

It is not often that G-D rebukes Moshe; however Rashi believes that in the beginning of this week's Parsha we read of just such an occasion. The Torah tells us "And God spoke unto Moses, and said unto him: 'I am the LORD; and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name G-D, made Me not known to them.'" Rashi explains that G-D was lamenting the loss of our patriarchs. Each of them was faced with singular and devastating challenges yet none of them ever questioned G-D's existence. They each bore their challenge with unquestioned faith and trust and never asked Me what my name is. Yet, G-D complains, when I appeared to you, immediately you asked Me what My name is.

The Gerrer Rebbe (R. Yitzchak Meir Alter) wonders why this rebuke would have been effective at all. Moshe was always noted for his incredible humility and certainly would have considered himself far below our forefathers. He would have been unfazed by G-D's critique; he would have accepted as a fait accompli that he had fallen short of the patriarchs.

The great Chassidic master, R. Bunim of Peshichsa, questions the very notion that Moshe should be known as the most humble of all human beings. Was Moshe unaware that he was Moshe? Did he not realize his own greatness? The entire Jewish people sat soaking in his every word; how could he not recognize that he was the unquestioned greatest leader of his day?

R. Bunim explains that of course Moshe was fully aware of the great regard in which he was held and knew that he had achieved an unparalleled position in Jewish history. However, Moshe's humility was such that he did not believe that he achieved his elevated status because of his own learning or because of his tiresome efforts; rather it was because of his intimate relationship with G-D that G-D Himself had initiated. It was only through this unique and intimate knowledge of G-D that paved the way for him to become the unquestioned leader of the Jewish people. Moshe assumed that, had G-D reached out that way to anyone else, they too would have achieved similar achievements.

Now, we can understand G-D's subtle rebuke to Moshe. G-D was telling Moshe that if you believe that greatness is achieved by knowledge and this is the essence of your humility, how can you explain the greatness of the patriarchs? G-D never told them His name. He never approached them the same way that he approached Moshe. Yet, their faith was incredible. No matter how challenging their ordeals, they never wavered in their commitment to G-D. However, Moshe was blessed with intimate knowledge of G-D's name; Moshe was approached many times by G-D, but still openly questioned G-D. As great as he was, his faith was incomplete and did not approach the level of the patriarchs.

Too often we are guilty of this erroneous mentality. We think that if we were just a little smarter we would be more connected to our faith. Or, if we had just a little stronger religious education we would be so much more committed to religion. While there are times when more is better, that is simply not the case with faith. More wisdom or greater intelligence is not an indicator of a greater dedication to Judaism. In fact, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe once said that the faith of the simple, uneducated Jew far outweighs the faith of the most educated and learned Jews. While "The grass is always greener on the other side" is a tempting and comforting thought, it is antithetical to our faith and simply untrue. No matter how learned or educated we are, dedication to our faith is an attainable and even expected outcome.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Meir Tannenbaum