

Mussar HaTorah

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

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Parashas Shemini

“AND MOSHE LISTENED, AND IT WAS GOOD IN HIS EYES.”
(VAYIKRA 10:20)

Aharon correctly did not eat from the regular sacrifices

AHARON HAD JUST SUFFERED the tragic loss of his sons Nadav and Avihu, and was therefore an *onen* – one who has just lost a close relative – who is disqualified from eating of the sacrificial offerings. Hashem told Moshe that in spite of Aharon’s status, he should still eat from those *korbanos* that were one time offerings for the Mishkan’s consecration. Moshe mistakenly extended this command to include all offerings and instructed Aharon accordingly. Aharon correctly did not eat from the regular sacrifices and when Moshe chastised him for not following instructions, Aharon replied, “If you heard from Hashem regarding one time offerings, that does not allow you to permit all the offerings!” The Torah records Moshe’s reaction to Aharon’s rebuke: “Moshe listened and it was good in his eyes.” Rashi explains that Moshe admitted his error, and was not embarrassed to concede that, indeed, he had not heard Hashem permit them.

The Sefer HaZikaron, a commentary on Rashi, teaches us that there are three types of reactions in a dispute: One, a person who does not admit he is wrong at all and knowingly denies the truth; two, a person who admits his error, albeit begrudgingly, with embarrassment, like one forced to act against his will; three, a person who acknowledges his mistake with a smiling face and without any embarrassment, delighted in the victory his friend has won over him, because through this defeat he has gained another piece of truth that he previously lacked. This, concludes the Sefer HaZikaron, was Moshe’s reaction. He was not upset or reluctant about Aharon’s disproving him, but instead elated.

How could Moshe have been jubilant about his defeat?

How could Moshe have been jubilant about his defeat in this exchange with Aharon? Even though he had learned a new truth, he still was defeated. Surely it was painful to be proven wrong! Wouldn’t Moshe have preferred to gain this knowledge without suffering the shame of defeat? Besides, how much joy could Moshe, the father of wisdom and receiver of the entire Torah from Hashem at Sinai, derive from learning one new law?

Since his joy was so overwhelming, there was no shame

Someone who trips and falls, hurting himself on the hard pavement, and finds a fifty dollar bill on the ground, is certainly happy about finding the money. But he’s still smarting from the pain of his fall, and wishes he could have found the money without the agony of his throbbing leg. If, however, he falls and finds this week’s winning ticket to a ten million dollar jackpot, he jumps for joy and doesn’t feel any pain, happy that he fell because it has brought him fantastic riches. Moshe loved truth and Torah more than others love money, and he was ecstatic at the acquisition of one more *halacha*, even though he already knew so much. Since his joy was so overwhelming, there was no shame; no pain in losing the dialogue with Aharon – it was insignificant in the boundless sea of joy he now felt. In this light, the loss of the debate became a *simcha* for him.

Let us ask ourselves: How do we react when someone corrects us? Which category defines us: Do we reject any attempt to disagree with our ideas, or do we accept the truth when faced with it? When we do admit our mistakes, are we thankful and happy at our newfound riches, or begrudging and bitter about being proven wrong? If we love Torah, wisdom and truth as Moshe did, we will respond with joy, delighted by this precious gem of truth, the only true and eternal wealth.