

Mussar HaTorah

ת"סב

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Parashas Vaaira

“AND ELOKIM SAID TO MOSHE, “I AM HASHEM.” (SHMOS 6:2)

Moshe was overly sensitive to these remarks

RASHI EXPLAINS THAT Hashem was taking Moshe to task for what occurred at the end of the last week's *parasha*. Moshe and Aharon left Pharaoh's palace and met up with Dasan and Aviram. The Midrash (Shmos Rabbah 6:2) tells us that these two troublemakers taunted Moshe for his lack of success in reducing the slavery. They pointed out that their situation had only become bleaker. The Midrash goes on to tell us that Moshe was overly sensitive to these remarks and a tinge of annoyance caused Moshe to say to Hashem, “From the time I came to Pharaoh ... [it has only become worse for the Jews].” This slight hint of complaint was the reason why Hashem took Moshe to task. Hashem said to Moshe, “I wrote in the Torah that you are humble, and now you're being hypersensitive?” Moshe was punished for this mistake – he did not merit to see the miracles of the conquest of Eretz Yisrael (see Etz Yosef, *ibid.*).

Hashem's question seems unanswerable: How, indeed, could Moshe have been affected by the remarks of these rabble-rousers? As Hashem testifies in the Torah, Moshe was the most humble person that ever walked the face of this earth. A person who is the epitome of humility should be immune to provocation and never be annoyed or upset. Most importantly, it seems from the Midrash that the emotional trigger for Moshe's misstatement wasn't his empathy with the terrible suffering of the Jews. It simply was a reaction to the taunting, nasty comments of Dasan and Aviram. How could Moshe allow their teasing, mocking statement to affect him to the extent that he reacted inappropriately in speaking to Hashem?!

The taunting words of Dasan and Aviram were able to find a tiny crack

Moshe's reaction, at the very least, teaches us an insight into the power of verbal insult, and the great strength required to control our reactions. True, we do not know exactly why Moshe did not withstand this test. Moshe was certainly the most humble human being of all time. Apparently, somewhere in his stratosphere of humility, beyond our perception, Moshe fell short of perfection, and had he possessed that one iota more, Moshe would have passed this challenge. However, there remains for us this important lesson: the horribly damaging power that taunting words possess. Even the super-humble Moshe was affected by the taunts of the lowest of the low. Moshe withstood the pain of his people, knowing that his efforts to save B'nei Yisrael had led to only more suffering for them. All of this overwhelming anguish was not enough to break Moshe's perfect control and calmness of spirit. Nevertheless, the taunting words of Dasan and Aviram were able to find a tiny crack in Moshe's humility and thereby inflict just enough damage to Moshe's spirit to cause him to make an inappropriate statement to Hashem.

This attitude filters down to our children

We live in a society that places a social value on quick wit and verbal agility. People feel they gain status if they can unleash a quip or a put-down at someone else's expense. The ability to deliver a humorous wisecrack or one-liner is celebrated in the media as a special talent. This attitude filters down to our children, and they sometimes use their words as daggers, as conversational tools to bully others. Do we appreciate the incredible power our words possess to damage and destroy even the most humble and unassuming person? We can taunt and tease, or we can compliment and reassure. We can break and hurt, or we can empower and embolden. The choice is ours.