
TOO BIG FOR YOUR BOOTS

Balancing Arrogance, Self-Esteem, and Humility

Few people believe themselves to be arrogant; even fewer aspire to be humble. In our competitive world of corporate ladder climbing and “keeping up with the Joneses,” the trait of humility seems counterproductive. And yet we can all recognize the value of having a good self-esteem. How do these three concepts – arrogance, humility, and self-esteem – interplay with one another? How highly should one think of oneself, and how lowly?

This class will explore the Jewish perspective on the dangers of arrogance, the necessity for self-esteem, and the lofty goal of humility. In the process we will clarify how these terms interrelate and how the Torah’s understanding of them can help us to strike a crucial balance in our own lives. In doing so we will seek to answer the following questions:

- What is wrong with being arrogant?
- Is it arrogant to think highly of yourself?
- Are humility and self-esteem mutually exclusive?
- Why should I be humble?
- How can I become more humble?

Class Outline:

- Introduction. General, Another Glass of Wine Please
- Section I. Arrogance
 Part A. Defining Arrogance
 Part B. The Pitfalls of Arrogance
 Part C. The Torah’s Attitude towards Arrogance
- Section II. Self-Esteem
 Part A. The Definition of Self-Esteem
 Part B. The Benefits of a Positive Self-Image
 Part C. Self-Esteem as a Torah Value
 Part D. The Case of King Shaul
- Section III. Humility
 Part A. What Humility is, and What it is Not
 Part B. The Advantages of Humility
 Part C. How to Work on Acquiring Humility

INTRODUCTION. GENERAL, ANOTHER GLASS OF WINE PLEASE

Four-star Army General Peter Chiarelli – the number two general in the U.S. Army – says he is absolutely not offended that Obama adviser Valerie Jarrett mistook him for a waiter at a fancy Washington dinner this week and asked him for a glass of wine.

It could have happened to anybody, Chiarelli tells CNN. “It was an honest mistake that ANYONE could have made. She was sitting, I was standing and walking behind her and all she saw were the two stripes on my pants which were almost identical to the waiter’s pants – REALLY. She apologized and will come to the house for dinner if a date can be worked out in March,” Chiarelli wrote in an e-mail.

In fact, when military personnel wear their dress uniforms of short jacket and striped trousers to black-tie parties, they themselves often make jokes to each other about waiting tables. Chiarelli, a veteran of Iraq, wears a chestful of medals, which Jarrett apparently did not see. The incident was first reported on the website Daily Caller, which said Chiarelli, who oversees the Army’s programs to help ill and wounded troops from the war, went ahead and got Jarrett a glass of wine. Chiarelli tells CNN that’s not exactly what happened.

“As a ‘laugh’ I poured her a glass of wine – it was only good fun. Yes, it was an honest mistake and anyone who says otherwise is trying to make it something it was not,” Chiarelli said. Sometime, embarrassing stuff happens (by Pentagon Correspondent Barbara Starr, CNN, Obama Adviser Mistakes 4-Star General for Waiter, February 6, 2011).

Humility is an attribute that is so essential to achieving completeness of character that the Torah testifies that it is one of the defining traits of Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses), Judaism’s greatest leader and prophet. To Judaism, humility is no laughing matter. Let’s explore the framework for eliminating the unacceptable attribute of arrogance, and the balancing of self-esteem and humility.

SECTION I. ARROGANCE

We know arrogance when we see it. We all cringe at having to deal with an arrogant person. It is a trait easily recognizable in others but not so much in ourselves. The Torah, though, warns us all against being arrogant. In this section we will explore the definition of arrogance and the Jewish attitude towards it.

PART A. DEFINING ARROGANCE

The definition of arrogance is having an exaggerated sense of one’s importance and abilities. This is a direct contradiction to belief in God’s supremacy.

1. **Malbim, Sefer HaCarmel, Entry “Ga’ava” – Arrogance means thinking more of oneself than one really is.**

Arrogance is illusory and not based on reality. It is an illusion contained solely within one’s head, but objectively untrue. One who is arrogant is

הגאווה הוא מדומה ואינה אמת והוא רק בעצם המתגאה ולא חוצה לה... שמתנשא ברוחו לדמות ולחשוב את עצמו יותר ממה שהוא בעצם ומתגאה

conceited and thinks more of himself than he really is. He is arrogant even without having any virtue over others.

בעצמו אף בלא שום מעלה על אחרים.

Arrogance is a magnification of one's own accomplishments and positive attributes to the point that one overlooks shortcomings, expects praise from others, and even looks down on people considered less accomplished than oneself.

2. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal), Mesillat Yesharim (Path of the Just), Ch. 11, Feldheim Publishers, based on Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translation – Arrogance stems from being too proud of one's own virtues.**

Pride is when someone has a high regard for himself and considers himself worthy of praise. There can be many different reasons for this. Some people deem themselves intelligent; some, handsome; some, honored; some, great; some, wise. The principle is that whenever someone attributes to himself any of the good things of the world, he puts himself in immediate danger of falling into the pit of pride ...

הנה כלל ענין הגאווה הוא זה, שהאדם מחשיב עצמו בעצמו ובלבבו ידמה כי לו נאווה תהלה. ואמנם זה יכול למשך מספרות רבות מתחלפות, כי יש מי שיחשיב את עצמו בעל שכל ויש מי שיחשיב עצמו נאה ויש שיחשיב עצמו נכבד ויש מי שיחשיב עצמו גדול ויש שיחשיב עצמו חכם. כללו של דבר: כל אחד מן הדברים הטובים שבעולם אם יחשב האדם שישנה בו, הרי הוא מסוכן מיד לפול בשחת זה של גאווה.

Arrogance can also come from magnifying one's spiritual attainments:

3. **Chovot HaLevavot (Duties of the Heart), Shaar Hak'niah, Ch. 9 – Arrogance can even be over spiritual accomplishments.**

Pride over spiritual assets can be divided into two categories, one negative and one positive. The form of negative pride is when a person is proud of his wisdom, or a righteous person is proud of his deeds, in a way that causes his accomplishments to be great in his eyes; to feel that he can make do with what he has already accomplished; to degrade other people; to look down at the great and wise people of his generation; and to be happy with others' shortcomings.

הגאווה שבמעלות הרוחניות מתחלקת לשני חלקים: אחד מהם מגונה והשני משובח. המגונה שיתגאה האדם בחכמתו, והצדיק במעשהו, וגורם זה שירבה בעיניו, ויספיק אצלו מה שקדם לו מהם... ולבוזת בני אדם... ולהיות חכמי דורו וגדוליהם פחותים בעיניו, ולהתפאר בקיצור חבריו וסכלותם...

PART B. THE PITFALLS OF ARROGANCE

Apart from the fact that it is clearly a vice, arrogance brings with it certain pitfalls that are detrimental to our goals in life. An arrogant person is a poor student in the "University of Life" too. He is less likely to learn from the people around him because he feels that he already knows it all. He is also not likely to ask advice from others more knowledgeable and experienced than himself.

1. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Mesillat Yesharim, Ch. 11 – Arrogance doesn't allow you to learn from others.**

Arrogance causes wise people to degenerate

הגאווה...משיבה חכמים אחר ודעתם מסכלת, מסירה

and causes them to lose their intelligence. It does this even to the wisest of men, and all the more so to those who have not studied enough; as soon as their eyes have opened [i.e. they have just begun their pursuit of wisdom], they consider the greatest of wise men to be their equals.

לב ראשי החכמה ואף כי תלמידים שלא שמשו כל צרכם, שכמעט שנפקחו עיניהם כבר חכמי החכמים שוים להם בלבם.

2. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Sotah 5a – People eventually lose respect for those who are arrogant.**

A person who has arrogance will eventually be rendered insignificant. (Rashi – From their important status.)

כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח לסוף מתמעט. (מחשיבותו - רש"י)

3. **Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerondi, Shaarei Teshuvah (The Gates of Repentance) 1:27 – Arrogance causes a person to transgress.**

Arrogance causes many sins and causes man's baser inclinations to overcome him, as it is written, "And your heart will become haughty and you will forget the Lord your God" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 8:14).

הגאווה מסבבת כמה עבירות ומגברת יצר לב האדם עליו, שנאמר ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך.

The arrogant person sees only himself and cannot submit to the authority of anyone, including God. Since he does not see himself in the proper context in his relationship to the world he lives in, he loses control over his baser desires; he feels an unlimited sense of entitlement and cannot bear to have any whim unfulfilled.

The commentators see in Haman the epitome of arrogance and the mindless pursuit of honor. Haman had everything a person could possibly want: money, power, family, and prestige. The entire country bowed before him – except for one Jew, Mordechai. Thousands upon thousands of people throughout 127 provinces paid homage to him, yet Haman could find no rest because Mordechai the Jew refused to bow down. He told his wife, "All of this is meaningless to me when I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (Esther 5:13).

That, Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz explains, is the essence of the pursuit of honor. It is all in the imagination. There can be no second best. If he doesn't have everything, he feels he has nothing and can find no pleasure in all that he does have. (Rabbi Ephraim Nisenbaum, Power Lines, Targum Press).

4. **Rabbi Ezriel Tauber, Self-Esteem – Arrogance causes one to lose objectivity.**

Self-esteem and egotism are *not* separated by a thin line. They are two altogether different categories. Egotism revolves around "getting what I want." I must possess anything of value that anyone else has. Everyone must bend to my will because I know everything better than anyone else. That is egotistical ...

The real problem with the egotistical person is that he cannot think as a human being is supposed to think – he cannot override his instinctual desires. Even if he harnesses his physical desires, if he thinks that his mind is the center of the universe he will not be able to think objectively. He will think that everything that he does is fine and nobody else will be able to tell him otherwise.

5. **Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, Ohr Yisroel, Letter 30 – Arrogance takes over the soul as one focuses on his own virtues and the shortcomings of others.**

Do not be surprised how it could be that a person with all his faults and smallness of stature nevertheless considers himself greater than his contemporaries. For the more a person loves being praised and admired, the more will his desire for praise grow and cover up his deficiencies, to the point that he no longer senses them. And as the desire to feel that he is better than others grows, his self-admiration heightens the sense of other people's shortcomings. By virtue of his arrogance he will no longer sense other people's virtues and will eventually only be able to sense his own virtues and other people's deficiencies. And so, arrogance will come to fill his entire soul without his even sensing it.

אין להתפלא על המתגאה על בני גילו, עם גודל חסרונותיו וקטנות ערכו, איך נהיתה, כי מאהבת האדם שבחו, היא היא התפעלותו, להגביר כח שבחו, לדחות כח חסרונותיו ולכבותם כליל מהרגש נפשו. גם תאות היתרון על זולתו, מקרב אל נפשו בהתפעלותו את חסרון חברו, ונגבר כחו להדעיק כח הרגש מעלת חברו, וממילא ההרגש בנפשו, רק שבח עצמו וחסרון זולתו. ובזו הגאווה מלאה כל בתי נפשו בלי הרגש.

6. **Talmud Bavli, Sotah 5a, with Rashi – Since the arrogant person lacks basic faith in God, he is much more prone to worry and discontentment.**

An arrogant person gets uprooted by even the slightest wind.

Rashi

Even small misfortunes tear him up and cause him to feel loss.

כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח אפילו רוח קימעה עוכרתו.

רש"י - פורענות קלה טורפתו ומאבדתו

PART C. THE TORAH'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS ARROGANCE

i. Not Even for the President, Prime Minister or King

1. **Devarim 17:20 – The Torah prohibits a king from being haughty.**

He [the Jewish king] must not come to feel superior to his brethren, and he will not stray from the commandment to the right or the left. He and his descendants will thus have a long reign in the midst of Israel.

לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו ולבלתי סור מן המצוה ימין ושמאול למען יאריך ימים על ממלכתו הוא ובניו בקרב ישראל:

2. **Ramban (Nachmonides), ibid. – Arrogance is prohibited even for a king; all the more so for the rest of us.**

prohibition against arrogance, for here the Torah aims to restrain the king from arrogance and a haughty heart; and all the more so the rest of us for whom arrogance is not as With this verse the Torah alludes to the befitting [as it would be

נרמז בכאן בתורה איסור הגאות, כי הכתוב ימנע את המלך מגאות ורוממות הלב, וכל שכן האחרים שאינן ראויים לכך, כי בראוי להתרומם ולהתגדל יזהירנו להיות לבבו שפל ככל אחיו הקטנים ממנו. כי הגאווה מדה מוגנה ונמאסת אצל האלהים אפילו במלך

for a king]. The Torah is explicitly warning those who are most likely to feel pompous and arrogant rather to be of humble spirit like the rest of their subjects. For the trait of arrogance is despicable and disgusting to God, even in a king, for to God alone belongs greatness and exaltedness ...

כי לה' לבדו הגדולה והרוממות...

Only God is the source of His own greatness; the rest of us must humble ourselves before the recognition of where our virtues truly come from.

3. **Ramban, Iggeret HaRamban (Letter of the Ramban) – Recognition of God rules out the possibility of arrogance.**

And now, my son, understand and observe that whoever feels that he is greater than others is rebelling against the Kingship of God, because he is adorning himself with His garments, as it is written, “God reigns, He wears clothes of pride” (Tehillim/Psalms 93:1). Why should one feel proud? Is it because of wealth? God makes one poor or rich (Shmuel/Samuel I 2:7). Is it because of honor? This is due to God, as we read, “Wealth and honor come from You” (Divrei Hayamim/Chronicles I 29:12). So how could a person adorn himself with God’s honor?

And one who is proud of his wisdom surely knows that God “takes away the speech of those who are trustworthy and reasoning from the sages” (Iyov/Job 12:20)! So we see that everyone is the same before God, since with His anger He lowers the proud and when He wishes He raises the low. Therefore, lower yourself and God will lift you up!

ועתה בני דע וראוה, כי המתנאה בלבו על הבריות, מורד הוא במלכות שמים, כי מתפאר הוא בלבוש מלכות שמים, שנאמר ה' מלך גאות לבש וגו'. ובמה יתנאה לב האדם, אם בעושר, ה' מוריש ומעשיר, ואם בכבוד, הלא לאלהים הוא, שנאמר והעושר והכבוד מלפניך, ואיך מתפאר בכבוד קונו.

ואם מתפאר בחכמה, מסיר שפה לנאמנים, וטעם זקנים יקח. נמצא הכל שונה לפני המקום, כי באפו משפיל גאים, וברצונו מגביה שפלים, לכן השפיל עצמך וינשאך המקום...

Since true greatness over and above all other beings belongs only to God, a person who feels that way about himself is essentially denying the existence of God.

ii. Denial of God

1. **Devarim 8:11-14 – Success may lead to haughtiness.**

Be careful that you not forget the Lord your God, not keeping His commandments, decrees and laws, which I am prescribing to you today. You may then eat and be satisfied, building fine houses and living in them. Your herds and flocks may increase, and you may amass much silver and gold – everything you own may increase. But your heart may then grow

השמר לך פן תשכח את יקוק אלהיך לבלתי שמר מצותיו ומשפטיו וחקתיו אשר אנכי מצוך היום: פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טבים תבנה וישבת: ובקרך וצאנך ירבין וכסף וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך ירבה: ורם לבבך ושכחת את יקוק אלהיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים:

haughty, and you may forget the Lord your God, Who brought you out of slavery from the land of Egypt.

2. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 5a – Arrogance leads to the denial of God's existence.

What is the source of the prohibition against arrogance? ... Rabbi Nachman, the son of Rabbi Yitzchak said: It is written (Devarim 8:14), "... And your heart will become haughty and you will forget (the Lord your God)." And it is also written (Ibid. 8:11), "Beware lest you forget the Lord, your God," and as we know from Rabbi Avin in the name of Rabbi Ilai: Wherever it is written "beware," "lest" or "don't," it implies a prohibition.

אזהרה לגסי הרוח מגנין... רב נחמן בר יצחק אמר מהכא "ורם לבבך ושכחת" וכתוב "השמור לך פן תשכח את ה' אלקיך" וכדברי אבין אמר רבי אילעא, דאמר רבי אבין אמר רבי אילעא: כל מקום שנאמר השמר פן ואל, אינו אלא בלא תעשה.

3. Sefer Mitzvot HaGadol, Negative Mitzvah #64 – The Talmud does in fact state that arrogance is a prohibition.

I have publicly expounded the virtues of humility, but to put it in print and count it as one of the mitzvot never occurred to me. Rambam (Maimonides) also wrote about it but did not count it as one of the mitzvot ... Afterwards, as I was perusing the first chapter of Tractate Sotah (5a), I found written there explicitly: "What is the source of the prohibition against arrogance? ... 'And your heart will become haughty and you will forget (the Lord your God).'"

תוכחת הענוה דרשתי לרבים כך אבל לחברה על לאו זה ולמנות זה בלאו לא היה דעתי, גם רבינו משה לא חיברו ולא הזכירו בחשבון הלאוין... אחרי כן עיינתי בספר פרק קמא דסוטה (ה, א) וגרסין שם אזהרה לגסי הרוח מגנין... "ורם לבבך ושכחת".

4. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 181 – Arrogance causes us to lose sight of the fact that we are subservient to our Creator.

[The essence of] arrogance is forgetting that one is created.

גסות הרוח היא שכחת הנבראות.

5. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim: Midot, Vol. II, p. 117 – Success provides the means for a haughty heart to deny God.

Presumably "your heart will become haughty" is not the reason for "you will forget the Lord, your God," but rather the converse is true: haughtiness itself is the product of forgetting God. Forgetting God causes haughtiness since a person attributes all his blessings and success to himself, and thus becomes haughty.

לכאורה "ורם לבבך" איננו הסיבה ל"ושכחת את ה' אלוקיך" אלא ה"רם לבבך" הוא התוצאה של "ושכחת את ה' אלוקיך" שהפועל יוצא משכחת השי"ת היא הגאווה שהוא מייחס את כל השפע וההצלחה לעצמו ובכך בא לידי גבהות לב.

However, the author of Sefer Mitzvot HaGadol says that it is just the opposite: haughtiness of heart causes the denial of God. It is just that the haughtiness in a person's heart needs an external impetus to trigger it. When a person is steeped in anguish and despair, even if he is naturally inclined to be arrogant, it is not likely that he will act with arrogance. Only when a person experiences good fortune, whether in the form of physical blessing or spiritual virtue, then he will come to "forget the Lord." The success a person experiences only serves as a medium through which to bring out his latent arrogance, the result of which is "you will forget the Lord, your God."

אך הסמ"ג מפרש שאדרבה ה"רם לבבך" הוא הוא שורש הענין המביא את האדם ל"ושכחת את ה' אלוקיך" אמנם כדי להוציא לפועל את ה"רם לבבך" צריכה הגאווה סיבות חיצוניות, אם אדם מדוכא ביסורים ובצרות גם אם יש לו שורש הגאווה הוא לא מסוגל להוציא אותה לפועל אך אם יש לו שפע כל טוב הן בגשמיות והן מעלות הרוחניות אז הוא בא לידי שכחת השי"ת ואדרבה הצלחת האדם בנכסיו גורמת לגאווה להיות שורש פורה הפורץ חוצה ומצמיח את העבירות ומביא לתוצאה של "ושכחת את ה' אלוקיך".

iii. Denial of Mankind's Role in This World

1. Talmud Bavli, Sotah 5a – God and the arrogant: there is only room for one.

Any person who is arrogant of heart, God says about him, "He and I cannot live in the same world."

כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח - אמר הקב"ה: אין אני והוא יכולין לדור בעולם

2. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, A Letter for the Ages, p. 72 – The arrogant worship themselves at the expense of God.

God created the world so that He be recognized by mankind – and mankind so that they recognize their Creator. To the extent that man magnifies himself, he thus detracts from the purpose of his existence. Hence, God declares, "[The arrogant person] and I cannot exist in the same world." In venerating himself, the arrogant person worships the idol of his own likeness.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

- ⌘ Arrogance is defined as an inflated sense of self-worth wherein the arrogant person sees himself as better than other people by virtue of his wealth, accomplishments, or even character.
- ⌘ Judaism views arrogance as offensive since it is rooted in the notion that we are the source of our own success. Rather we must recognize that all blessings and success are God's doing and not our own.
- ⌘ The trait of arrogance develops when a person takes pride and credit for his own success, and leads him to deny the role of God in his life.
- ⌘ Arrogance also undermines our quest to fulfill our life's goals: it keeps us from learning from others, causes others to lose respect for us, and generally contributes to an egocentric life.

SECTION II. SELF-ESTEEM

If we must not be arrogant, should we then consider ourselves as nothing?

While arrogance is a self-destructive trait that is clearly condemned by the Torah, Jewish sources are also clear about the importance of recognizing one's own self-worth. Arrogance has its pitfalls, but a low self-esteem has dangers all of its own.

PART A. THE DEFINITION OF SELF-ESTEEM

1. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, *Angels Don't Leave Footprints*, ArtScroll Publications, p. 11 – A healthy self-image has two main factors.**

Self-esteem has two main components: self-worth and competence.

i. Self-worth

The first key ingredient to a positive self-image is a feeling of self-worth.

1. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, *Let Us Make Man*, CIS Publications, p. 116 – Appreciating our purpose in life gives us a sense of self-esteem.**

Just as the feeling of one's life having been futile is profoundly depressing, so is the awareness that one's life is one of achievement extremely elating. This is why a sense of purpose in existence, a conviction that one is achieving one's mission in the universe, provides a true sense of joy as well as a feeling of self-esteem. This is what the Psalmist meant when he affirmed, "The commandments of God are just; they bring joy to one's heart" (Tehillim 19:9).

Conversely, one who feels lowly will consider no action beneath his dignity.

2. **Rambam, *Pirkei Avot 2:13* – The person who lacks self-worth will engage in unproductive behavior.**

If a person looks at himself as a lowly individual, he will not consider any [negative] act to be beneath his dignity.

כשיחשוב אדם עצמו חסר ופחות, לא יגדל בעיניו חסרון שיעשהו.

The quality of our actions is based on our self-image: the less we think of our own moral character, the lower our standards will be.

ii. Competence

Awareness of one's importance, however, is not enough. One also needs to have confidence that he has what it takes to do the job.

David, who later went on to become King David, was a young boy who took offense at the blasphemous scorn heaped upon the Jewish soldiers by the giant Philistine warrior, Goliath. David approached King Shaul with the suggestion that he, armed only with a slingshot and some small rocks, take on the seasoned warrior.

1. **I Shmuel 17:33-37 – David’s recognition of his successes gave him the ability to defeat Goliath.**

Shaul (Saul) said to David, “You cannot go to fight against this Philistine; for you are but a youngster, while he is a man of war from his youth.” And David said to Shaul, “Your servant was a shepherd for his father. When a lion or bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went out after it and struck it and saved [the sheep] from its mouth. If it attacked me, I held onto its mane and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both a lion and a bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has blasphemed the legions of the Living God.” And David said, “God, Who saved me from the lion and the bear, will save me from this Philistine.”

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאוּל אֶל-דָּוִד לֹא תוּכַל לְלָכֶת אֶל-הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הַזֶּה לְהִלָּחֵם עִמּוֹ כִּי-נָעַר אַתָּה וְהוּא אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה מִנְעָרָיו. וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-שָׂאוּל רַעְיָה הִיָּה עִבְדְּךָ לְאָבִיו בְּצֹאנוֹ וּבֵאת הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-הַדּוֹב וְנִשְׂאָ שָׂה מִהָעֵדֶר. וַיַּצֵּאתִי אֲחֵרָיו וְהִבְתִּיו וְהִצַּלְתִּי מִפִּיּוֹ וַיָּקָם עָלַי וְהִחַזְקֹתִי בְּזַקְנוֹ וְהִבְתִּיו וְהִמִּיתֵנִי. גַּם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ גַּם-הַדָּב הִכָּה עִבְדְּךָ וְהִיָּה הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הָעֶרְל הַזֶּה כְּאֶחָד מֵהֵם כִּי חָרַף מֵעֲרֹכֶת אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים. וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד ה' אֲשֶׁר הִצִּילָנִי מִיַּד הָאָרֶץ וּמִיַּד הַדָּב הוּא יִצִּילָנִי מִיַּד הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הַזֶּה.

2. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter – The belief in one’s ability to overcome challenges comes from one’s past successes in that area.**

Why didn’t David say from the outset that he was confident God would save him from the Philistine? Why did he begin instead with a record of his amateur matador skills? After all, he was acting out of zeal to defend God’s honor. Moreover, the ability to overpower a lion does not guarantee that one can overpower a trained and skilled warrior!

Before David could even begin to think about going to war against this giant, he needed to be aware of his own experience in the past that showed him he was capable of standing up to someone or something more powerful than himself. Once he could point to such an experience, he was able to build upon it and place his trust in God that He would help him accomplish an even more incredible feat.

Not only must one be aware of his abilities to meet the practical challenges of life, he must also be aware of his ability to meet moral and ethical challenges. That is, he must be aware of the successes he has met in those areas as well.

3. **Chovot HaLevavot, Shaar HaK’νιαh Ch. 9 – Appreciation of one’s virtues inspires the confidence to build upon them.**

The positive type of pride [over spiritual matters], as the pride of the wise in their wisdom or the righteous in their good deeds, is that which leads one to thank God for granting these gifts and to take joy in them; to become even more determined to seek further levels of wisdom and piety ...

וְהַמְשׁוּבָה: כְּשִׁמְתַגָּאָה הָאָדָם בַּחֲכָמָתוֹ, וְהַצְדִּיק בְּמַעֲשָׂהוּ הוֹדָאָה לְגוֹדֵל טוֹבַת הַבוֹרָא עֲלָיו בְּהֵם וּשְׂמִיחָה בְּעִבּוּרָם, וַיְגַרוּם לוֹ לְהוֹסִיף וּלְהַשְׁתַּדֵּל בָּהֶם ...

PART B. THE BENEFITS OF A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE

Apart from the obvious advantages of a positive self-image, self-esteem has other fringe benefits.

1. **Rabbi E. E. Dessler, Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Vol. V, p. 264, citing Rabbi Mendel of Vitebsk – Appreciating both one's physical possessions as well as one's spiritual attainments fosters contentment.**

The concept of “being happy with what one has” is applicable to spiritual matters as well. This certainly does not mean that one's drive for greater accomplishments should be dampened; rather that one should also be aware of the value of what he already is doing, and feel happy about it.

הענין של שמח בחלקו צריך להיות גם ברוחניות. לא שתחסר ח"ו השאיפה לעלות אלא שיכיר גם כן את הערך והשמחה במה שהוא עושה עתה.

2. **Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Likutei Amarim, Ch. 1 – A negative self-image will have a damaging effect on your mood.**

If one looks at himself as a bad person, he will be sad and therefore unable to serve God with joy.

אם יהיה בעיניו כרשע, ירע לבבו ויהיה עצב, ולא יוכל לעבוד ה' בשמחה ובטוב לבב.

3. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, Angels Don't Leave Footprints, p. 11 – Confidence in oneself gives the ability to cope with life.**

Someone with self-esteem feels that he has the wherewithal to deal with life. He has the ability to think, learn, make decisions, and cope with whatever situations life will present him.

PART C. SELF-ESTEEM AS A TORAH VALUE

A positive self-image is not just a good way to avoid detrimental influences; it is actually an obligation. Judaism considers a positive self-image as necessary for the proper observance of mitzvot. Without a sense of self-worth, a person will not take the responsibility to stand up for himself in the face of others' demands nor against the demands of his own baser instincts.

The Torah teaches us the necessity of self-esteem by relating the unique creation of Adam. Unlike all the other creatures that God created, only man was created alone as a single, individual unit. The Talmud seeks to know what we can learn from this interesting fact.

1. **Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5 – There is an obligation to recognize your own importance.**

For the following reason man was created alone: to teach that whosoever destroys a single Jewish soul, Scripture imputes [guilt] to him as though he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single Jewish soul, Scripture ascribes [merit] to him as though he had preserved a complete world ... Therefore, every single person is obliged to say, “The world was created for my sake.”

לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי ללמוד שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו איבד עולם מלא וכל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיים עולם מלא ... לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר בשבילי נברא העולם.

This sounds a bit egotistical, does it not? If the entire world was created for me, doesn't that put everyone and everything at my disposal? Don't I then have the right to demand that my every whim be satisfied?

A moment's thought will show that this is not the Sages' intent. If it were an issue of entitlement, why are we taught that one "is obligated" to say the world was created for him? Is one *obligated* to feel entitled?

Rashi explains that the Mishnah is not teaching entitlement, rather the responsibility one has because of one's stature:

2. Rashi, ibid. – My responsibility for myself is commensurate to my importance.

"The entire world was created for my sake" – I.e., "I am as important as an entire world: I will not cut myself off from the world on account of a single transgression."

כשבילי נברא העולם – כלומר חשוב אני כעולם מלא
אל אטרד את עצמי מן העולם בעבירה אחת.

Just as we are commanded to have self-esteem, we are similarly exhorted not to have a low self-esteem.

3. Pirkei Avot 2:13 – Don't look down upon yourself.

Do not regard yourself as a bad person.

אל תהי רשע בפני עצמך.

4. Rabbeinu Yonah, Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 2:13 – There is a danger in considering yourself to be a bad person.

A person should not be wicked in his own eyes for then he will not be able to do *teshuvah* (lit. return), as he will have already lost hope of ever doing so. When faced with the possibility of committing a transgression it would seem permissible to him since, after all, it is no worse than the bad things he has already done.

שלא יהא בעיני עצמו רשע שאינו יכול לחזור בתשובה,
שנמצא זה מתיאש לבו מן התשובה, ואם באת לידו
עבירה הותרה לו לפי שמעלה על דעתו שהיא קלה
כנגד החמורות שעבר עליהן.

PART D. THE CASE OF KING SHAUL

The first King of Israel was Shaul HaMelech. The kingship was taken away from him when he failed to complete a Divine mission. Shaul was ordered by God to lead the Jewish people into battle against their mortal enemy, Amalek, and to completely annihilate them. Yet, having won the battle, Shaul let their king, Agag, live and also spared some of their livestock to use as offerings to God.

The prophet Shmuel was sent by God to reprimand Shaul HaMelech and remove him from the throne. Shaul's excuse? The people made me do it! To this claim the prophet responded as follows:

1. I Shmuel 15:17 – Shmuel criticizes Shaul's lack of self-esteem.

And Shmuel said, "Even if you are small in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? And the Lord anointed you as king over Israel!"

ויאמר שמואל הלוא אם קטן אתה בעיניך ראש שבטי
ישראל אתה וימשחך יקוק למלך על ישראל:

Shmuel's criticism of Shaul indicates to us that Shaul's fatal flaw was a lack of self-esteem.

2. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski M.D., *Let Us Make Man*, CIS Publications, p. 20 – Shaul’s humility had gone too far.**

The Divine reprimand to Shaul indicates that in his great piety and profound humility, Shaul had gone too far and had crossed that hairbreadth beyond which the virtue of humility ends and the dangerous self-effacement of personal negativity begins. It was this type of improper self-effacement that led Shaul to allow himself to be overruled by the wishes of the populace. It was also this self-effacement that led to his futile attempt to defend his actions and that precluded the prompt admission of having done wrong that could have been his salvation.

We see from the story of Shaul’s demise that a low self-esteem will lead one to be too easily influenced by others and unable to take responsibility for one’s own actions.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ∞ A prerequisite for any positive accomplishment or growth is an awareness of one’s significance, as well as the confidence that one has been endowed with what it takes to get through life successfully. This includes an awareness of what one has already accomplished, and what one is capable of accomplishing henceforth.
- ∞ Without a sense of self-worth a person will be unable to stand up for himself either in the face of the demands of others, or the demands of his own baser instincts.
- ∞ Not recognizing one’s significance and unique assets that enable him to get through life will result in self-doubt and negative behavior.

SECTION III. HUMILITY

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky was once needed to testify in a case in which the Beit Din of London was sued by a shochet [ritual slaughterer] who had been fired. As the head of the Beit Din, Rabbi Abramsky had no choice but to testify in a secular court. His attorney asked him to state his name and his position. The attorney then asked, “Is it true that you are the greatest living halachic authority on the European continent?” Rabbi Abramsky said, “Yes. That is true.”

At that point the judge interjected and said, “Rabbi Abramsky, is that not rather haughty on your part? I thought that your laws and ethics teach you to be humble.” Without any hesitation, Rabbi Abramsky responded, “I know we are taught to be humble. But I am under oath.”

Recognition of personal greatness is a must, and yet arrogance is forbidden. How can we develop positive self-esteem without becoming arrogant? The answer is: Humility!

Contrary to popular belief, humility is not about self-negation but rather appropriate self-valuation. True humility demands that our appraisal of our own self-worth and achievements be the result of intelligent reasoning with regard to our role in God’s universe. In this section we will explore more deeply what real humility is and how it is acquired.

PART A. WHAT HUMILITY IS, AND WHAT IT IS NOT

i. Fake Humility

1. **Chovot HaLevavot, Shaar HaK'niah Chapter 2 – Real humility is the product of nobility of spirit.**

Humility can be divided into three parts (we will examine two of them): The first is common to man as well as many types of animals, and that is a weakness of spirit, and tolerance of avoidable abuse because one lacks the intelligence with which to evade it. This pertains to unintelligent people and ignoramuses, because they lack knowledge and are unaware of their own self-worth. This trait is colloquially called “humility,” but in reality it is not humility at all but rather weakness and blindness that results from unintelligence.

Real humility comes after one has achieved loftiness of spirit; has risen above the lowly habits of animals; and has become elevated above the character traits of lowly people, through wisdom and nobility and a clear knowledge of [one's] various good and bad character traits. When, additional to all this, one is able to become humble, this is in fact a noble trait. Otherwise, “humility” is not one of the positive character traits at all, but rather a negative one, no different than the humility [i.e., lack of self-assertiveness] attributed to animals.

הכניעה תיחלק לשלשה חלקים: אחד מהם כולל את האדם ורבים ממיני בעלי חיים... והוא דלות הנפש וסבלה ההיזק, אשר היתה יכולה לדחותו, מפני סכלותה באופני דחייתו. וזה יהיה מן הכסילים שבבני אדם ועמי הארץ, מפני מיעוט ידיעתם וחלישת הכרתם את נפשותם וערכיהם. וזה נקרא כניעה על דרך ההסכמה בלבד, אבל על דרך האמת הוא דלות הנפש ועוורונה, בסכלות הגוברת עליה...

אבל הכניעה היא אשר תהיה אחר רוממות הנפש והתנשאה מהשתתף עם הבהמות במידותן המגוננות, וגבהותה מהידמות במידות פחותי בני אדם ביתרון חכמה ויקרת נפש, וידיעה ברורה במידות הטובות והמגוננות, וכאשר תהיה סמוך לזה כניעת הנפש ושפלותה, אז תהיה מידה משובחת, אבל זולת זה איננה נכנסת במידות המשובחות ומעלות הנפש אך במגוננות שבהן, כי ענינה בזה כענין הבהמות.

2. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Mishlei/Proverbs 22:4, Feldheim Publishers – False modesty is no virtue.**

The humble person to whom our Scriptures refer is poles removed from the false modesty by which a person backs away from any action or activity for the welfare, rescue, or advancement of others by affecting total insignificance and inadequacy, not venturing to say a word or take a step forward. That kind of modesty can be excused at the most as impotence, but never can it be considered a virtue.

Someone who tolerates abuse in any form when he could do something about it is not humble – he is a fool. Humility has nothing to do with meekness or submissiveness. In fact, a prerequisite to humility is nobility and an appreciation of one's self-worth.

ii. Awareness of Virtues and Their Source

A humble person must be aware of his strengths, yet at the same time able to recognize from where they truly derive. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) was widely considered the foremost Talmudic and halachic authority of his day. The most complex issues of Jewish law were sent to him, and he earned the respect of hundreds of thousands of Jews worldwide. Aside from his scholarship, Rabbi Feinstein was also renowned

for his sterling character.

In our generation, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, was the epitome of modesty. He carried the responsibility of the nation on his shoulders by deciding the most crucial and difficult halachic (Jewish Law) queries, yet he would humbly rise to greet all those that came to him.

About a week ago, when I was in need of halachic guidance, I traveled to speak to his son, Rav Dovid Feinstein, shlit"a. In addition to the clear guidance he rendered in regard to my question, I saw how he had clearly absorbed the ways of his father, zt"l.

When I called to speak to him, the secretary suggested that I try calling the public phones that are situated outside of his office. When he gets a phone call, one of the students calls him, he comes out of his office, sits in the phone booth and answers the questions posed to him.

I ended up just going to the yeshivah without an appointment, knowing that he would be available. Upon my arrival, I found him, true to form, speaking on the public phone. When he finished, he invited me into his office which, to my amazement, was filled with cases of soda. Someone explained to me that he himself refills the soda machine, not wanting to burden anyone else with the chore. I hope the incredible lessons of that day will last me a life time (Rabbi Yisroel Ciner, Torah.org, Parsha Shlach Insights, 5762).

1. **Chovot HaLevavot, Shaar HaK'niah Chapter 9 – Humility is built upon a strong sense of self-worth.**

Positive pride [in one's virtues] does not hinder the quality of humility; to the contrary, it strengthens it. Regarding this it is written (II Chronicles 17:6), "His heart rose in the paths of God."

זאת הגאווה אינה מתנגדת לכניעה ולא מרחקת אותה, ובכמוה אמר הכתוב "ויגבה לבו בדרכי ה'" (דברי הימים ב' יז:ו) אך היא מסייעת אותה ומוסיפה בה.

An indelible impression was made on me when, as a young child, I would accompany my father, z"l, to Long Island University where he was a professor and the Director of Health Services. He would greet and introduce me to other professors and department heads in the very same way that he greeted and introduced me to the custodial workers (Rabbi Yisroel Ciner, Op. Cit, Parshat Beshalach).

The difference between humble pride and arrogant haughtiness lies in where one views the source of one's virtues to be.

2. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Mishlei/Proverbs 22:4 , Feldheim Publishers – The humble person recognizes that he is not of his own making.**

Our holy scriptures know of no higher, more ennobling virtue than humility, the mentality residing in the profoundness of the spirit which is totally unconscious of its own importance. Whatever the humble person may be, possess, desire, or accomplish is never his own making; it is exclusively the product of a higher Being. Himself he considers a creature, created by the one and only God, as His child and servant. The word "I," emphatically spoken, is completely strange to his trend of thought and mentality.

iii. Awareness of Limitations

While the humble person attributes his virtues to God, he is also keenly aware of his own limitations and imperfections.

1. **Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Begin Again Now, p. 148 – Humility means acknowledging that you aren't perfect.**

Humility is the realization that you are a fallible human being with no claim to perfection.

2. **Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Mesillat Yesharim, Ch. 22 – Humility demands an honest assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses.**

Humility in thought consists of a person reflecting upon and recognizing as a truth the fact that he does not deserve praise and honor (let alone elevation above his fellow men), both because of his natural limitations and because of his accumulated defects. As far as natural limitations are concerned, it is obvious that it is impossible for any man, regardless of the level of perfection he has reached, to be without many faults, whether because of his own nature, because of his family and relatives, because of certain experiences he has had, or because of his deeds. "For there is not a righteous man on earth that does good and does not sin" (Kohelet/ Ecclesiastes 7:20). All of these are defects in a person which allow no room at all for the feeling of self-importance; for though he may possess many virtues, these faults suffice to overshadow them.

הענווה במחשבה - הוא שיתבונן האדם ויתאמת אצלו אשר אין התהילה והכבוד ראויים לו, כל שכן ההתנשא על שאר בני מינו, וזה מפני מה שחסר ממנו... - פשוט הוא, כי אי אפשר לאדם, באיזה מדריגה שיהיה מן השלימות, שלא יהיו בו חסרונות רבים, או מצד טבעו, או מצד משפחתו וקרוביו, או מצד מקרים שקרו לו, או מצד מעשיו, ש"אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא" (קהלת ז'), הן כל אלה מומים באדם שאין מניחים לו מקום התנשאות כלל, אפילו יהיה בעל מעלות רבות, כי כבר עניני החסרונות האלה יספיקו להחשיכם.

PART B. THE ADVANTAGES OF HUMILITY

There are those who believe that a humble person is someone who walks around morose, sad, and spineless. Actually, the opposite is true.

1. **Mishlei 22:4 – Humility comes with many fringe benefits.**

In the wake of humility comes fear of God, riches, honor, and life.

עקב ענוה יראת יקוק עשר וכבוד וחיים:

As the above quote testifies, the benefits of humility are not limited to the sphere of religious observance. There are in fact many advantages to being humble: those who are humble are simply more pleasant to be around, and people respect them; it is also very liberating to be humble because humble people do not feel that they have to constantly put on a show in front of others. This realization makes a person free to experience the inner joy of who they really are. Humility is the ultimate dignity and self-respect that we can accord ourselves.

i. The Respect of Others

1. **Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b – A person of humility earns the real and abiding respect of others.**

Whoever humbles himself, God raises him up;

כל המושפיל עצמו הקב"ה מגביהו וכל המגביה עצמו

and whoever raises himself up, God humiliates him. One who seeks prestige, prestige evades him; and one who evades prestige, prestige seeks him out.

הקב"ה משפילו כל המחזר על הגדולה גדולה בורחת ממנו וכל הבורח מן הגדולה גדולה מחזרת אחריו.

2. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Mesillat Yesharim, Ch. 22 – Everyone wants to be around a person who is humble.

People are pleased to be in the company of a humble person. He does not grow angry or quarrel; rather he does everything in a quiet and peaceful way. Fortunate is someone who develops this character trait! The Sages have already said, "That which is a crown on the head of wisdom is but the sole of the foot of humility," because the value of humility surpasses any wisdom that exists.

חברת הענו נאה עד מאד ורוח הבריות נוחה הימנו, לא יבא לידי כעס ולא לידי מריבה אלא הכל בהשקט, הכל במנוחה. אשרי מי שזוכה למדה זו. וכבר אמרו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה, "מה שעשתה חכמה עטרה לראשה, עשתה ענוה עקב לסולייתה", כי כל החכמה כלה לא י ערכנה...

3. Chazon Ish, Emunah U'Bitachon (Faith and Trust), 4:14 – True honor is to be found through humility.

The task of refining one's character traits does not mean to take away from man his natural self-love. The existence of a natural drive for honor ... is a positive thing in the makeup of the living organism called Man; depriving Man of this drive does not build the soul but rather robs it of existence. *Mussar* [Torah ethics] says to man, "Love yourself and attain honor; but know what is true gratification on Earth, and what your real honor is: There is no honor other than [mastery of] Torah; there is no honor other than humility; there is no honor other than the abandonment of the race after honor ...

אין תיקון המידות שוללת מהאדם אהבת עצמו, כי מציאות הנטייה לכבוד... היא מציאות חיובית בהרכב זה של החי המכונה אדם, ואין שלילת הנטיות האלה בנין בנפש האדם אלא סתירת היותו. המוסר אומר לאדם אהוב את עצמך ורכוש כבוד, אבל דע לך מהו אשרך עלי חלד, ומה כבודך, אין כבוד אלא תורה, אין כבוד אלא ענוה, אין כבוד אלא עזיבת הכבוד...

One who runs after honor distances himself from dignity with every step. He is constantly demeaning himself. Whereas the humble person concentrates on doing what is important because it is important, not because of the accolades he will receive. His life is a life of inner dignity and nobility.

ii. Wisdom

1. Talmud Bavli, Ta'anit 7a – Humility is a prerequisite to understanding the Torah.

[Said] Rabbi Chanina, "Torah is compared to water, as it says, 'All those who thirst, go to water,' to teach you that just as water flows to the lowest point, so too Torah resides only within someone who is humble in spirit."

[אמר] רבי חנינא בר אידי למה נמשלו דברי תורה למים דכתיב הוי כל צמא לכו למים לומר לך מה מים מניחין מקום גבוה והולכין למקום נמוך אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין אלא במי שדעתו שפלה.

iii. Joy

1. **Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 29:19 – Humility as a source of joy.**

And humble people will continuously rejoice in God; and the simple among men will find gladness in the Holy One of Israel.

וְיִסְפוּ עֲנוּיִם בַּה', שְׂמֵחָה; וְאֲבִיּוֹנֵי אָדָם, בְּקִדּוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
יִגְלוּ.

2. **Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Begin Again Now, p. 148 – Humility is a truly liberating attribute.**

Appropriate humility is a calming and healing attribute. Rather than denying your strengths, virtues, and achievements, acknowledge them while at the same time realize that everything you have is a gift. Humility... is a trait that allows you to be relaxed. It frees you from the need to appear to others as a perfect human being who never makes mistakes.

True humility and a life of joy go hand in hand. Since humility frees you from the need to appear to others as more than you really are, you are free to enjoy life. You no longer fear mistakes so you are open to acquiring new knowledge and skills.

Humility allows you to respect others. You do not feel a need to appear stronger, wiser, wealthier, or better than others in any way. Humility frees you from needlessly worrying about how other people will view you and you can focus your attention on personal growth and helping others.

A person with appropriate humility will be liked and respected by others. This will not be his main focus but an automatic byproduct of this virtue.

The individual who is preoccupied with his own self-image finds no rest. He is constantly worried about maintaining his image in the eyes of others, and there is always someone else competing for his coveted spot. But the humble person is free to enjoy God's world, paying attention to every detail and making use of his time and resources to come closer to God. No one can take away what matters most to him – his connection to his Creator.

PART C. HOW TO WORK ON ACQUIRING HUMILITYi. **Control Your Anger**

Anger is an impediment to humility. A humble person is generally not an angry one. Hence working at removing anger from your character will help you gain humility.

1. **Ramban, Igeret HaRamban – Speak gently and respectfully.**

Train yourself to always speak gently to all people at all times; in doing so, you will be saved from anger. When you are saved from anger, you will attain humility, the greatest of the positive character traits ...

תתנהג תמיד לדבר בנחת כל דבריך לכל אדם בכל עת,
ובזה תנצל מן הכעס... וכאשר תנצל מן הכעס תעלה על
לבך מידת הענוה שהיא המידה הטובה מכל המידות...

One day in the study hall, Rav Moshe Feinstein left his desk briefly, and while he was out, one of the students accidentally tipped over an ink bottle onto his Talmudic book. The boy felt terribly embarrassed and he and his friends

stood around nervously as they waited for Rav Moshe to return. Seeing what happened, Rav Moshe broke into a pleasant smile and said that blue was his favorite color, and the book looked even more beautiful than before. He sat down and returned to his writing as if nothing had happened (Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, *Five Great Lives*, ArtScroll Publication).

2. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim: Midot, Vol. II, p. 154 – There are two ways in which conquering anger helps us acquire humility.**

But how is it that by removing anger one is able to acquire the trait of humility? There are two ways by which we can understand this phenomenon. 1) Once one has removed anger, which is itself a stage in the uprooting of arrogance (since anger stems from arrogance), at that point it is possible to move forward and focus on the trait of humility. 2) Alternatively, it is not just a technical matter of removing something bad – the anger – and afterwards acquiring something good. Rather, one actually leads directly to the other. This means to say that when a person speaks softly at the moment when he feels justified in raising his voice and getting angry, that itself brings one to acquire the trait of humility!

מדוע ע"י שינצל מהכעס יקנה את מידת הענוה?
אפשר לבאר זאת בב' אופנים (א) אחרי הסור מרע
שלא יכעס שאף זה חלק מעקירת הגאווה (שהכעס
נובע מגאווה) אז אפשר להתקדם לעשה טוב להתבונן
במידת הענוה (ב) אין זה רק ענין של סדר שקודם צריך
להיות הסור מרע ואח"כ העשה טוב אלא זה מביא לזה
לומר כשאדם מדבר בנחת ובשפלות גם במקום שיש
לכאורה סיבה מוצדקת להרים את קולו ולכעוס זה
גופא מביא אותו לקנות את מידת הענוה.

ii. Awareness of One's Limitations

1. **Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, Midot Ra'ya, p. 85 – Humility comes from meditating upon one's own weakens.**

Humility is connected to spiritual perfection: The more a person comprehends of the world and of life, of their spiritual and material sophistication, the many needs of the world as a whole and of each individual specifically – the more he grasps his own weakness, his own blindness, and the weakness of his own desire to do good for others. Through all of this his spirit becomes humbled, and as a result of it he constantly strives and grows because of his great desire to come closer to the Absolute Good.

הענוה היא מחוברת עם השלימות הרוחנית, שכל
מה שהאדם משיג יותר את העולם ואת החיים, את
שכלולם הרוחני והחמרי, את הצרכים הרבים של
הכלל ושל הפרט, אז הוא משיג את קוצר ידו, את עורון
השגתו, את מיעוט כח רצונו להטיב, והוא מושפל
ברוחו, והוא תמיד הולך ומתעלה על ידי חפצו הגדול
להתקרב ביותר אל הטוב המוחלט.

2. **Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, Begin Again Now, Z. Pliskin Publishers – Let life teach you to be humble.**

Awareness of the size of the universe, the limitations of the human mind, and the temporary nature of physical strength and beauty all contribute to a sense of humility.

Life will provide you with many teachers of humility. Keep your eyes open, for the lessons will come in various forms. Develop the habit of saying, "This is an opportunity to gain humility." When someone doesn't talk to you with respect, "This is an opportunity to gain humility." When you do not do as well as you expected, "This is an opportunity to gain humility." When you become aware of any weakness or mistakes, "This is an opportunity to gain humility."

3. **Rabbi Yissocher Frand, Rabbi Frand on the Parsha, Parshat Shemini, ArtScroll Publications – Humility is realizing how fragile your greatness really is.**

There is a famous Mishnah at the end of Masechet Sotah that states that when Rebbi (Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, the editor of the Mishnah) died, humility ceased. Rav Yosef in the Talmud questions this Mishnah and says that it could not possibly be accurate, “For I am here.” This comment of Rav Yosef begs for clarification.

I once heard a beautiful homiletic interpretation of this Talmudic passage. Rav Yosef was not saying, “I am humble. Therefore there are humble people around.” He was saying something else. We learn elsewhere that Rav Yosef became blind. When he became blind, he forgot all his learning. This great Talmudic Sage, Rav Yosef, whose opinion is found on so many folio of the Talmud, who learned so much, who taught so much – this same Rav Yosef forgot it all after his illness.

Rav Yosef is saying is the following: Do not say that there cannot be humble people around anymore – because I am around. As long as I am around, people can look at me and see what can happen to a person. Let them see that a person can be a Talmudic Sage, know all of the Mishnah, have hundreds of students and yet forget it all. If people bear that in mind, then there can still be humble people. For the key to humility is realizing that everything is a gift that can be lost at any time.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was once walking along the streets of Jerusalem when a trash collector jumped off the back of the garbage truck, kissed his hand, and returned to his work.

“Who knows if he should be kissing me, or I should be kissing him?” said Reb Shlomo Zalman to his students, who were surrounding him. “Look at my life. I was born to a scholarly father, my parents encouraged me to learn Torah from the day I could read, my in-laws are extraordinary people. Look what intelligence G-d blessed me with and what a supportive wife I have. Who knows how much is expected of me? I should be changing the world. This man, however, was probably born to a different kind of parents. He very likely never had the opportunities I did, the education I had, or the upbringing I was given. And yet look at how much he has grown. He is the great one. It is I who should be kissing him.”

Reb Shlomo Zalman’s comment encapsulates the way a humble person looks at the world. On one hand, he recognizes his accomplishments, but at the same time, he recognizes that all his successes and achievements are simply gifts that God has granted him in His kindness (Rabbi Dan Roth, Relevance, Feldheim Publishers, pp. 94-95).

iii. Inflate the Virtues of Others

Ramban further exhorts us to develop an appreciation for the greatness in others to the point of looking up to them, even if their greatness lies only in one particular area.

1. **Ramban, Igeret HaRamban – See how others have virtues greater than your own.**

Therefore, I will explain how you should act with humility: All of your words shall be spoken gently ... consider everyone else to be greater than you ...

ולכן אפרש איך תתנהג במידת הענוה ללכת בה תמיד:
כל דברך תמיד יהיו בנחת...וכל אדם יהיה בעיניך גדול
... ממוך.

2. **Chovot HaLevavot, Shaar HaK’niah, Ch. 10 – Humility means recognizing the virtue in every person with whom we come into contact.**

One of the wise men was asked, “What made

ושאלו אחד מן החכמים במה היית אדון לכל בני דורך.

you into the leader of the generation?” He answered, “I never encountered someone without recognizing an area in which he is better than me. If he was wiser than I, I would say [to myself] that he must fear God more than I, [for he has the tools to do so] since he is wiser. If he was less wise than I, I would say [to myself] that his judgment will be lighter than mine on the day of [final] judgment ... If he was richer than I, I would say [to myself] that because of his wealth he has the means to serve God better than I; if he was poorer than I, I would say [to myself] that because he is downtrodden he is better than I am. I therefore [honored everyone] and humbled myself before them.”

אמר מפני שלא פגעתני אחד מהם שלא ראיתי לו מעלה יתירה עלי, כי אם היה יותר חכם ממני, הייתי אומר הוא ירא אלקים יותר ממני, ליתרון חכמתו על חכמתי, ואם קטן ממני בחכמה, אומר כי חשבוננו יהיה קל מחשבוננו ביום הדין... ואם יהיה יותר עשיר ממני, אומר כי מצאה ידו בעשרו לעבוד הבורא יותר ממני, ואם יהיה דל יותר ממני, אומר כי הוא דכא וכו' והוא טוב ממני, ולא זזתי כו' ולהכנע להם.

We will now look at a couple of examples of humility to see how humble people relate to themselves and to others. The first example is the saintly figure of Rabbi Aryeh Levin, known as the “Tzaddik of Jerusalem” for his work on behalf of the poor, the sick, and the incarcerated.

3. **Simcha Raz, A Tzaddik in our Time, Feldheim Publishers, pp. 70-71 – True humility demands humbling oneself before equals.**

“My father,” said the son of Rabbi Aryeh Levin, “had one basic quality, which was both the foundation and the crest of all his good deeds and acts. It was simple *humility*. In this he excelled beyond human understanding.”

“There is a well known teaching,” continued his son, “in Pirkei Avot: ‘Be humble in spirit before every man.’ We generally explain it to mean even before the smallest, least significant person. But to my poor mind it rather means this: It is very easy for a person to be modest and humble before smaller people, less important and significant than himself. For then his modesty shines through. He shows how big-hearted he is, as he humbles himself in dealing with his inferiors.

“Neither is it hard for a man to be modest and unassuming toward persons far greater than he is. The real difficulty is to have humility when dealing with people who are similar or equal to you. If a man is to show the quality of humility toward someone like himself, he really has to grow humble so as to make it appear that the other is superior to him. And that is something very difficult ...

“I can bear witness,” concluded Reb Aryeh’s son, “that my father was humble toward everyone. He bowed his head in respect before a person greater than himself; he lowered his head before someone smaller, inferior to himself. But he also behaved humbly with any person who was (or seemed to be) his like or his equal ...”

This outlook on life is easier said than done. One does not naturally consider the virtues in others and hold them up on a pedestal. Doing so often runs counter to our logic, which tells us that we are smarter, richer, or even kinder than others. As such, attaining humility in this way requires a leap of logic (see further: Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, Ohr Yisroel, Ch. 30). Nevertheless, there are still shining examples of this kind of humility. Rabbi Aryeh Levin was one; Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was another.

4. **Rabbi Shimon Finkelstein, Reb Moshe – The Life and Ideals of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, p. 225 – Rabbi Feinstein put himself out for everyone – even strangers.**

In Tifereth Jerusalem (the Yeshivah Rabbi Feinstein presided over), it was not uncommon to see Reb Moshe hurrying from his seat near the Ark to greet a bedraggled stranger in the back of the study hall. “Can I do something for you?” he would ask, his eyes radiating the inner warmth he felt for every Jew.

5. **Ibid., p. 226 – Rabbi Feinstein took great care not to inconvenience others.**

On a hot summer day, someone came with a halachic query. Wishing to discuss the matter in private, Reb Moshe took his visitor to his office – but it was occupied. A student seeking relief from the heat had gone into the office with his Talmud and was sitting there with the air conditioner going full blast. Not even remarking on the unauthorized use of his office, Reb Moshe apologized to the student for disturbing him – and went back to the study hall ...

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

- ∞ Humility has nothing to do with meekness or submissiveness. In fact, a prerequisite to humility is nobility of soul and an appreciation of one’s self-worth.
- ∞ Humility means attributing your strengths and successes to God and at the same time being aware that you are not infallible.
- ∞ Among the many advantages of humility is that humble people are pleasant company and they earn the real and abiding respect of others. Humility also brings a person joy, inner serenity, and a contentedness with himself, his achievements, and his role in life.
- ∞ Speaking gently and respectfully to others is one key to attaining humility; being aware of one’s own shortcomings and valuing the virtues in others is another.

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHAT IS WRONG WITH BEING ARROGANT?

No one likes someone who is arrogant and eventually people lose respect for those who display arrogance. From the Torah's perspective, though, arrogance is not just an anti-social character flaw; it is much worse. Arrogance is seen by Judaism as a worship of self far removed from the correct spiritual outlook needed to observe the Torah.

IS IT ARROGANT TO THINK HIGHLY OF YOURSELF?

Yes and no. It is good and right to think highly of yourself. You were, after all, created in the image of God. The question lies more in how we relate to our own virtues and successes: are we the source of our own greatness or is it all just a gift from God? If we take the credit for ourselves we might be arrogant, whereas having gratitude to God is the foundation of humility.

ARE HUMILITY AND SELF-ESTEEM MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?

Being humble does not equal having a low self-esteem. Being humble does not mean being a pushover. Humility is not self-negation, but appropriate self-valuation. A truly humble person knows his self-worth and feels good about himself, yet he also knows his limitations and is aware of how his existence fits into the big scheme of things.

WHY SHOULD I BE HUMBLE?

There are a lot of advantages to being humble. A humble person is pleasant company and people like being in his presence. A humble person earns the real and abiding respect of others.

Being humble is also a liberating experience as it frees you from the need to appear to others as more than you really are. With humility you become free to develop inwardly and are open to learning from everyone.

Since humility is founded upon the awareness that we are not perfect, attaining it enables us to strive towards perfection, constantly improving ourselves. In all these ways, true humility brings a person joy, inner serenity, and a contentedness with himself, his achievements, and his role in life.

HOW CAN I BECOME MORE HUMBLE?

Working on building humility starts with first eliminating its opposite. One must remove arrogance from one's heart, particularly its most noxious form of expression, anger. Becoming more conscious of one's limitations is also a humbling experience, as is the appreciation of the virtues of others.