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Moshe: The Humblest of Men

Rabbi Alex Hecht

In the course of its narrative about Aharon and Miriam's conversation criticizing Moshe for separating from his wife (Bamidbar 12:1-10, Sifri Bamidbar 99), and Hashem's subsequent rebuke, the Torah tells us, "And the man Moshe was very humble, more than any person on the face of the earth." (12:3) Why does the Torah seemingly interrupt the narrative to mention this feature of Moshe's character, and what is the precise definition of the humility to which the Torah refers?

Why mention humility? Defense

A midrash suggests that the Torah is highlighting Moshe's humility, to explain why Hashem intervened. (Sifri Bamidbar 100) In this midrash, Rabbi Natan contends that Moshe actually heard Miriam and Aharon's conversation, in which they noted that they were also prophets and yet they had not been instructed to cease marital relations. However, due to his humility, Moshe did not defend himself against their accusing remarks. Rabbi Natan interprets the biblical passage as follows: "And Hashem heard and the man Moshe [heard], but Moshe suppressed the matter," because he was very humble.

Consequently, as Ramban explains (commentary to 12:3), it was necessary for Hashem to come to Moshe's defense. Hashem explained that Moshe's conduct was proper because He communicated with Moshe in a more direct manner than He did with other prophets. As the Torah continues, "[Hashem] said, 'Hear My

words, If there shall be prophets among you, in a vision shall I, Hashem, make Myself known to him; in a dream shall I speak with him. Not so is My servant Moshe... Mouth to mouth do I speak with him, in a clear vision, and not in riddles, at the image of Hashem does he gaze.'" (12:6-8, ArtScroll tr.)

Why mention humility? Accusation

In a different understanding of the Torah's mention of Moshe's humility, Don Isaac Abarbanel (ad loc.) contends that the statement about Moshe's humility is not the voice of the Narrator, but is actually part of Miriam and Aharon's dialogue. According to this interpretation, Miriam and Aharon said, "Does Hashem not also speak to us and hear our voices, without us ceasing marital relations? If Moshe did this out of a sense of humility, is he more humble than everyone on the face of the earth, who never conducted themselves in this way?" After hearing this, Hashem confronted them to explain the unique behaviour required of Moshe due to the directness of their communication.

Why mention humility? Qualification

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv) adds that the Torah mentions the singular status of Moshe's prophecy to emphasize the fundamental principle of faith that there was never, nor will there ever be, a prophet like Moshe, who spoke with Hashem – metaphorically – face-to-face. (Ha'amek Davar to 12:3; Devarim 34:10, Rambam to Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1) The Talmud says that humility is a prerequisite for prophecy ([Nedarim 38a](#));

therefore, the fact that Moshe was uniquely humble enabled him to be granted a unique level of prophecy.

What is humility?

In addition to clarifying context, we must clarify the definition of "very humble", when used to describe Moshe. The midrash cited above implies that humility describes a certain meekness, in which Moshe suppressed any hurt he may have felt when hearing Miriam and Aharon's remarks. Other commentators, including the Netziv, go a step further, and define Moshe's unique level of humility as absolute immunity to pain from insult or slight to honour. (Ha'amek Davar to 12:3) The Netziv emphasizes that a humble person, such as Moshe, is not one who does not recognize their stature. Rather, such a person does not exert excessive authority as a result of their stature, and does not expect excessive honour. (See [Sotah 49b](#), [Horayot 14a](#))

Furthermore, a humble person recognizes that all of his or her abilities and accomplishments are gifts from Hashem, and must be used in His service. (Orchot Tzadikim, Gate 2) Indeed, Moshe used all of his G-d-given strengths, and directed all of his actions to serving Him, earning him the lofty title of "servant of Hashem" upon his passing. (Radak to Yehoshua 1:1) By mentioning Moshe's extraordinary humility, the Torah provides instruction for becoming the greatest servants of Hashem possible.

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Summary

Our chapter begins with a visit by the Queen of Sheba, who wishes to test King Solomon's famed wisdom. She is very impressed with his brilliance as well as his wealth, and she praises Hashem, "May Hashem your G-d be blessed for selecting you and placing you upon the throne of Israel, in His eternal love for Israel. He placed you as king to perform justice and righteousness." The queen gives Solomon great wealth, including gold, spices and gems. The text also mentions Solomon giving the queen "all that she asked," in addition to material gifts; Rashi and other commentators explain that this refers to sharing wisdom with her. (10:1-13)

Embedded in the description of the Queen of Sheba's visit are two sentences which describe unparalleled *almug* wood brought by the fleet of King Hiram of Tyre. *Almug* is sometimes translated as sandalwood, a heavy, aromatic and expensive wood. King Solomon used it for several purposes, including the entrance to the Beit haMikdash and to his palace, which he displayed to the Queen. (10:11-12)

The chapter then describes large quantities of gold which Solomon

received in gifts and taxes. He used this to create shields, which may have been more decorative than functional. The Egyptians take those shields in Melachim I 14, but they seem to be recovered later; see Yeshayah 22:8 and Divrei haYamim II 32:5. (10:14-17)

We are then told about Solomon's massive throne of ivory and gold, adorned with lions. As with other aspects of Solomon's wealth, the text emphasizes that this throne was without parallel in any other land. The text then continues to describe how Solomon's utensils were made of gold rather than silver, because he possessed so much gold. However, it also notes that Hiram's fleet brought other expensive materials, as well as exotic animals. Additional wealth came from people who sought to hear "the wisdom that G-d had placed in his heart." (10:18-25)

The chapter concludes by describing King Solomon's 1,400 chariots and 12,000 charioteers, and the way he relied on Egypt to provide the horses. In these verses, the text also mentions that Solomon shared his wealth, distributing silver and cedarwood generously. (10:26-29)

Insight

This chapter may be the most hopeful chapter in Tanach, describing a brief period when a Jewish kingdom in Israel was respected for its association with Hashem, and was secure militarily and financially. One might compare this with similar texts describing a Jewish utopia; see Devarim 28:1-14, Shemuel I 7, Yeshayah 11 and Divrei haYamim II 32:20-23, as well as Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 12:5.

Nonetheless, we see the seeds of King Solomon's demise here as well. Devarim 17:14-20 specifically prohibits kings from amassing gold, silver and horses. It even warns against pursuing **Egyptian** horses, as Solomon did. From that viewpoint, even the Queen of Sheba's visit may be seen negatively; King Solomon's open exhibition of grandeur may be compared to King Chizkiyahu's display to foreign visitors, which the prophet Yeshayah criticized. (Yeshayah 39)

We will see the negative side of Solomon's reign evolve in the coming chapters.

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The Israeli Farmer: Tithing Emergency Crops: Sugar Beets**Rabbi Adam Friedmann**

The general rule for the tithes of *terumah* and *ma'aser* is that they are only taken from produce which is considered edible for human beings. (Mishnah Ma'asrot 1:1; Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Terumot 2:2) However, for some crops, this definition cannot be neatly applied. A good example is sugar beets. These beets are a close relative of the red table or sea beets we find in the supermarket. However, sugar beets contain a higher concentration of sugar and are much harder, and are therefore more difficult to eat than other beets. Their main use is sugar production, although they can be eaten, and sometimes are, in times of need. Do sugar beets require tithing? This question was addressed to Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli; his analysis follows.

Notwithstanding the general rule about edible crops mentioned above, we find that a mishnah discusses what to do with *ervil* that is *terumah*. (Terumot 11:9) *Ervil*, also known as bitter vetch, is similar in form to red lentils. To be made edible for humans, it must be boiled several times over in water to remove its bitter taste. As a result, it is not generally eaten by people. However, it is excellent cattle feed. The fact that this mishnah discusses *terumah* that had been separated from a crop of *ervil* implies that there is an obligation to tithe it. Why should this be, given that *ervil* is not edible for humans? The Talmud Yerushalmi (Challah 4:4) explains that the requirement to tithe *ervil* is rabbinic, and was decreed during the days of King David when there was a famine (see Shemuel II:21). At that time, *ervil* was eaten as a subsistence crop.

The case of *ervil* seems to be a good model for sugar beets. It

is a crop that is generally not eaten by people, but can be in dire circumstances. This might lead us to believe that sugar beets ought to require tithing based on a rabbinic decree.

However, the preceding seems to conflict with another halachah. The Talmud (Niddah 51a) indicates that certain crops (examples include savory and hyssop), which are only occasionally eaten by people, are only obligated in tithes if they are initially planted for the purpose of human consumption. This halachah is cited by Rambam immediately after the preceding rule about *ervil*. Given that these crops are not only eaten by people, but are occasionally even grown for this purpose, it stands to reason that they would certainly be consumed in times of need. If so, why does it make any difference what purpose they are planted for? Surely, they should be subsumed under the rabbinic decree discussed above. Based on this question, and other proofs, it seems that the decree regarding *ervil* must have been restricted to that crop alone, and not applied to all emergency foods.

As a result, Rabbi Yisraeli rules that, excepting *ervil*, any crop which is not eaten regularly in its natural state by humans, even if it *can* be eaten in times of need, is exempt from tithes. This includes sugar beets.

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Biography

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu was born in 1929, to Rabbi Salman and Mazal Eliyahu of the old Jewish quarter of Jerusalem. The family, poor to begin with, was hard-hit with the passing of Rabbi Salman in 1940, and young Mordechai had to work as a hummus seller in the Jerusalem's old market. Despite these difficulties, Mordechai also studied in the famous Porat Yosef Yeshiva, under Rabbi Ezra Atiyeh.

As a young man, Rabbi Mordechai looked for ways to strengthen the connection of the young Jewish state to Torah and its observance. His passion and commitment led him to try and prevent public Shabbat desecration and selling of non-kosher food in Jerusalem, using aggressive force. Rabbi Mordechai later admitted that he was mistaken in the path he had chosen, but stayed loyal to his life's mission of drawing G-d's people closer to Him.

Rabbi Mordechai continued his studies, and at the early age of 31 he was appointed as a Dayan (rabbinical judge), serving in Beer Sheva. Seven years later he was called upon to serve in the Supreme Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem. In 1983 he was elected Israel's Chief Sephardic Rabbi. However, his high and respected position did not change his dedication to teach Torah to the simplest people or to the youngest children. He took the initiative, visiting not only yeshivot but also elementary schools, and even pre-schools, to look for new opportunities to encourage the students' growth in Torah and mitzvot.

Rabbi Eliyahu recognized the urgent need for books of Halachah addressing modern questions for the new Jewish state. Some of the books he wrote became the standard in Halachah for many decades, such as his book about the laws of family purity, and the siddur he published. His halachic approach integrated kabbalistic considerations and mainly followed the tradition of the Ben Ish Chai and Kaf HaChaim. This often placed him in a stricter position than was Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the other leading Sephardic authority of the generation.

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu passed away on Sivan 25, 5770 (2010).

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Torah and Translation

Was Aharon Jealous?

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Divrei Mordechai, Beha'alotcha

Translated by Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

למה נסמכה פרשת המנורה לפרשת הנשיאים? לפי שכשראה אהרן חנוכה הנשיאים חלשה דעתו, שלא היה עמהם בחנוכה, לא הוא ולא שבטו, אמר לו הקב"ה חייך, שלך גדולה משלהם, שאתה מדליק ומטיב את הנרות (רש"י במדבר ב:ב)

דברי רש"י צריכים ביאור. הלא אהרן היה בעל דרגת אהבת ישראל עליונה. ידועים דברי חז"ל (אבות א', י"ב) על אהרן: "אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה." כיצד יתכן, אפוא, שאהרן הכהן, אוהב ישראל הגדול, חלשה דעתו משום שלא השתתף בחנוכה? ... עומק העניין נעוץ בהבנת מעלתו של חנוכה המזבח.

חינוך הבית הוא יסוד הבית, ורק אם נחנך הבית בקדושה ובטהרה מובטח שגם המשך בנייתו של הבית תהיה בקדושה ובטהרה. את מעלת ה' חינוך' אנו רואים בדברי הגאון המקובל רבי יצחק אלפייא זצ"ל... בהקדמה לספרו 'קונטרס היחיאלי' הרחיב בחשיבותה של חנוכה הבית, שעיקר שבתו בביתו תתחיל בלימוד תורה, וכתב שם שצריך לעשות סעודה בכל 'חינוך', כגון: חינוך הבית או חנוכה בית הכנסת וכדומה. (מכאן עלינו ללמוד כמה אדם צריך לשמוח ולהתקדש בכל התחלה של מצוה שהוא מקיים, ובפרט בחינוך הבנים לתורה ויראת שמים.) אם כן, חנוכה המשכן צריכה להיעשות מתוך קדושה יתירה. זכותם של הנשיאים לחנוך את הבית מגלה על מעלתם הגבוהה. ומכאן נובעת חלישות דעתו של אהרן: כיון שראה שלא הוא נבחר לחנוך את הבית, הבין שכנראה אין מעלתו גבוהה דיה – ועל כך הצטער אהרן.

על חששו של אהרן אמר לו הקב"ה: "אתה מדליק ומטיב את הנרות." הדלקת הנרות בכל יום מביאה שפע של חכמה וקדושה לעם ישראל, הארה יום יומית... משום כך יש בהטבת הנרות נחמה לאהרן, כיון שהיא מגלה את דרגתו האמיתית, שאין היא פחותה מזו של הנשיאים.

"Why is the portion of the menorah juxtaposed with that of the tribal leaders? For when Aharon saw the inauguration performed by the tribal leaders, he felt distressed over not joining them in the inauguration - neither he nor his tribe. So G-d said to him, 'By your life, yours is greater than theirs, for you will light and prepare the candles (of the menorah).'" (Rashi to Bamidbar 8:2)

Rashi's words requires elaboration. Aharon stood on the highest level of love for Yisrael. The words of our sages on Aharon are known: "A lover and pursuer of peace, who loves all creatures and draws them closer to Torah." (Avot 1:12) How could it be that Aharon the priest, the great lover of Yisrael, was distressed about not participating in the inauguration?... Understanding the importance of the altar's inauguration is at the source of the issue.

The initiation of the house is its foundation, and only when the house is initiated in holiness and purity is it certain that its ongoing character will continue to be holy and pure. The importance of the dedication can be seen in the words of the Gaon and the Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Alafia zt"l... In the introduction to his book *Kuntres HaYechieli* he expanded on the importance of the dedication of a house, that full dwelling in a house should begin with the study of Torah. He wrote there that one should hold a meal as part of every dedication ceremony, such as for a house or a synagogue. (This should teach us how much one should rejoice in the beginning of any new mitzvah one fulfills, and especially in educating children to Torah and awe of heaven.) Therefore, the dedication of the Mishkan must be done with utmost holiness. The empowerment of the tribal leaders to perform the dedication revealed their high level. That was the source for Aharon's distress: when he saw that he was not chosen to inaugurate the house, he understood that apparently his level was not high enough – and so he was distressed.

Addressing this distress, G-d said to Aharon: "You will light and prepare the candles". Kindling the menorah every day brings a flow of wisdom and holiness to the Jewish People, a daily enlightenment... Therefore, the lighting of the candles could comfort Aharon, as it revealed his true level, which was no less than that of the tribal leaders.

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Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Week 1: Shemuel haNagid

Free of Charge; Register at <https://torontotorah.com/sephard>

8:00 PM Wed. June 2: Jewish Art: Symbolism or Idolatry?, a 6-part mini-series

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WEEKLY

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After minchah at Shaarei Shomayim, Responsa of the 20th Century, R' Sammy Bergman

Sunday May 30

9:20 AM Contemporary Halachah, Netanel Klein (not this week)

10:00 AM Gemara Shabbat, Rabbi Aaron Greenberg (University)

7:30 PM Ketuvot, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)

Monday May 31

8:30 PM Gemara Shabbat, Chap. 15, Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Tuesday June 1

1:30 PM Megilat Ruth, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

7:30 PM Shemuel Ch. 2, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men)

Wednesday June 2

6:15 AM Talmud Eruvin, Rabbi Sammy Bergman

7:00 PM Pirkei Avot: Admiring the Strong?, Rabbi Alex Hecht

7:30 PM Religious Zionism: Settling Israel: More than a Mitzvah, Rabbi Sammy Bergman

Thursday June 3

8:30 AM Daniel, Rabbi Chaim Metzger (University)

1:30 PM Shemuel Ch. 20, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women)

8:00 PM Gemara Beitzah, Rabbi Eitan Aviner (men, advanced)

9:30 PM Gemara Bava Metzia, Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University women)

Friday June 4

8:30 AM Parshah, Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University)

10:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

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