) that when the spies returned from scouting the land, they reported, "There we saw the *Nefilim*, the children of the giant, and we looked like grasshoppers in our eyes; and so we looked in their eyes."

#### The Words of Our Sages

Rashi comments that the spies heard the giants saying to each other, "There are ants in our vineyards that look like people." Rashi's source is *Sotah* 35a. There, the Gemara quotes Rav Mesharshia as saying that the spies were liars; for while they could certainly state that they viewed themselves as grasshoppers, could they say with certainty that this is how the giants viewed them? The Gemara responds that they could in fact attest to this, for when the people of the land would serve food to mourners, they customarily did so underneath trees. When the spies saw this, they climbed the trees and sat there. They heard the giants exclaiming to one another, "Did you see men in the trees, who looked like ants?"

#### Questions

- 1- All the commentators ask, the Torah stated that the spies said that they viewed themselves like **grasshoppers**. Why then did the Gemara and Rashi write **ants** and not grasshoppers?
- 2- Why was it necessary for the spies to say how they **viewed** themselves? The main was thing was to say that compared to the giants they seemed tiny!

#### The Way of Man

Most individuals do not value their talents and abilities enough. Therefore, they feel that they are incapable of getting involved in communal activities, since they lack self-confidence and are embarrassed lest they fail and not succeed. This is especially difficult when the community needs someone to assume responsibility over a spiritual matter. Then he is even more likely to feel that he is not up to the task, and he generally shuns the limelight. Perhaps in his heart he feels that this is a display of modesty, lest he become prideful over his accomplishments. However, our Torah teaches us that modesty is not what lies at the root of his behavior. Rather, it stems from a lack of self-esteem, which man has developed because of laziness. Man is obligated to be aware of his abilities and to utilize them, for this is his purpose in the world. Every individual possesses strengths and talents that will enable him to fulfill his role in the world. One who does not utilize these strengths is guilty of acting negligently with his role and purpose in life.

#### Principle of Rabbeinu Ovadiah M'Bartenura

Now we can explain the aforementioned words of our Sages. Rabbeinu Ovadiah M'Bartenura writes that in essence, by answering one question we can answer the other. The spies believed that the



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giants viewed them as ants. *But this began by their viewing themselves as grasshoppers.* Others will always view you less than how you view yourself. The Torah is teaching us that if they would have known to value themselves and to trust in Hashem, they would definitely not have viewed themselves like grasshoppers, and as a result, the giants would not have viewed them like ants.

### Conflicting Behavior

According to this principle, we can ask about what appears to be an apparent contradiction in the behavior of Hillel Hazaken. One on hand, our Sages point out his trait of humility, as they teach in *Avot DeRebbi Natan* (15) and in *Masechet Kallah* (10). There our Sages teach, "One should always be humble like Hillel and not strict like Shammai." They go on to relate a story about two individuals, who waged a bet. They said that whichever one of them could get Hillel angry would receive 400 zuz. One of them therefore went to Hillel on *erev Shabbat*, when Hillel was washing his hair in the honor of Shabbat. He approached the door of Hillel's house and asked loudly and disrespectfully if there was someone who lived there named Hillel. Nevertheless, Hillel put on his head covering and went out to greet him. Hillel asked him softly, "My son, why have you come?" The man responded that he wished to ask Hillel a question. "Ask, my son! Ask!" was Hillel's reply. The man asked Hillel why the Babylonians' heads were oval-shaped. Hillel praised the man for asking a very good question and then proceeded to answer that the shape of their heads was due to the fact that their midwives were incompetent and did not know how to deliver babies in the proper fashion. The man then waited an hour and returned, once again disturbing Hillel in the middle of his Shabbat preparations. Once again he posed a ridiculous question. Nevertheless, Hillel once again praised the man and responded gently. This situation repeated itself yet again, with the man returning to ask a silly question. Yet Hillel could not be angered. Finally, the man told Hillel that he had many more questions to ask, yet he feared that Hillel would get angry. However, Hillel once again responded, "Ask whatever question you would like." Frustrated in not having succeeded in what he set out to do, the man asked Hillel, "Are you Hillel, the one people call the *Nasi* of *Yisrael*?" "Yes!" replied Hillel. "Then there should not be any more like you in *Yisrael*!" exclaimed the man. "My son, why do you speak this way?" asked Hillel. To which the man responded, "Because I lost 400 zuz because of you." Hillel therefore concluded that the man should be careful, "for it was better to lose 400 zuz and then another 400 zuz than to get Hillel angry." Our Sages continue by telling us the story about the three converts who came before Shammai to be converted but were rejected, and then came before Hillel, only to be accepted. They therefore exclaimed that the modesty of Hillel brought them beneath the wings of the *Shechina*.

On the other hand, in *Masechet Succah* (53a) it states that Hillel said something which would seemingly imply the opposite. There it says that when Hillel was in a joyous state of mind at the *Simchat Beit Hashoeva*, he said, "If I am here, everyone is here. But if I am not here, who is here?" These words seem to imply that Hillel felt that he was everything – is that not arrogance?

### The Difference Between Humility and Lack of Self-Esteem



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I saw in the *sefer Sichot Mussar* by Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l an answer to the above question. He says that here, our Sages are teaching us an important principle in *avodas Hashem*. He explains that that there is a very essential difference between humility and lowliness. Humility means that a person knows that everything he has is from Hashem and not from his own strength, abilities, nor wisdom. Rather, everything is a gift from Hashem. This is humility. Yet one who lacks self-esteem and feels that he can't accomplish anything or utilize the abilities that Hashem has granted him, is not to be mistaken with humility. A claim will be leveled against such an individual in Heaven, because he is required to make the most of his G-d given talents. This can be compared to the manager of a bank. The money he is handling certainly does not belong to him, and he does fool himself into thinking that he is a very wealthy man. So too, man must know the value of his abilities and intellect that Hashem placed inside of him and make use of them. Every man has a purpose in this world for which he was created, and he was given the tools to utilize this purpose. If man does not do so, he will be charged for not acting responsibly by fulfilling his purpose in the world, and he will be punished. Therefore, everyone must make the most of their abilities in order to fulfill their role in the world. Yet at the same time, man must act humbly, understanding that everything stems from Hashem. He should not lose sight of this and begin to act arrogantly. Hillel was truly humble, but he also understood the talents he was blessed with for the sake of serving Hashem to the fullest.

### At the Source Might Lay Haughtiness

Another difference between lowliness and humility is as follows: There are many people who say that they are nothing and tend to minimize themselves. This stems either from arrogance or a lack of self-worth, but it is not true humility. The test is when he finds himself in a situation where others are insulting him. How does he react? Does he act patiently and control himself, or does he respond immediately and sharply? By responding in such a fashion, he reveals to all that his so called "humility" was no more than a facade, and that he is no more than an arrogant man in disguise.

### Story About the Priest in the Time of the Rambam

In the Rambam's time, there was a priest who acted with great humility. He acted respectfully even to small children, and his name spread as being even more humble than Moshe Rabbeinu, *keviyachol*. The Rambam wished to learn about his nature and went to visit him. When he arrived, he greeted the Rambam with honor fit for a king and served him in an unusually respectful manner. The more the Rambam sat with him, the more his amazement grew. How could a priest have risen to such a high level? He was unable to find any flaw in his behavior. However, when the Rambam left, he asked the priest a question. The entire time he sat with him, he said, he kept thinking that the Torah states that Moshe was the humblest man alive; it would appear that **his** name should have been mentioned! The priest responded that he too, found this question exceedingly difficult, and he did not have an answer to it. Then the Rambam understood that it had all been an act; the priest acted humbly so that he would be honored by the people.



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### Words of Mussar

We have learned that even though man must act humbly, but he must not have a negative perception of himself. Therefore, he is obligated to recognize his abilities and talents and to utilize them as much as he can; for this is man's purpose in the world. Many times, we find that people think that they are acting humbly and lower themselves. But sadly, this either stems from a lack of self-esteem, which renders him unable to demand himself to be assertive for the sake of benefitting the public. Or it may stem from arrogance, for he truly wants honor. Even though now he appears humble, the minute someone insults or offends him, he immediately voices his disapproval and defends his honor like a starving lion. Therefore it is incumbent upon each individual to examine himself and recognize his strengths and abilities. As our Sages say, "In a place where there is no man – you be the man." Every individual, according to his own specific talents, is capable of changing the world. He simply must have the will to do so. For nothing stands before man's will.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rav Mordechai Malka