

“AND MOSES SPOKE BEFORE HASHEM, SAYING: ‘BEHOLD, THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL HAVE NOT LISTENED TO ME; HOW THEN SHALL PHARAOH HEAR ME...?’” (SHMOS 6:12)

HASHEM HAD ASKED Moshe to confront Pharaoh and demand that he let the Jews go. Moshe attempted to decline this mission, explaining that he had a speech defect – his diction was lacking and he would not be an appropriate envoy. We find that Moshe mentioned this difficulty three times (Shmos 4:10, 6:12 and 6:30). The Ramban (ibid. 6:12-13) explains the reasoning behind each statement. He explains that Moshe was acutely aware of his speech impediment and felt that they he would be degraded in the Egyptians’ eyes because of his disability. Hashem actually accepted this point and told Moshe that Aharon would do all the public speaking to Pharaoh.

Should Moshe’s possible embarrassment be a factor?

Should Moshe’s possible embarrassment be a factor in deciding whether he will carry out the will of Hashem?! Shouldn’t Moshe have just swallowed his pride and suppressed his feelings of embarrassment to do Hashem’s command?

Obviously, when we are faced with a absolute Torah responsibility, we must follow our command despite the emotional impact. But this does not mean that our emotions are not relevant, or that they should be bottled up and ignored. To the contrary, these emotions must be addressed, and can possibly change the outcome – if the task is still in the decision making stage. Since Moshe and Hashem were still negotiating the nature of the mission, Moshe was not only allowed to bring up the issue – he was even required to discuss it because it could be damaging to him to be ridiculed by the Egyptians. In fact, the Ramban states that Moshe was rewarded due to his humility, his hesitation to speak in an imperfect manner, and therefore merited to give instructions to Aharon without having to talk directly to Pharaoh, just as Hashem speaks only to a prophet and the prophet then relays the message to the people.

Avraham was crying tears of compassion

Once Hashem “concludes negotiations,” and it is finalized that the obligation exists, then we must deal with the embarrassment or shame and fulfill the obligation. But even in such circumstances, one’s feelings are indeed relevant. Reb Yisrael Salanter points out that at the *akeidah*, Avraham was crying tears of compassion at his beloved son’s imminent death, even as his hands moved with joy that overwhelmed his heart to fulfill the decree of Hashem. Hashem does not expect us – and he didn’t expect Moshe – to stop up our emotions and act as automatons. Normal human emotions – such as love for one’s child, shame for embarrassing actions and other human sensitivities – are universal and need to be cultivated and dealt with in a natural manner. We cannot “animalize” ourselves and strip healthy feelings from our personality, just as we cannot cut out healthy organs from our physical body and hope it will still function properly.

Do we worry about the shame of a latecomer to shul?

Just as we are to respect our own emotions and not trample on or ignore these feelings, so too must we honor and respect the feelings of others. Do we worry about the embarrassment of our friends or our family members when we have to correct or criticize their behavior? Do we worry about the shame of a latecomer to shul or to a class and offer them a *siddur* or a seat? Let us be sensitive to the glorious symphony of feelings Hashem has instilled within us, and act in a manner that shows that sensitivity and respect in everything we do.