



Shmini Atzeres; Simchas Torah 2022

Humility Redux

2 minute read | Straightforward

We take for granted that humility is an admirable virtue, but it's worth taking a moment to consider what humility is and also what it is not.

Humility is commonly understood to mean a low estimate of oneself and one's accomplishments. The Oxford English Dictionary defines humility as "the quality of being humble: having a low estimate of one's importance, worthiness, or merits."

But this doesn't ring true with what Judaism teaches us about the value of humility.

The Midrash famously teaches that Mount Sinai was only a little mountain to show how instrumental humility is.

But if the educational purpose of giving the Torah in such a place is to illustrate the value of humility, then you'd assume a valley would be a more appropriate geological feature to teach the lesson!

So why give the Torah on a mountain at all?

The Shem M'shmuel states that to accept the Torah and live its ideals, you must be like a mountain, not a valley; or as Pirkei Avos puts it, if I don't stand up for myself, what am I?

As important as the quality of humility is, people who accept the Torah upon themselves must consider themselves important and deserving of the Torah.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks teaches that humility is an appreciation of our talents, skills, and virtues. It is not meekness or self-deprecating thought, but the dedication of oneself to something higher.

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi notes that the Torah labels Moshe as the most humble of all men. If humility is simply a low view of oneself, then Moshe, the Lawgiver and single greatest authority on the Torah would meekly cave to any challenge – which he obviously couldn't and didn't. But if humility is about being of service, then Moshe truly was the most humble of all men – Moshe singularly dedicated his entire life to public service. His achievements were never about him or his status; they were all in furtherance of rescuing and building the Jewish people.

It was no lack of humility for Moshe to acknowledge his own authority and leadership. When a person believes they are nothing, then ultimately, the Torah itself will have little effect in elevating him. Although pride is a dangerous vice in large quantities, a small amount is still an essential ingredient to living a good life.



Pride is about competing – that you are smarter than or richer than; humility is about serving. Humility isn't the opposite of narcissism and hubris; it's the lack of them. In the absence of pride, you find humility, which sees no need for competition.

So perhaps humility is not that you are nothing; it's just that it's not about you anymore. In humility, you are no more and no less than other people. Humility is not about hiding away, becoming a wallflower or a doormat; it is about the realization that your abilities and actions are not better or less. They simply are.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.

A Legendary Relationship

2 minute read | Straightforward

Midrashim are cryptic and often misunderstood. They are metaphors, literary devices that encode perspectives on how Chazal understood stories in the Torah.

One popular Midrash teaches that before Creation, God approached every nation and offered them the Torah. Every nation responded to the offer with an inquiry into what they were signing up for and declined the Torah for one reason or another until God offered it to the Jewish People, who accept without reservation.

What is this Midrash about?

The Midrash is probably not talking about some sort of metaphysical racial superiority, or that Jews aren't afraid of sin. We can speculate which answer might have turned them off if they had only asked; perhaps the response might have been about business ethics or gossip, and they'd decline the Torah just the same as anyone else!

R' Chaim Brown explains that the Midrash is about something else entirely – relationships.

If you get a call from an unknown number, and the caller claims he has the deal of a lifetime for you, but you just need to send all the money right now, you'd have a lot of questions to ask. Healthy natural skepticism should give rise to lots of sensible questions, like, who are you? How did you get my number? What's the deal? And crucially, what are the terms?

Before you agree to anything, it is absolutely reasonable to ask what you're getting yourself into. If you are used to accepting the Terms and Conditions without reading and signing anything with no review, you really shouldn't!

So the Midrash probably isn't speaking about a defect in the nations who ask the question; the question is eminently fair and reasonable – “what will this Torah require of me?”

But now, what if it's not an unknown caller; consider that it's your parent, sibling, or favorite cousin on the phone. They are launching a new venture imminently, but you can join too if you send the money right away.



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Sure, there are risks – and you shouldn't make any financial decisions this way! – but in the context of the love and trust of a close relationship, you don't have the same kind of questions, and your natural skepticism is muted.

That's what the Midrash is about.

When it's our Father in Heaven offering us the deal, all the obligations are worthwhile to be in business together.

The Loop

< 1 minute | Straightforward

On certain special occasions, we make a blessing called Shehecheyanu, expressing thanks for the opportunity of experiencing the event.

Finishing the Torah cycle on Simchas Torah is a significant milestone, yet we don't say the Shehecheyanu blessing.

Why not?

R' Shlomo Farhi points out that the first word in the Torah is בראשית, and the last, ישראל. The first and last letters in the Torah spell out לב – heart. The Torah only wants an emotional investment from us – רחמנה ליבא בעי –

But in the correct order, it also spells out בל, as in בלב or מבלבל, meaning “confused” or “mixed up”. When we look at the ocean of Torah before us, it is בלב – uncharted and unknown territory. But looking back, it is our לב.

A Torah cycle does not stand in isolation – every new cycle amplifies previous cycles.

This lends light to the old adage that the Torah never finishes, and why we immediately loop back to the beginning. There is no end, only a constant battle against בלב by way of לב, finishing again. And again. And again.

In other words, there's no והגיענו!

It's not the Torah we complete every year, only the cycle.

I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.



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I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond. And if you saw, heard, read, or watched anything that spoke to you, please send it my way - Neli@TorahRedux.com.

If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?

Neli

PS - *TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. I have been blessed to operate a niche business that allows me to dedicate a substantial amount of time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I consult for NY home care companies, so if you have a contact in the NY home care industry, please introduce me!*

PPS - *If anyone you know is looking for a job in healthcare, please put them in touch with me. With a helping hand from Above, I have successfully helped **5 people** get jobs in healthcare so far!*

Redux: *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.