

Mussar HaTorah

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

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Parashas Terumah

“SPEAK TO B’NEI YISRAEL, AND THEY SHALL TAKE FOR ME A PORTION FROM EVERY MAN...” (SHMOS 25:2)

This shift alludes to a dialogue between Hashem and Moshe

THE WORDS OF THE *pasuk* above seem inconsistent. The verse begins, “Speak to *B’nei Yisrael* and they shall take...” referring to the nation as a whole, using the plural form. The next phrase, “From every man,” seems to shift the focus to each individual member of the Jewish people. The Midrash (Shmos Rabbah 33:8, see Mahrzu) tells us that this shift alludes to a dialogue between Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe heard the first part of the *pasuk* and then asked Hashem: How is it possible for *B’nei Yisrael* to build an abode for Hashem’s *Shechina* – Divine Presence? As King Solomon said, “The heavens and earth can’t contain You...” (Melachim I 8:27). How can human beings build a dwelling for Hashem, even if all *B’nei Yisrael* join together to try to accomplish the task? Hashem replied, “Even one individual Jew can do it.” This is why the *pasuk* continues in the singular, “From every man...”

Moshe thought it was inconceivable that the Jewish people could create a dwelling for the *Shechina*. Hashem told Moshe that he was vastly underestimating the power of the Jewish nation – every Jew can build a Mishkan! Let us pause to examine who we are dealing with. Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest prophet that ever lived, mastered 49 of the 50 gates of wisdom (Rosh Hashana 21b). His prophetic vision was absolutely clear (Yevamos 49b). If anyone could have correctly gauged the spiritual level of *B’nei Yisrael*, it should have been Moshe. After hearing Hashem’s command that the entire nation build a sanctuary for Him, Moshe was baffled. He knew better than anyone else what was required to accomplish this almost superhuman feat. It seemed impossible for *B’nei Yisrael* to succeed. So how can it be that this mind-boggling level is found in one lone Jew? How is it possible that one Jew’s greatness surpasses what Moshe Rabbeinu thought could be mustered by millions of spiritual giants, who witnessed the plagues in Egypt, saw the splitting of the Red Sea, stood at Sinai and experienced Divine Revelation?

We have only a meager understanding of who we really are

In truth, we have only a meager understanding of who we really are. As the handiwork of the perfect Creator, who created us in His Divine image, and as the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, we are endowed with holiness that it is beyond our comprehension. The *neshama* within us is vested with such potential for greatness that even Moshe Rabbeinu didn’t properly grasp its full extent. Only Hashem, in His perfect knowledge, has the full understanding of the sanctity within us. It is important to note that the Midrash doesn’t state that only a very righteous Jew could build the Mishkan. It seems that an average, simple Jew – one we meet on the street, in shul or in the supermarket – is not so average or so simple. He or she actually contains a massive reservoir of purity and holiness which merely needs to be brought to the surface.

We need to raise our sights to higher goals

The most important lesson, however, is not to underestimate ourselves. We tend to live up to our own expectations, and we need to raise our sights to higher goals in accordance with our true worth. If we appreciate who we really are, and refuse to listen to the *yetzer hara* who sells us a false self-image of mediocrity, we can elevate our deeds to new heights, and transform our homes, and our hearts, to become genuine repositories of Hashem’s *Shechina*.