

On the occasion of the Tendler Family simchas.

Rabbi Ze'ev Smason, NHBZ

Ancient Greek legend tells of Antaeus, a giant wrestler of incredible strength. He challenged anyone who passed his way to a wrestling match, and he always destroyed his opponents. But then Antaeus met a foe that he could not defeat: a fellow by the name of Hercules.

How did Hercules vanquish Antaeus? Hercules lifted Antaeus off the ground! As long as Antaeus stood firmly on earth, he was unconquerable; but once he was uprooted, his strength left him. Hercules was victorious because he discovered the secret of Antaeus' power: A rootless Antaeus, disconnected from the ground, would be sapped of power and unable to stand against the strength of Hercules.

We use the word *grounded* (or a close derivative) in many ways.

-- There are picnic *grounds* and burial *grounds*

-- A *grounded* wire in electricity is directly or indirectly connected to the earth

-- An area or a position that is contested in or as if in battle: The soldiers held their *ground* against the enemy. Character witnesses helped the defendant stand her *ground* in the trial.

-- The foundation for an argument, a belief, or an action; a basis: *Grounds* for suspicion; a *ground* for divorce

-- To prevent an aircraft or a pilot from flying or a teen from going out on weekends, by being *grounded*.

And, as in the important lesson from the legend of Antaeus: people who are well *grounded* are able to withstand opponents and challenges; people who lose their footing, who become rootless, are sapped of power.

What does it mean to be a grounded person'?

The term "humility" comes from the Latin word *humilitas*, a noun related to the adjective *humilis*, which may be translated as "humble", but also as "grounded", "from the earth", or "low", since it derives in turn from *humus* (earth). In English we use *humus* (not to be confused with the yummy *hummus*) to refer to the dark organic material in soils. There are numerous English words derived from *humus*; exhume, humiliate ...and human (*hombre* in Spanish, *homme* in French). What is the connection between *human* and *humus*? Humans originate from the earth. This concept is expressed in loshon ha'kodesh (the Holy language), Hebrew. *Adam*, which means 'person' and is the source of the name Adam, is closely related to *adamah*, which means 'soil, earth'. The very first person came from the earth.

We see, then, that to be 'grounded' means to be humble.

In this week's parsha we read a perplexing passage. Miriam and Aaron spoke disparagingly of Moshe. Moshe -- the greatest prophet, the greatest leader, the selfless shepherd of his people -- was confronted by many challenges during the course of his career. But now his own sister and brother -- those closest to him and upon whom he surely relied -- spoke against him. How could Moses bear this betrayal? From where did he summon the strength to withstand what could otherwise have been emotionally devastating?

The Torah informs us: "Now the man Moshe was very humble, more than all men upon the face of the earth." It was humility that enabled Moshe to withstand his great challenge.

There's a story told of a well known, wealthy Jewish businessman who was visiting a synagogue. As a matter of courtesy, the prestigious guest was asked to deliver words of greetings on Shabbos. Unfortunately, he got rather carried away in the process and went on to tell the congregation about all the wonderful things he had done for Hashem.

"I have a large house, a fine family, a successful business, and a good reputation. I have enough money to do whatever I want, and I am able to support multiple Jewish institutions very generously, and many organizations want me to be a director. I have health and almost unlimited opportunities. Most people would love to change places with me. What more could Hashem give me?"

As he paused for effect, a voice shouted from the back of the shul, "How about a dose of humility?"

What is humility? How do we define it?

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks states that in Judaism humility is an appreciation of oneself; one's talents, skills, and virtues. It is not meekness or self deprecating thought, but subjugating yourself to something higher. Humility is thinking you're a shmatta or doormat, but appreciating what you have, what you've received, and the Source of your blessings. In recognition of the mysteries and complexities of life, then, one becomes humbled to the awesomeness one is and what one can achieve.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and so too, the human personality. Without humility, not only can't we achieve, but pride and arrogance seep in to take its place.

Chani and I were traveling out West. We stopped at a sign that said, "Echo Point."

"Try it," Chani suggested.

"I think it's silly," I said. Finally, I agreed to give it a try. I shouted at the top of my voice, "Baloney!"

After a moment, I said, "See, nothing happened."

"Try it again," Chani said.

So I shouted, "I'm the best looking man in the world!"

Then the echo came back: "Baloney!"

Pride is the ultimate emotional parasite. For the person ruled by pride there is no deep joy, no satisfaction, no peace. The prideful person is ruled by feelings that he isn't getting enough, not getting what he deserves, and that someone else is better-looking, has more money, more friends, a bigger house or a newer car. King Solomon succinctly identified the danger of pride in Proverbs (16:18): "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall"

Prideful people get their security from how far up the ladder they are compared to others, rather than whether their ladder is leaning up against the right wall.

The antidote for pride is humility -- the humility to realize that we're not the center of the universe, we're not an island, and that the quality of our lives is inseparably connected to the quality of the lives of others. Humility allows us to find meaning not in consuming and competing, but in contributing. Humility enables us to realize the world doesn't revolve around us, and to value Hashem and people.

Today we celebrate two simchas in a family of individuals who walk with humility and appreciate others: The Tendlers.

People who value people: The Tendlers

Mazel tov to Hershel, who just graduated McKendree University with a degree in Physical Education. And mazal tov to Anna Rose and Vic, in that Hershel not only graduated college, but has a job!

It reminds me of the story of the rabbi, priest and minister who were discussing when life begins. The priest said, "In our religion we believe life begins at conception." The minister said, "In our religion we believe life begins when the baby emerges from the mother." The rabbi said, "In our religion, we believe life begins when the last child graduates medical school and the dog dies!"

But seriously, Hershel -- I know your parents are enormously proud of you for what you've achieved, and how much you're learning. Your father told me that at work, you've already begun to realize that people are different; some are nice, while some are more difficult to get along with. Mastering those skills in the working world and in your personal world will be of invaluable benefit as you go on in life. But given your nature -- a quite, happy, humble guy who loves to help people -- I'm certain you'll continue to grow, learn, and excel. After all, you're a Tendler!

We're also celebrating Vic and Anna Rose's 35th anniversary. What a wonderful milestone. Many of you may not know that Vic came to Israel with his family from Kazakhstan when he was 17. At that time, as

he only spoke Russian, his family sent him to an ulpan to learn Hebrew. Anna Rose happened to be in Israel at that time, and was supposed to go to an ulpan on the Golan Heights. However, in a stroke of Divine Providence, the Yom Kippur War broke out, so she went to ulpan at Ramat HaSharon -- where she met Vic. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Vic is one of the most optimistic, positive, happy, humble people you'll ever meet. He's a great help to our shul with his support and regular attendance at minyanim. And as for Anna Rose -- you will not find someone more energetic, buoyant, positive, and helpful. It would be hard to imagine our shul being able to put together all our various kiddushim, lunches and simchas without Anna Rose's help. And she does it without fanfare, deflecting to others the credit for all of her hard work. But like at Epstein Hebrew Academy (where Anna Rose was recently and so deservedly honored) -- behind the scenes, many, many good things at our synagogue take place because of Anna Rose.

That great Jewish philosopher, Mel Brooks, was once asked for his secret to a happy marriage. Brooks quoted Carl Reiner's wife Estelle, who said, "Find someone who can stand you." Brooks said, "It's true! You got to find someone who can stand your wackiness and all your anger and your happiness. Someone who enjoys you."

And like the Tendlers, to the degree you can walk quietly, with humility, you'll be able to enjoy other people.

I'd like to conclude with the following story:

A young boy was granted his choice of two wishes, to be huge, or tiny. And like most small boys would, he chose to be huge. He was swayed by the appearance of being big and strong, and for the first couple of hours of his giant status he thoroughly enjoyed the sense of power.

After a while, though, the boy became bored. Because of his size, he was able to walk around the world in only a few steps, and he scaled the highest mountain ranges in one step. Like a child one half hour after the birthday presents have been opened, he asked, "What else is there to do now?"

The young boy learned the lesson the hard way. Only "small" people can celebrate and enjoy life. Only small people have nothing to prove, no score to settle, and no one to impress. To small people, even the single flower growing from the side of a rocky hillside is an object of curiosity, beauty and pleasure. Only small people can be truly humble: unpretentious, approaching life not from power -- and the need to defeat and dominate -- but from respect. Only when we are small, are we truly free to receive.

The secret of Moshe's greatness was his profound humility. And let's integrate the important lesson from the legend of Antaeus: people who lose their footing, who become rootless, are sapped of power. But those who are well grounded are able to withstand both opponents, and the greatest challenges of life.

Mazel tov to our good friends, the Tendlersand Good Shabbos.