



BADERECH

RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMP HASC
AUTHOR OF BADERECH SERIES

Before Hashem, With Hashem

In the Beis Medrash of Rebbe Yitzchak Meir Heshel of Zinkov (d. 1854), the oldest son and successor of the Oheiv Yisrael of Apta zy'a, there was an emphasis on *avodas ha-midos*, refining character traits, and in particular attaining humility. When the Rebbe returned home to Zinkov from a lengthy road trip, he found that over the course of his protracted absence, his community had hired a *chazan* to lead prayer services. Unfortunately, this *chazan* seemed to be lacking in *yiras Shomayim*, and his *midos* did not live up to the standards the Rebbe was comfortable with. In defense of their hiring, the Gabbai pleaded: "The *chazan* was passing through town and had such a magnificent voice; everyone was so impressed! His voice fills the room, and he davens before the *amud* so beautifully that we didn't think we needed to know anything more about his personality, and we offered him the job on the spot."

Said the Rebbe, "Indeed, you found a *chazan* who davens for the congregation 'before the *amud*', however I would have preferred that in Zinkov we have a *chazan* who davens before Hashem".

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... ויקרא אל משה. "Hashem called to Moshe,"

inviting him to enter the *Ohel Moed*, the Tent of Meeting, and stand before Him there for the first time. The last letter of the word *Vayikra* is written in our Torah scrolls as an *alef ze'ira*, a "small alef", graphically smaller than the other letters. The *Meforshim* comment that this points out Moshe Rabbeinu's humility; even as Hashem called to Moshe directly, Moshe remained *anav mikol adam*, "more humble than any other person" (Vayikra, 12:3)

Rav Yisroel Belsky, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah VaDaas points to Moshe Rabbeinu's *midah* of humility and noted how self-aware those in positions of Jewish leadership and influence must be within their roles of power and authority. Jewish law states that when a Jewish king davens the *amidah* he must remain in a bowed position throughout the entire prayer, instilling in himself self-negation and humility before the King of Kings. Rav Belsky would say that *malchus*, rulership, is the ultimate *avdus*, servitude. It is in this spirit that the great *tzadik*, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zy'a, would sign his letters as "A Servant of the Holy Nation in the Holy Land".

Rambam writes of a Jewish king: "He must be exceedingly humble; (he must) not exercise pomp and dignity over his people more than necessary... (he must) be gracious and compassionate to young and old, and go and come for their sake and their good...and protect the honor of the smallest of the small...." (*Hilchos Melachim*, 2:6)

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When the Tzemach Tzedek, Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (the 3rd

Lubavitcher Rebbe) was brought to *cheder* to learn Torah, he asked his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, why the letter 'alef' of the word *Vayikra* is written smaller than the other letters. The Alter Rebbe explained to the young genius and future Rebbe that the *alef zeira* honors Moshe's humility, his 'smallness' in his own eyes. He shared an insight as to how Moshe maintained that *midah*: "Moshe Rabbeinu was aware of the outstanding qualities he had been blessed with, yet did not become conceited. Instead, with great humility, he said to himself, 'Someone else in my position, given the opportunity to receive the Torah face-to-face from Hashem and granted all of this spiritual potential, would have accomplished so much more.'"

After experiencing the chaotic unraveling of Covid 19 - of our routine, expectations, sense of control and stability - what is clear is how so many of us have been '*davening for the amud*' - relying on external structures and framework, man made (holy!) institutions and constructs for our spiritual and personal connection with Hashem.

In the aftermath of this period, it is clear each of us are called upon to be a *shalich tzibur*: We are all davening for one another, leading a congregation of even one... in our own homes, for & with our families, our friends, online - it is so clear how much we are all standing before Hashem. Individually and collectively, we are experiencing the humility of the *alef ze'ira*.

This Shabbos Vayikra, may we embrace a humbled state, hear Hashem's calling, and respond directly to Him, with open, sincere conversation, real talk, real *keshet*.

No more davening for the amud, before a congregation.

Only before Hashem, with Hashem. ■

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