

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Bamidbar

“AND HASHEM SPOKE TO MOSHE IN THE SINAI DESERT IN THE TENT OF MEETING...” (BAMIDBAR 1:1)

**We became a mature nation and Hashem felt that He needed to speak to us in private**

**Was it even possible to give us more kavod?**

**It injects a new dimension of respect for us into the relationship**

THE MIDRASH (Bamidbar Rabbah 1:3) explains that before the *Mishkan* was erected, there was no specific venue for Hashem to speak with Moshe. Hashem spoke to Moshe at the burning bush, in Mitzrayim and other places. The Midrash tells us that once the *Mishkan* existed, however, Hashem would only speak to Moshe in the *Ohel Moed*, due to *tzniyus* – modesty. A similar Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:4) attributes this change in procedure of only speaking to Moshe in the *Mishkan* as due to Hashem’s desire to show greater respect to *B’nei Yisrael*. The Midrash brings a parable: A king had a daughter that he loved very much. When the princess was young, he would speak to her anywhere. As she matured, the king felt it was beneath her dignity to speak to her in public. He built a private structure where he would speak with the princess. So too, the Midrash says, when *B’nei Yisrael* were young, Hashem spoke to us (through our representative, Moshe) anywhere. Now that we accepted the Torah and said, “We will hear and we will do,” we became a mature nation and Hashem felt that He needed to speak to us in private in order to show us the proper respect.

The Midrash is not dealing with a person wanting to have a conversation about some mundane topic with friend, where a private venue would seem to give the conversation some added dignity. It is talking about the Creator and Master of the entire universe, communicating His divine will and prophetic message to his chosen people. The very fact that Hashem chose to reveal himself to our nation and to speak to us through Moshe is the most amazing manifestation of respect and honor that could ever be accorded a people. Was it even possible to give us more *kavod*? In the midst of this overwhelming display of importance, elevating and exalting our people with the unparalleled gift of the word of G-d Himself, could we feel any more honored? How would it be possible for a nation to appreciate, understand or even sense an extra level of respect by Hashem speaking to us privately rather than in public?

Our sages are opening our eyes to the true grandeur of our *neshamos*, and to the delicate refinement of *tzniyus*. Our *neshama* is like a highly calibrated instrument – every nuance can be detected, measured and felt. In the midst of the greatest honor that human beings can experience – to hear the word of King of all kings, conveying His love and esteem to us through the greatest prophet that ever lived – our nation could indeed feel that extra *kavod* of Hashem treating us with more modesty.

At the same time, we can gain new insight into the incredible power of *tzniyus*. As we absorb the earth-shattering revelation of Hashem’s affection and respect for His people – is there anything that could add to our dignity? *Tzniyus* can – it is so significant that it can register even in the highest stratospheres of prestige to uplift us even more, because it injects a new dimension of respect for us into the relationship with Hashem Himself. Our *neshama* is sensitive to the refined beauty of modesty and feels that special dignity, above and beyond all the other honor it receives. Let us appreciate our *neshama* and live a life that befits it, upholding its highest standards of behavior, and let us remember that the crowning glory of modesty – in actions and speech, as well as in dress – is precious and meaningful beyond all other honor.