

# Humility – Sotah 49b

”משמת רבי בטלה ענוה ויראת חטא” אמר ליה רב יוסף לתנא 'לא תיתני ענוה דאיכא אנא' אמר ליה רב נחמן לתנא לא תיתני יראת חטא דאיכא אנא

The final line of the mishna states that from the time when Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi died, humility and fear of sin ceased. Rav Yosef said to the tanna who reviewed the mishna: Do not teach that humility ceased, for there is still one who is humble, namely me. Rav Naḥman similarly said to the tanna who reviewed the mishna: Do not teach that fear of sin ceased, for there is still one who fears sin, namely me.

# A discussion on **Humility** based on Sotah 49b

## A Related Story:

Once George Washington was riding near Washington city with a group of friends and they came to a place where they had to leap over a wall. In the process one horse knocked off a number of the stones from the wall. Washington said, "We better replace them." His friends told, "Oh, let the farmer do it." But Washington didn't feel right about that. When the riding party was over, he went back the way they came. He found the wall and dismounted. Then he carefully replaced each of the stones. His riding companion saw what he did and said, "You're too big to do that." His only response was, "On the contrary, I am the right size."

## Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- How can Rav Yoseph say that humility is still in the world because he is around?
- Is this not the opposite of being humble?
- Do you think this Mishna and gemora trying to teach us any lesson deeper than just how great these rabbis were?
- How can Moshe write that he himself is the most humble person ever?

## Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What is humility? Is playing down your own strengths good humility or is it actually a bad thing?
- Is the difference between being humble and being modest?
- Do you think the Jewish definition of humility is the same as the OED definition?
- Are humility and arrogance opposites not?
- Should your outlook on how humble you are vary at different times or should you be consistent with how you view yourself/act at all times?
- Do people in different positions require to show different levels of humility?) see pasuk from Devarim)

## Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What would you want to be said about things that are lost from the world after your death?
  - How can you ensure you use this to make a difference in your life?
- Can you think of times when you have downplayed your abilities but maybe it wasn't being humble? What was the cause of this?

## Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Oxford English dictionary definition of humility:

The quality of having a modest or low view of one's importance

Bamidbar 12:3

והאיש משה ענו [עניו] מאד מכל האדם אשר על-פני האדמה:

Mishlei 11:2

When arrogance appears, disgrace follows, But wisdom is with those who are unassuming.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Humility is not low self-regard. Humility means that you are secure enough not to need to be reassured by others.

Devarim 17:18,20

When he (the king) is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the Cohanim and levi'im... Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.

## Some Interactive Resources:



**Strengths Dartboard** – Get the chanichim to draw a target with their strengths to show how they need to be strong with their own abilities