

It is precisely because Moshe was the ultimate paragon of “anivus” (humility) that he merited to be the agent for receiving the Torah

(Tractate Shabbos, 89a)

Likewise, the lowest mountain, Har Sinai, rather than the most majestic, was chosen for Mattan Torah

(Tractate Sotah,5a)

The first Mishnah of Pirkei Avos (1:1), “Moshe kibel Torah miSinai” – Moshe received the Torah from the mountain of Sinai -- recognizes both prototypes of human and material modesty as inextricably linked to the transmission of Torah

(Sefer Kedushas Levi, Likutim, Avos 1:1)



moshe rabbeinu



kohayn gadol



aaron



Het is misschien wel het best bewaarde geheim van het Waterlooplein: de Mozes & Aäronkerk. Omdat de kerk regelmatig gehoord wordt voor conferenties en vieringen, is het gebouw niet dagelijks open voor buurtbewoners en toeristen.

The Moses and Aaron Church is a Roman Catholic church situated in the ancient Jewish quarter of Amsterdam. The church no longer holds regular services, instead, it is now used as an education centre and a venue for exhibitions and concerts. The Moses and Aaron Church was originally constructed as a hidden church in the 1641. It was rebuilt as a proper church, with a Neo-Classical design, in 1795 when freedom of faith was officially restored. The original statues of Moses and Aaron are preserved in the church to this day.

Landmarking the eastern corner of the Waterlooplein flea market, this structure once had a warehouse facade to disguise its function as a clandestine Catholic church. If this rarely used church could speak, it would name-drop **the great philosopher Spinoza (it was built on the location of his birth house)** and Liszt (it hosted a recital of his that he considered his all-time best). Originally built in 1649, it was rebuilt in 1841 by architect T. Suys the Elder, then refurbished in 1900. The name of the church refers to the figures adorning two gable stones of the original edifice, now to be seen in the rear wall. Today it functions as an adult education center.

Located on Waterloo square, opposite the town hall, is the **Moses and Aäron** church. Initially the property of a Jewish trader, the church was rebuilt between 1837-1841. In 1578 native tradesmen decided to form an alliance with the Prince of Orange, in his revolt against Spain's reign in Holland at that time. The reason for their decision was dissatisfaction with the Catholic rulers in town. They inadequately represented the city of Amsterdam economically and militarily. This consequently meant the end of Catholic supremacy in Amsterdam. The Catholics had to give up many of their possessions and buildings. As a result conventicles (secret chapels of worship) were formed. They were able to practise their dissented religion here.

- א וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמֹשֶׁה, עַל-אֲדוֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכַּשִּׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח: כִּי-אִשָּׁה כַּשִּׁית, לָקַח.
- 1** And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman.
- ב וַיֹּאמְרוּ, הֲרַק אַךְ-בְּמֹשֶׁה דִּבֶּר יְהוָה--הֲלֹא, גַם-בָּנוּ דִּבֶּר; וַיִּשְׁמַע, יְהוָה.
- 2** And they said: 'Hath the LORD indeed spoken only with Moses? hath He not spoken also with us?' And the LORD heard it.--
- ג וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה, עָנּוּ מְאֹד--מְכֹל, הָאָדָם, אֲשֶׁר, עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה. }ס{
- 3** Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.-- {S}
- ד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה פְּתָאֵם, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל-מִרְיָם, צֵאוּ שְׁלֹשְׁתֵּכֶם, אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד; וַיֵּצְאוּ, שְׁלֹשְׁתָּם.
- 4** And the LORD spoke suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam: 'Come out ye three unto the tent of meeting.' And they three came out.
- ה וַיִּכַּד יְהוָה בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן, וַיַּעֲמֵד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל; וַיִּקְרָא אֶהֱרֹן וּמִרְיָם, וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם.
- 5** And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forth.
- ו וַיֹּאמֶר, שְׁמַעוּ-נָא דְבָרַי; אִם-יְהִיֶּה, נְבִיאֵכֶם--יְהוָה בְּמַרְאֵה אֱלֹוֹ אֶתְוֹדַע, בְּחִלּוֹם אֲדַבֵּר-בּוֹ.
- 6** And He said: 'Hear now My words: if there be a prophet among you, I the LORD do make Myself known unto him in a vision, I do speak with him in a dream.
- ז לֹא-כֵן, עֲבָדֵי מֹשֶׁה: בְּכָל-בֵּיתִי, נֶאֱמָן הוּא.
- 7** My servant Moses is not so; he is trusted in all My house;
- ח פֹּה אֶל-פִּי אֲדַבֵּר-בּוֹ, וּמַרְאֵה וְלֹא בְחִידָת, וּתְמִנַת יְהוָה, יְבִיט; וּמִדּוּעַ לֹא יִרְאוּ, לְדַבֵּר בְּעַבְדֵי בְּמֹשֶׁה.
- 8** with him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD doth he behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?'
- ט וַיִּחַר-אַף יְהוָה בָּם, וַיִּלְךְ.
- 9** And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and He departed.
- י וְהָעֶנָן, סָר מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל, וְהִנֵּה מִרְיָם, מְצֻרַעַת כְּשֹׁלֵג; וַיִּפֹּן אֶהֱרֹן אֶל-מִרְיָם, וְהִנֵּה מְצֻרַעַת.
- 10** And when the cloud was removed from over the Tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow; and Aaron looked upon Miriam; and, behold, she was leprous.
- יא וַיֹּאמֶר אֶהֱרֹן, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה: בִּי אֲדֹנָי--אֶל-נָא תִשֶׁת עָלֵינוּ חַטָּאת, אֲשֶׁר נוֹאֲלִנוּ וְאֲשֶׁר חָטָאנוּ.
- 11** And Aaron said unto Moses: 'Oh my lord, lay not, I pray thee, sin upon us, for that we have done foolishly, and for that we have sinned.
- יב אֶל-נָא תְהִי, כַּמֵּת, אֲשֶׁר בְּצִאתוֹ מִרְחֹם אִמּוֹ, וַיֹּאכַל חֲצִי בְשָׂרוֹ.
- 12** Let her not, I pray, be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.'
- יג וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה, אֶל-יְהוָה לֵאמֹר: אֵל, נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ. }פ{
- 13** And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying: 'Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee.' {P}

The final section of Parashat Beha'alotekha relates the incident of Miriam's inappropriate talk about her brother, Moshe. In the midst of this story, the Torah interjects its assessment of Moshe's character: "Moshe was a very humble man, more so that any other man on earth" (12:3). What precisely does the word "anav" (translated here as, "humble") denote, and how does this characteristic of Moshe relate to the narrative at hand?

Parshas Beha'alosecha (Num. 12:20) is the shabbos of healing, based on the the last Aliyah, when Miriam the prophetess is afflicted with Tzaraas and Moshe prays on her behalf : "El na, refah na lah" . Based on this passuk Reb Leibele Eieger writes that all healing for Klal Yisrael flows from this Shabbat. As is known, all his Shabbos Toirah in some way refers to his two passions, Shabbat and Bris, and here the Rebbe suggests that ALL healing flows to the rest of the year from this specific Shabbat. It is an auspicious time then, to pray for healing, since the Ribbono shel Olam is open to our prayers now in ways other times are not, the way He was moved by Moshe Rabbeinu's prayer in this Shabbat parsha.

But what is the relevance of this passuk referring to Miriam specifically with Klal Yisrael? Why would healing an individual relate to all Am Yisrael for all time? For this the Rebbe alters the punctuation of the verse. Rather than placing the "comma" after El Na, "Please Hashem, heal her please" he places it after the next word Refah....meaning now as follows: "Please Hashem heal, (all of Klal Yisrael- and included among them) please her too!" In a unique semantic twist worthy of the best midrash, the Rebbe has troped on the double use of the word "na" -please, (for the second "na" seems redundant)- "Hashem please- heal please her"; but by splitting the verse into two phrases , one referring to the klal-, the other the prat-the individual, he makes sense of the double lashon of "na".

Moshe Rabbeinu was most humble and was able to overcome his own prejudice and hurt to pray and intercede on behalf of Miriam, his sister and thus evoked and arouse divine mercy and healing.

ג וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה, עֲנוּ מְאֹד--מִכָּל, הָאָדָם, אֲשֶׁר, עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה. } ס

As Rabbi David Silverberg points out,¹

The Netziv ("He'amek Davar") suggests that contrary to what many people think, the term "anav" does not refer to one's self-image or how he assesses his credentials. Rather, it describes someone who has no interest in honor. He may think very highly of himself, as one should if he indeed deserves to be thought highly of, but he seeks no recognition for his greatness or stature. He simply does what he needs to do without worrying about whether or not people afford him special treatment on account of his greatness. The Torah here wishes to emphasize that God did not react as harshly as He did to Miriam and Aharon out of concern for Moshe's feelings. Moshe, the "humblest" of all men, suffered no emotional harm as a result of his siblings' gossip, because he had no interest in honor. God felt compelled to act in order to demonstrate to posterity the greatness of Moshe, but not to defend his personal honor.

¹ Rabbi David Silverberg, <http://www.vbm-torah.org/archive/salt-bemidbar/36-5behaal.htm>

In this vein the Netziv explains an otherwise startling Gemara towards the end of Masekhet Sota. In response to a comment that after the death of Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi humility is no longer to be found in the world, Rav Yosef expresses his disagreement. "What about me?" he says. At first glance, Rav Yosef's remark seems ludicrous; how can one possibly argue for his own humility? Does this not itself testify to his arrogance? However, the Netziv writes, once we realize that humility does not involve one's low self-image, but rather a disinterest in how others view him, this Gemara poses no problem at all. That Rav Yosef acknowledged his humility does not undermine it. Indeed, the Netziv notes, the Gemara at the end of Masekhet Horiyot tells that throughout the period when the amora Rabba served as Rosh Yeshiva, his colleague, Rav Yosef, made a point of refusing any expression of honor. Despite his being Rabba's equal, he felt no concern for his own honor and saw to it that nothing he did could be interpreted as a challenge to Rabba's authority.

Thus, Rav Yosef could indeed testify to his own "humility." He worried about doing the right thing and paid no attention to whether or not others paid attention to him. This is what it means to be truly "humble."

While the Netziv, interprets the term "anav" as referring to a disinterest in honor, rather than a low self-image, Rashi seems - at first glance - to argue. He translates the word as "shafal ve-savlan." The first word Rashi uses in his translation, "shafal," generally means "lowly." The second term, "savlan," denotes tolerance or forbearance. How do both these terms define the single word, "anav"? According to Rashi, what does "anav" mean - a sense of lowliness, or the quality of forbearance?

Perhaps the simple understanding would be that Rashi here refers to a cause-and-effect process triggered by one's "shiflut" (lowliness). When seeing himself as undeserving, one naturally tolerates adversity or even hostility. The less he feels he deserves the good will of others, the more likely he is to tolerate their ill will. Thus, according to Rashi, "anav" indeed refers to a low view of oneself.

The Rebbe of Kotzk, however, offers a characteristically sharp interpretation of Rashi's definition. The "humble" person, says the Kotzker, is "lowly and tolerates his lowliness." In other words, "savlan" modifies "shafal"; "anav" describes a person who can "tolerate his lowliness." Consistent with his typical brevity, the Kotzker leaves it at that and explains no further. What does he mean?

Rabbi Silverberg suggests that external arrogance or presumptuousness often reflects internal insecurity.

Many people feel overwhelmed by their shortcomings that they try to compensate with artificial confidence and forced self-esteem, often by seeking the respect of others. According to the Kotzker, the greatness of humility does not lie in the recognition of one's faults, in his lowliness. This recognition is shared by all people, whether or not they admit it. The test of one's humility is how he deals with his existential sense of inadequacy. The humble person "tolerates" his shortcomings. Meaning, he feels no need to balance his insecurity with some artificial coating of self-assurance. Instead, he

confronts the weaknesses themselves and tries to improve. If he succeeds, great; if not, then he tries again. The arrogant, by contrast, cannot "tolerate" their low self-image, so they seek ways to fabricate a healthy ego.

For Rabbi Silverberg, the Kotzker's approach brings us to the same result as the Netziv's explanation, only from the opposite direction. According to both, humility involves not one's self-image but how he responds to his self-image. The Netziv claimed that the humble man recognizes his admirable qualities but has no interest in having others recognize them. According to the Kotzker, the humble man knows his faults, but makes no attempt to seek the high regard of others in order to artificially improve his low self-esteem.

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Rabbi Nachman's parable of the humble king:

There was a certain king who had a wise man. The king said to the wise man:

"There is one king who signs himself as being 'mighty, great and a man of truth and humility'. As for his being mighty, I know he is mighty because his kingdom is surrounded by the sea and in the sea stands a fleet of warships with cannons, which will not allow anyone to draw near. Inland from the sea is a deep moat that goes around the whole kingdom. To get in, there is only one tiny pathway wide enough for only one man, and there too stand cannons. If someone comes to make war, they fire with the cannons. It is impossible to get near.

"However, as for his signing himself 'a man of truth and humility', I don't know. I therefore want you to bring me a portrait of that king."

This was because this king had portraits of all the kings, but there was no portrait of that king in any king's collection. The reason was that he was hidden from everybody. He sat behind a veil, remote from the people of his country.

The wise man went to the country. He realized that he needed to find out the nature of the country. How do you find out the nature of a country? You find it out through the people's humor. When you want to know something, you should find out how people laugh and joke about it.

There are different kinds of jokes. Sometimes a person may really want to hurt another with words, but when the other takes exception to his words, he says, "I only meant it as a joke". "Like one who exerts himself to cast firebrands and arrows. and then says, I am only joking" (Proverbs 26:18-19) . There are other times when a person may say something that is truly intended as a lighthearted joke, yet his friend is hurt by his words. Thus there are various different kinds of jokes and humor.

And among all the different kingdoms there is one kingdom that includes all kingdoms. In that kingdom is one city that includes all the cities of the entire kingdom that includes all kingdoms. In that city is one house which includes all the houses of the whole city that includes all the cities of the kingdom that includes all kingdoms. And there is one man who includes everything in that entire house. And there is also someone who produces all the mockery and joking of the kingdom.

The wise man took with him a large sum of money and went there and saw how they were mocking and joking in various ways. From the humor, he understood that the entire kingdom was full of lies from beginning to end. He saw the way they would joke about how people defrauded and deceived others in business, and how the injured party would sue in the lower courts where everything was lies and bribery. He would then go to a higher court, where everything was also lies. They used to put on comedies about all these kinds of things.

Through their humor the sage understood that the entire kingdom was filled with lies and deceptions and that there was no truth anywhere. He did some business in the kingdom, allowing himself to be defrauded in the transaction. He took the case to court, but the court was all lies and bribes. One day he would give them a bribe but the next day they would not recognize him. He went to a higher court, and there too it was all lies. Eventually he came before the Supreme Court, but they too were full of lies and bribery. Finally he came to the king himself.

When he came to the king, he said, "Who are you king over? The whole kingdom is full of lies from beginning to end and there's no truth in it."

He began enumerating all the lies in the kingdom. When the king heard his words, he turned his ear to the veil to hear what he was saying. The king was surprised that there was anyone who knew about all the lies in the kingdom. The ministers of state who heard what he was saying were very angry with him. Yet he went on telling about all the lies in the kingdom.

"It would be proper to say," declared the wise man, "that the king too is like them - that he loves falsehood just as his kingdom does. But from this I see that you are a man of truth: you are far from them because you cannot stand the falsehood of the country."

The wise man began to praise the king greatly. But the king was very humble, and "in the place of His greatness, there is His humility" (*Megilah* 31a) . Such is the way of the humble person. The more he is praised and magnified , the smaller and humbler he becomes. Because of the sage's great praise, extolling and magnifying him, the king reached the utmost humility and smallness until he became literally nothing. He could not contain himself, and he threw aside the veil to see who this wise man was that knew and understood all this.

His face was revealed, and the sage saw it and brought his portrait back to the king.²

² The Humble King translated by Avraham Greenbaum: www.azamra.org

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Although I can readily understand the word *shafal* as in the word *shifllus* meaning “lowly” or humble. But the surprising addition of the gloss *soveil* adds a new dimension hitherto untapped. Rashi implies that to be *soveil* means to “stand oneself” or to literally be able to suffer oneself, one’s flaws, ones character defects, one’s addictions, literally the “peckel” we each carry as we go through life, including our resentments, fears and hidden secrets. The Kotzker points out that Moshe teaches us that anivus or humility also includes the element of acceptance of oneself as God has created us, warts ‘n all. It’s a theology of imperfection!.

“Yes my genes gave me such and such, my environment gave me such and such, my past abuse, the things I have done to others, what others have done to me, all have brought me to this sacred moment in time where I stand before You Lord.” And I accept all this as I struggle to live in Your presence! Resentment for my sister! Of course not! I just feel HER pain!. Lord please heal HER!” This Moshe teaches us is true humility according to Rashi.

Moshe becomes the paradigm of disinterested ego-less prayer since he prays only for his sister despite her Lashon hara, thinking only of her pain. Moshe becomes the first ‘Rebbe’ thinking only of the Hasid. The Rebbe sees a seamless transition between the interpretive strategies in reading Torah and the deepest way of connecting to others, sisters, friends, klal Yisrael, humanity. The role model Moshe reflects in this reading as concerned only with the pain of the other is reflected in the Zaddik’s life. Torah becomes a manual of spiritual compassionate discipline, no longer an academic exercise.

And what of Aaron Hakohein? why wasn’t he punished? The commentators struggle with this question but Shloime might say, after what he had already suffered was any further punishment possible? Can you punish a Yid after losing a child-two children, any further? Aaron was mekabel lashon hara, not because he was a gossiper - chas veshalom-, rather he too was identifying with Miriam’s pain. And Miriam? lashon hara? really? Of course not! Like David Hamelech whose supposed “sin” was really to open the gates for Teshuva for Am Yisrael, she too was showing the way for Am Yisrael to receive the blessings of Refuah, of healing.