

# Mussar HaTorah

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

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Parashas Vayikra

“AND HASHEM CALLED TO MOSHE...” VAYIKRA (1:1)

**“Who here is Hillel!”**

THE FIRST WORD of this week’s *parasha* is written with a small letter *aleph* to testify to Moshe Rabbeinu’s humility. The Gemara (Shabbos 31a) tells of a man who made a bet, wagering 400 *zuz* that he could make Hillel HaZaken angry. He callously came on *erev Shabbos*, stood outside the door and waited until Hillel was bathing for Shabbos. At that moment, he called him out of the house by yelling “Who here is Hillel!” – considering Hillel’s position as the prince of the Jewish nation – this was quite rude. Nevertheless, Hillel dressed himself and came out to answer the boor’s questions. The annoying person waited until Hillel had resumed bathing and repeated the same inconsiderate behavior two more times. Each time Hillel got dressed again and responded with patience. The man continued to say, “I have more questions to ask, but I’m afraid you’ll get angry.” This, the Maharsha explains, was a ploy to make it easier for Hillel to become angry, by “allowing” it as an expected response. Nevertheless, Hillel retained his patience. At this point, the man finally said, “There should be no more like you in *B’nei Yisrael!*” The Maharsha explains that he was saying, “It is not right for men to be as humble as you are. You cost me 400 *zuz!*” The Maharsha continues to tell us that Hillel attempted to teach the man a lesson and said, “It is worth losing 400 *zuz* as long as Hillel doesn’t become angry.”

**Hillel, nevertheless, did not give up on him**

As we examine this wager and the man that attempted to anger Hillel, we realize that this man was a wicked individual who employed every means to try to harm Hillel. To Hillel, becoming angry would have been a very serious error. Yet, this man even turned to diabolical psychological tricks to try to reach his nefarious goal. Now, having lost the bet, he has become extremely angry himself, and that anger is all directed at Hillel for causing him this major financial loss. Money obviously means a lot to him, and the value of patience does not. Hillel, nevertheless, did not give up on him. Hillel tried to enlighten him to the importance of humility and patience. Could this man take the lesson to heart? After trying so hard to induce a lack of patience, after losing his valuable bet, and now in a state of rage, could he be at all receptive to this lesson?

**He was following up on one the most amazing displays of self-control**

Hillel, with his astute perception of human nature, was able to discern that this was a “teachable moment.” The vivid, real-life example of the nth degree of patience and humility that Hillel had just provided was a very profound audio-visual teaching aid. It was able to resonate and make impact on even the most hardened target. Perhaps the verbal message alone would indeed have fallen on deaf ears, but Hillel wasn’t merely lecturing here. He was following up on one the most amazing displays of self-control we have in the Talmud.

In our own attempts to impart lessons to our students, children or associates, we have to ask ourselves: “Am I just lecturing now, or have I taught this lesson by my own example as well?” Besides the negative factor of hypocrisy that undermines the effectiveness of an otherwise correct message, there can be an additional loss of a powerful element of teaching by example, which can penetrate the most callous mind, and overcome an enraged heart, to strike home and reach the soul of our fellow Jew. Let us examine our actions and elevate them into the most potent lessons of ethical behavior, a shining beacon of pure light that will inspire others to follow on the path of Torah and *mitzvos*.