

Malchut – Humility

By Alan Morinis, Founder

INTRODUCTION TO WEEK SEVEN

Tomer Devorah says:

How should a person train himself to acquire the quality of *malchut*? First of all, one should not be proud in one's heart because of all that is their's, but should behave constantly like a destitute person, standing before one's Creator like a pauper begging and offering supplication. Even one who is wealthy should train oneself to behave in this attitude by considering that none of their possessions are attached to them and that one requires the mercies of heaven at all times, for all one has is the bread one eats. One should humble their heart and afflict oneself, especially at the time of prayer, for this is a very effective aid.

Malchut means “majesty” and refers to the way that Godliness is revealed to all. Humility is how we, as individuals, make room for the expression of our own Godliness.

Rabbi Bahya ibn Paquda wrote the classic Mussar text *Duties of the Heart* in Spain in 1080. He poses a question: On what do the virtues depend? His answer is clear: “All virtues and duties are dependent on humility.” This is a principle all later Mussar teachers have endorsed—**the foundation of the spiritual life involves the cultivation of humility**—called *anavah* in Hebrew.

Humility entails an unvarnished and honest assessment of who you are, both strengths and weaknesses. Without this accurate self-awareness, nothing else in your inner life will come into focus in its true measure—“measure” being the essential meaning of the word for ‘soul-trait’ in Hebrew (i.e., *middah*).

There is a misconception that humility means being lowly and preoccupied with all the ways you are deficient. The traditional Jewish understanding is quite different. Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz of the Mir Yeshiva said: “Woe to the person who does not know their weaknesses. But woe’s me to the person who does not know their strengths.” And Rav Kook puts it like this:

Humility is associated with spiritual perfection. When humility effects depression, it is defective; when it is genuine, it inspires joy, courage and inner dignity.

Mussar teaches that *real* humility is always associated with healthy self-esteem. Lack of self-esteem leads to unholy and false feelings of worthlessness.

And so being humble doesn't mean being nobody: it just means being no more of a somebody than you ought to be.

How can we know that *anavah* doesn't mean being a lowly, worthless nobody? In the Torah, Moses is described as "*very humble, more than any other person on the face of the earth*" (Numbers 12:3). Now this is the same Moses that is considered the greatest prophet who ever lived, the same Moses who spoke to God "face to face," and the same Moses who challenged Pharaoh to "Let my people go!" If a leader as great as Moses is depicted as having humility, then there must surely be more to humility than the shrinking meekness we ordinarily associate with the term.

And indeed, there is. Jewish sources teach us that humility means occupying your rightful space, neither too much but also not less than you are worthy of.