

A Little Humility Couldn't Hurt

Category: Bereishis, Bereishis

Moses and Adam were two of the greatest men to ever live. What were their differences, and what do they teach us?

Competition

So, who's greater? Moses or Adam?

This week we begin to read the Torah again from the beginning, having completed it on Simchas Torah. The Torah begins and ends with two personalities, both fundamental to the Jewish people and indeed to mankind as a whole. The Torah opens with the life of Adam, the first man, and the Torah finishes at the very end of the life of Moshe Rabeinu — Moses, the first leader of the Jewish people. This is actually the whole period covered by the Chumash; it starts with Adam and ends with Moses.

This presents us with an opportunity to study the way in which these two great men conducted their lives.

Let's begin with Moses, about whom we just finished reading on Simchas Torah. At the end of the Chumash, the verse is full of great praises for Moses; "And Moses the servant of G-d died...and there never arose a prophet like Moses whom G-d knew (personally) face to face."

In the Talmud, there is a dispute among the Sages about who actually wrote the last eight verses of the Torah. R' Yehuda reasons that Joshua had to write them but R' Shimon claims that Moses himself wrote the last few verses before he died, "with tears in his eyes".

Moses had tears in his eyes when he wrote about his own passing? Moses was 120 years old and had lived a full rich life; what did he have to cry about?

[When my grandmother reached the age of 90 she said that she had no fear of dying because she had already received everything that she had requested from G-d. She had asked for family- children and grandchildren who would go in the

ways of G-d and the Torah and Boruch Hashem that had already come true. Money... well she didn't ask for it so she didn't get it. But once you have such a wonderful family who needs money!]

Perhaps Moses' tears could be explained as tears of pain. G-d had commanded Moses - the humblest of men - to write all of these wonderful, impressive praises about himself and this was very difficult for him to do. It is a very uncomfortable experience for any person who has to write his own eulogy.

It's an accepted custom to engrave on tombstones the praises of the people who lie beneath it. But some people don't trust others to write their praises, so just to be safe they compose the wording for their own tombstones in the best and most proper way... just to ensure there should be no mistakes.

Blame Your Wife

Let's now go to the beginning of Torah to Adam, the first man who ever lived. The Torah opens with the story that we all know about Adam: the story with the tree of knowledge.

Adam's biggest problem was not that he transgressed G-d's word. Anyone can stumble and sin. It's a human weakness built in by G-d himself. Adam's biggest fault was how he dealt with his sin.

After the sin G-d revealed himself to Adam and asked, "Where are you?"

So, first off Adam ran and hid, not exactly the way a "real man" is supposed to behave. But then when G-d confronts him with the question, "Did you eat from THAT tree?" he cannot summon the courage to take responsibility for his actions. Instead, he blames his wife, "She made me do it." And since then, all men blame everything on their wives! [See? It's the biblical thing to do.]

What is the correct reaction to sin? What should a person do when he commits a sin?

Adam should not have waited until G-d challenged him. He should have been a man and stepped forward on his own, to admit that he sinned and find out what he could do to make up for his transgression. But not only didn't he admit to his sin, but he ran and hid himself, passing all the blame onto his wife.

His behavior is the total opposite of Moses. Adam was desperately lacking Moses' greatest virtue, humility, and that's why he wasn't ready to accept the fact that he had failed or made a mistake.

The Big and Little Aleph

The Tzemach Tzedek (the third Rebbe of Chabad) was orphaned from his mother at a very young age and his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe (First Chabad Rebbe) took on the responsibility for the boy's upbringing. When the Tzemach Tzedek turned three, they made him an upsherenish, and as is customary, the boy was brought to the Cheder on the day after Yom Kippur. The Alter Rebbe instructed the teacher to open the Chumash and teach the boy "Aleph-Beis" from inside the Chumash Vayikra (Leviticus). When the teacher showed the boy the letters, the boy realized that the letter "aleph" in the word "Vayikra" was smaller than all the other letters on the page. Turning to his grandfather, he asked why the letter Aleph of Vayikra was made smaller.

The great Rebbe sat with closed eyes for a long moment, deep in thought. Then turning to his grandson, he said, "In Torah there are three types of letters: there are small letters, medium sized letters and big letters. Almost the entire Torah is written with the medium sized letters, not big and not small, and this teaches us that a person must always strive to be a Beinoni."

[A Beinoni is the Intermediary Jew, which the Alter Rebbe describes in great length in his fundamental work the "Tanya," also known as "Sefer Shel Benonim—the Book of the Intermediary Jew."]

"By Adam," he explained, "we find that his name is written [at the beginning of Divre Hayomim- Chronicles] with a big Aleph, but by Moshe Rabeinu it is written, 'Vayikra el Moshe' with a small Aleph.

According to the Midrash, Adam — who was created by the hands of G-d — was wiser than the supernal angels and he was well aware of his own greatness. The problem was that he took himself too seriously, which caused him to sin by eating fruit from the tree of knowledge. Moshe, on the other hand, never bragged and never became haughty. In fact, he was lowly in his own eyes, as the Torah testifies about him that, "Moshe was humbler than any man on the face of the earth."

“And that,” concluded the Alter Rebbe, “is why the aleph of Vayikra is small.”

As we begin anew to learn the Torah, let’s approach this round of Torah study humbly. We must always bear in mind that the Torah is the Will and Wisdom of G-d Almighty and that we are but little people trying to understand His thoughts. We will only be able to understand as much of Torah as we have the energy to put into its study. But even that which we don’t understand — we must always remember that this is G-d’s Torah and we must cherish it and keep it close to our hearts.