

Date: 11 Av 5785 (August 5, 2025)

Torah Portion: Va'etchanan

Topic: True Humility

It is written (Deut. 3:24), “Adonai, YHWH, You have begun.” The Name “YHWH” is indicative of Hashem’s Attribute of Mercy, whereas the Name “Elohim” represents His Attribute of Strict Justice. The combination of the two Names here thus appears to be something of a contradiction. The Midrash discusses this: In two instances, Moshe compared himself to Abraham, but it did not help him at all, i.e., he did not merit what Abraham merited.

Regarding Abraham, Hashem called out to him and he responded, “Here I am,” (Gen. 22:1) meaning he is ready. Abraham is ready for the yoke of the priesthood, and I am ready for the yoke of the kingship.” Eitz Yosef explains that the priesthood and the kingship require self-sacrifice, extreme dedication to the service of Hashem, and unswerving patience with His children. It was on the understanding of these terms that Abraham willingly accepted these offices.

From where do we learn that Abraham merited to achieve priesthood? For it is stated, “YHWH has sworn and will not relent: You shall be a priest forever; by the word of Malchizedek” (Psa. 110:4). Malchizedek and his encounter with Abraham are described in the Sefer Beresheet (Gen. 14:18). As for the kingship, it is stated (Gen. 14:17), “The king of Sodom went out to meet [Abraham] ... to the valley of Shaveh, which is the king’s valley.” The Hebrew word שָׁוֶה (*shaveh*) means “equal” or “as one” because everyone joined together to coronate Abraham there as a king over them, in the aftermath of his miraculous victory over the four mighty kings.

And Moshe also sought to do so, as it is stated, “And [YHWH] said, ‘Moshe, Moshe,’ and he replied, ‘Here I am’ (Exo. 3:4).” Moshe is saying, “I am ready for the yoke of the priesthood, and I am ready for the yoke of kingship. Moshe emulated Abraham in his response and hoped that he would merit as Abraham did. Indeed, it should be noted that Moshe was considered the king of Yisrael, and there is a dispute in Zevachim (101b) as to whether or not he was also considered a priest. The issue is discussed whether Moshe’s request to merit priesthood and kingship for all generations.

Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah (“Teachings of the School of Elijah) (§31) chastises Saul for displaying arrogance when he failed to fully carry out his mission to eliminate Amalek, all the while proclaiming to Shmuel that he did in fact obey Hashem’s command. The midrash illustrates how such insistence can be construed as arrogance. But Chidushei HaRim is troubled by that midrash’s attributing this to arrogance, when we find that, on the contrary, when Saul was informed that he would be king, he insisted that he was unworthy and he ran away and concealed himself in an attempt to flee from honor (1Sam. 10:22).

Chidushei HaRim suggests that perhaps even Saul’s humility in that incident itself bespoke a trace of arrogance. Arrogance is the assertion of self. Humility is the submission to Hashem – whatever He may demand. If Hashem commands one to assume the throne, then humility demands that one *not* flee from the honor. To the contrary, such flight from honor would be a sign of arrogance, the implied assertion that he can thwart the Will of Hashem. In such situations, true humility would be the humility exhibited by Moshe. This same Moshe, regarding whom Scripture attests, “Now the man Moshe was *exceedingly humble, more than any person*, declares himself prepared to assume any position of leadership for which Hashem has chosen him. *“I am ready for the priesthood, and I am ready for kingship.”*

Ultimately, true humility is negating one’s will completely before the Will of Hashem, whatever that Will may be – even if it is the Will that the humble shall assume the most lofty position given to man.

Shalom.