

Judaism abhors haughtiness to such a degree that it is identified with רשעות, wickedness and the haughty individual with a רשע, wicked person. This abhorrence is reflected in Halacha according to Rambam, as the שביל הזהב, the golden path, that tells us to adhere to a middle of the road position in human behavior, does not apply to the attribute of haughtiness. We are told to go to the opposite extreme, of exceptional עניוּת, humility. When man makes a fatal mistake of believing כחי ועוצם ידי, that he is the master of his own destiny, he starts down a terrible path. He must always remember that his physical and spiritual existence, with all his accomplishments, does not belong to him. He owes thanks to God for all of them. וזכרת את השם אלקיך כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל. This is a manifestation of the Judaic principle that מלכות, monarchy, is God's alone, לשם הארץ ומלואה. It is an expression of הלא כל הגבורים כאין לפניך וכו'.

But if haughtiness is a disgusting attribute in general, its negativity is significantly amplified when it comes to those in positions of power. A person who wields power who thinks he is superior to others is an idolator. The idolatry of self-worship and self-glorification is particularly repulsive. As noted, man must realize that whatever physical, material, or intellectual talents he has are not his but are gifts from Gd. He must therefore be humble and grateful for them. Even the king was admonished to remain grounded in humility, לבלתי רום לבבו (דברים יז:כ). Chazal recognized גאווה, haughtiness in kings as the root of all evil and problems. King Hezekiah was criticized for his lack of humility and Jeroboam's downfall was caused by his haughtiness. מלכות must be bound with עניוּת, humility. Otherwise, it corrupts the king.

Semicha, what we refer to today as ordination, must also be bound with this concept of מלכות and regulated by עניוּת. In fact, Semicha is not ordination but rather נטילת רשות, permission to judge and render opinions regarding halachic questions. As Rambam says, those granting Semicha would proclaim:

וכן יש לסומכין ליתן רשות עד זמן ולומר לנשמך יש לך רשות לדון או להורות (הלכות סנהדרין ד:ט),

they tell him you have permission to act as a judge. Rendering a Halachic decision, even in יורה דעה, permitted and prohibited objects and activities, איסור והיתר, inherently implies power over someone else. Someone who seeks a rabbi's advice and direction immediately creates a superior-inferior relationship. Even in דיני ממון, monetary law and torts. The petitioner is the subservient and the one rendering the decision is superior. Judaism views power skeptically and with great concern. It was concerned that the one rendering the decision should not be arrogant, but rather he should make sure he understands the great weight and responsibility on his shoulders. That is why an individual who seeks to act as judge

over others must be a Musmach, to get permission beforehand. Inherently, Semicha tells you that everything you are and achieved is not yours. You must admit that whatever you are saying or ruling is not you or yours, and you must bow your head. Everything you have comes from God. The Halachic decisor must admit **הלא כל הגבורים כאין לפניך**. Just as the king is commanded to act with reserve and modesty and without haughtiness, so to the rabbi. As Chazal say, **מאן מלכי רבנן**, who are kings? Rabbis.

The institution of Semicha is built on 3 foundations that every rabbi must take with him as he embarks on his mission:

The first, **השראת הרוח**, a special divine spirit that alights on the individual, based on the verse **קח לך את יהושע בן נון איש אשר רוח בו וסמכת את ידך עליו (במדבר כז:יח)**. It requires someone who understands the unique revelation of **חסד אלקים**, a Godly grace granted the worthy individual. One of the greatest acts of kindness that can be bestowed on a young man is opening the gates of the Written and Oral Law for him. Ramban says the obligation to recite Blessings over the study of Torah is Biblical, **דאורייתא**. Praising God for the favor of studying Torah is more important than all other blessings. For **תורה שבעל פה** and **תורה שבכתב** open new vistas for man in his understanding and perspective on life. It brings him joy and gives him meaning and purpose, **פקודי השם ישרים משמי לב**. What is Judaism without **תורה שבעל פה**? How can one be a Jew without Torah? It's a **משא**, a burden, a curse for one to live without it. If one is fortunate to attain Torah knowledge, he must be appreciative and thankful and recite the blessings on Torah with feeling. If **ברכות התורה** were a Torah obligation in previous generations, it is definitely one in our days. There are many young Jews who thirst for knowledge of Judaism. **הנה ימים באים והשלכתי רעב בארץ וכו' (עמוס ח:יא)**. The people who will suffer this famine and thirst for water did not have the privilege to attend a yeshiva to study the Mesorah. They didn't find the direction of the Halacha. They fell prey to other traps and wandered around aimlessly. A rabbi must be thankful that his lot is different and he was able to drink from the well of Torah.

According to Ibn Ezra, Kuzari and Ramban, the true Influencer, is One, steady, consistent. But the recipients of that **השפעה** are many and diverse. We must accept His decrees. **חסד אלקים**, God's kindness, culminating with Prophecy, can be seen in the Divine Spirit, **רוח הקודש**. That kindness is unlimited. God excludes no one from the possibility of attaining the **Chesed of Torah** and **רוח הקודש**, **צדיק השם בכל דרכיו וחסיד בכל מעשיו**. Ramban said, paradoxically, Moses, the greatest of men, did not receive more favor than a simple Jew. The difference is in his willingness and drive to receive and accept what he was shown. Moses had more dedication to

receive and absorb the Torah he was given. It depends on the will of the student. One requires dedication and desire to become a Rosh Yeshiva. The more the better. The Halacha is the central idea of Judaism. There are additional disciplines, but Halacha is foremost. One must commit and dedicate himself to acquire knowledge of Halacha in order to offer an opinion, to become a party to the discussion. In scientific disciplines, one must be an expert in the field under discussion to offer an opinion. Unfortunately, when it comes to Halacha those with no training have the temerity to voice an opinion that confirms their ignorance of the topic at hand.

According to many opinions, including Rabbeinu Bachaya, הכרת הטוב, expressing thanks, is a fundamental Judaic principle. Students of Yeshiva College should be thankful for the Jewish and secular education they received. Appreciation should be expressed in subjective, as well as objective forms. Subjectively, every Musmach must consider the Yeshiva his spiritual home and feel spiritually connected to the Yeshiva. He must realize that he stands with the Yeshiva and falls without it. Torah Judaism in America would be impossible without RIETS. In the American public domain RIETS is the only one capable of standing in the breach. Without RIETS it would have been impossible to build a Yeshiva in Boston that would not have to look up to Columbia University (which includes JTS) as the model to pursue.

The second foundation of Semicha relates to שליחות, agency. תורה שבעל פה is built on Mesorah, the שלשלת הקבלה. Every generation is the agent of the previous one. Our qualifications and knowledge of Torah is based on what was given us from previous generations. וסמכת את ידך עליו וכו' ונתת מהודך עליו וכו'. The light of the ordained individual is reflected, like Moses and Joshua. פני משה כפני חמה פני יהושע. Moses' knowledge, reflected in the light that shone from his face was like the sun, direct, powerful. Joshua, Moses' student, was like the light of the moon, a reflected light from the original source. The first rule of agency is the mission, the שליחות, must be carried out scrupulously. If the agent changes anything, even if he thinks it's for the best, he nullifies the שליחות. For the dispatcher can always disassociate himself from the agent by claiming לתקוני שדרתיך ולא לעותתי, I sent you to act for my benefit, not my detriment.

While we live an American reality and have a Rabbinate that differs from what we were accustomed to for many generation, the principle and approach to Judaism remains the same. These principles were formulated by our predecessors who charged us as their representatives; the principles are not ours. We have no right to modify or change them.

A local rabbi must be very careful when it comes to deciding Halachic questions. He has permission to rule regarding a dairy spoon that falls in a meat pot. In these cases, the rabbi is simply channeling a human Shulchan Aruch. The law is well established, and he simply quotes what was written. Even in these cases, the rabbi will not lose anything if he spends time researching the sources for the proper decision. Rabbis must be careful when asked to render an opinion on substantive questions they have been presented. In America, a typical rabbi can receive questions on Mamzeirut and Agunah that were reserved for only the greatest rabbis and decisors of previous generations. Nowadays, a typical rabbi can receive complex questions, including difficult new issues regarding artificial insemination and Mamzeirut, and he is expected to rule on them immediately, otherwise his reputation as a scholar will suffer. In these cases, he must recognize his extremely limited authority to rule. The rabbi must think carefully and deeply before answering these difficult questions. He should not be embarrassed to say he has to explore the issue and will get back to the petitioner. He must not reply immediately because he fears the petitioner will think less of his rabbinic ability if he does not answer on the spot. He should consult with his rabbis and teachers to take advantage of their knowledge and experience.

The Rav cited a case he was asked regarding artificial insemination and potential Mamzeirut and the petitioner expected an immediate response. He replied he would not give an answer immediately, instead the petitioner should call him back after several days. He was asked why can't he answer immediately, after all he is supposed to be a great scholar! He replied that regardless of his reputation, call him back later in the week! If the Rav felt he needed to think carefully about these issues how much more so should a newly placed rabbi when considering such difficult issues.

The difficult questions presented the rabbi of today are not limited to marriage and divorce. There are also questions regarding public relations relating to the Jewish community, including the non-religious Jewish community as well as the non-Jewish community. These questions regarding inter-faith relations can be as difficult as those of marriage and divorce. They include questions that are like those decided 1900 years ago in the attic of the house of Nitza in Lod (סנהדרין ע"ד:א) that revolved around the preservation of Judaism against Christian encroachment that included topics related to question faced by our ancestors of violating the 3 cardinal sins in Judaism and the obligation to submit to martyrdom. A rabbi must not decide on or answer Inter-faith "good will" questions on his own. He must ask his teachers, Gedolei Yisrael. If only the political leadership in America and Israel

consulted the Halachic perspective and experts before immersing themselves in these difficult topics, they would not fall prey to the blunders they have made.

The Rav told the story of a newly appointed rabbi who was told he had to attend the forthcoming mass for the recently departed local priest. He was told his lack of participation in the service could lead to dire consequences for the local Jewish community. The young rabbi asked him if he could attend the mass. The Rav told him to call him back later in the week for his answer. The Rav already knew what his reply would be, but he wanted the young rabbi to take some time to calm down before giving his opinion. The Rav subsequently told him he would not attend the mass and he would see there would be no pogrom. Throughout our history of martyrdom, many Jews perhaps would have been spared if they simply agreed to attend a mass or some other religious service, even if they disavowed it in their own minds. Apparently Jewish history ruled that such participation was forbidden. The Talmud (גיטין נז:ב) tells of the story of young Jewish children who committed suicide rather than expose themselves to being possibly violated by their Roman captors. This, even though Maimonides ruled that one should not forfeit their life in a situation where they cannot ascertain they would be forced to violate one of the three cardinal sins of idolatry, murder and illicit sexual relations. Ramban disagreed, saying that apparently, based on the story of these young Jewish children who chose martyrdom, Jewish History ruled against Maimonides. There are areas where the key decision maker is Jewish History, and the rabbi must be careful to respect that history.

A rabbi, especially an inexperienced rabbi, must be very careful with מנהגי ישראל, Jewish customs and traditions, that are to be considered pure and beautiful. Our Mesorah is Halacha, especially those related to our customs regarding all aspects of prayer and synagogue practice. The young rabbi must not have the chutzpah to say this minhag I agree with and accept while this one I do not. The rabbi must show respect for מנהגי ישראל. Each was established and written in the blood and tears of the martyrs who over millennia forfeited their lives to sanctify God's name. When the reform movement began in Germany, they omitted the first יקום פורקן that spoke of the leaders of the academies and the diaspora, saying these are no longer relevant institutions. At that time, they said the content of the second יקום פורקן was acceptable and could remain. Later they questioned why say an Aramaic prayer that is the same as the מי שברך that follows it, so they omitted that as well. Samuel David Lutzato quipped that the reform movement has fulfilled the biblical verse of וימח את כל היקום! If you remove even one יקום פורקן from our liturgy you run the risk of causing great harm to Judaism.

A third foundation is that שליחות, agency, of Semicha also depends on personal connection between שליח and משלח, the agent and the one who sent him. A mute/child/mentally deficient individual cannot be an agent. The שליח must be כמותו, a fitting representative of the one who sent him. He must be capable of identifying completely with him. If the שליח lacks respect for the משלח he cannot fulfill his שליחות. If the rabbi is not dedicated to his Rebbe, he can't complete his mission. Be careful to remain connected to your teachers. It wasn't the Torah knowledge Joseph learned from his father that saved him from the advances of Potiphar's wife, but rather the image of his father he saw before his eyes. Every time a question arises, the rabbi should ask "how would my Rebbe approach this problem"? The rabbi must keep the image of his rebbe in front of his eyes to ground himself and his approach to a question.

Not only must a rabbi have respect for his immediate Rebbe, but he must also respect all Torah scholars, especially זקני תלמידי חכמים of all Yeshivas. They gave their lives for Torah. These elders saw the great Rabbis of yesteryear. Though they seem outdated and old fashioned, they must be respected and indulged. When Rabbi Akiva's wife came to greet him upon his return after being away many years studying Torah, his students tried to push her away, questioning what she could possibly have to do with their great teacher. He told them to let her pass for היא שלי ושלכם שלה היא, all my Torah knowledge and therefore all your Torah knowledge is because of her. We must say the same to older Roshei Yeshiva, that all we have is from them. All these תלמידי חכמים are our Rebbes.

A rabbi's sermons should be built on the Mesorah and תורה שבעל פה. They should be different than those presented by Seminary (JTS) graduates. The difference between their form and style should be immediately evident by anyone who hears even a few minutes of the rabbi's sermon. They should focus on some important theme of Chazal, to show the beauty and depth of their wisdom and to teach their congregants that their words, though at times difficult to understand, are timeless pearls of wisdom.

The rabbi should realize that it is difficult to bring an entire congregation back to Judaism at one time. Sometimes, things done in public fall apart quickly. The first Luchot were given publicly to all Jews. However, in a short time they were broken. The Luchot remained permanent only when Moses alone rose up the mountain with stone tablets he hewed himself out of stone. Torah needs to be presented between individuals. The rabbi should be willing to teach individuals in 1:1 as well

as group settings. Teach Torah to every thirsty individual and eventually you will make a significant impact.

Every rabbi should build a Yeshiva Ketana, elementary day school, especially in towns where one does not exist. Without this most fundamental building block, Torah, and ultimately that Jewish community, cannot survive. The rabbi is responsible to individuals as well as the community. Rabbis today have no time for the individual. They have a messiah complex of saving the world. He is too busy to spend time and be concerned with the needs of a poor woman in the synagogue. They should not rely on a pool of secretaries to deal with the needs of their congregants. Rabbis should follow the path of the patriarchs and Gdolei Yisrael. When Abraham saw strangers from a distance on a brutally hot day, he left God and ran to take care of their needs. The people did not move until Miriam healed from her leprosy and returned to the camp. The rabbi must step away from all his community roles, titles and glory-seeking endeavors and focus on the poor destitute individuals in the community. Abraham was both the leader of the generation as well as the leader and caretaker of all the individuals.

The rabbi must not be a בעל גאווה, in awe of his own personae. He must always be aware of הלא כל הגבורים כאין לפניך. Always remember the beautiful statement of the scholars of Yavne (ברכות יז:א):

מרגלא בפומיהו דרבנן דייבנה: "אני בריה, וחברי בריה. אני מלאכתו בעיר והוא מלאכתו בשדה. אני משקים למלאכתי, והוא משקים למלאכתו. כשם שהוא אינו מתגדר במלאכתי, כך אני איני מתגדר במלאכתו. ושמא תאמר: אני מרבה, והוא ממעיט — שנינו: אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכנין לבו לשמים"

The educated great scholars of Yavne emphasized they were the same creations of God as the farmer and fisherman. My work is spiritual, studying Torah in the city, in Yavne, while his work is to toil in the fields. I write not for today but for future generations to ensure the continuity of Torah, while the farmer and fisherman work for today. How can he compare to me? The Rabbis of Yavne admonish the scholar that both of us wake up early to do our work. Perhaps his religious spark is as great as mine. Just as he shows no haughtiness in his work so I too must not have any in mine. Both of us are important. The rabbi and the congregants must have respect for each other and the work they do.

Why was Judah chosen to be king above all the brothers? The Mchilta in Parashat Bshalach quotes 3 reasons, one of which is he admitted his mistake in the story of Tamar, when he said צדקה ממני. What was so special about that incident that

merited the reward of monarchy? Indeed, we find that Chazal judged Judah harshly for his actions regarding Joseph and his brother Benjamin. They say (בבא קמא צב:א) that for the 40 years the Jews traveled the desert, the bones of Judah did not rest in their coffin, until finally at the end of his life, Moses asked that Judah be admitted to the Heavenly assembly, מתיבתא דרקייע. What was so outstanding about his admission regarding Tamar?

As noted above, each king had his personal prophet who attempted to keep him in line. The temptations of monarchy can easily lead even the best of men astray. Often, a king surrounds himself with “yes” men who are afraid to tell the king when he commits an error. It was therefore important, especially for the king, to have someone at his side who would not be afraid to rebuke the king when he sinned or erred. מלכות must be connected with the recognition of שפלות, that ultimately even the greatest of men must recognize how limited he is.

One of the most difficult things for a human being to do is to admit he made a mistake. The greater the individual, the more power he holds over others, the greater the aversion to admit his mistake. How many battles and lives were lost in wars because the leader of a country or a military campaign believed he was correct and the advisors around him were afraid to tell him he was wrong. This deficiency plagues anyone in a position of authority. It could be scientist, a doctor, even a Rosh Yeshiva or a rabbi. A rabbi will do anything he can to avoid admitting he made a mistake, even when he clearly erred in an open Halacha in Shulchan Aruch. It is a refusal to be מודה על האמת, to admit they were wrong. The inability to admit an error is a terrible character flaw that can cause tremendous damage to the individual as well as those around him. We say in our morning prayers לעולם יהא אדם ירא שמים בסתר ובגלוי ומודה על-האמת ודובר אמת בלבבו. If one cannot be מודה על אדם ירא שמים he cannot be a שמים האמת.

This article contains comments from the Rav ZT”L delivered in his address at the 1953 Chag HaSemicha as well as a Shiur in Moriah on Masechet Brachot delivered in the 1950’s that concluded with remarks on Parashat Vayigash.

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