

## Middah Reflection #2

### Anivut, Humility

By Shmuly Yanklowitz



Anivut (humility) holds a very special position of priority in positive Jewish self-development. Rav Kook wrote (The Moral Principles, page 174) that “Humility is associated with spiritual perfection. When humility effects depression it is defective, when it is genuine it inspires joy, courage, and inner dignity.” In short, humility should not diminish our personality traits; rather it should help us to become unique, moral, and courageous agents of change.

Benjamin Franklin famously said that “to be humble to superiors is duty, to equals courtesy, to inferiors nobleness.” The impulse to extend humility to all relationships is perhaps most imperative in our activist work. One who is organizing against the perpetrators of injustice can easily lose one’s sense of perspective while rallying in front of the morally “inferior.” It is at these moments, raising the prophetic voice for social change and justice, that humility is perhaps the most important for the Yid committed to tikkun olam.

This does not mean, chas v’shalom, that humility should restrain someone from fully expressing their obligations as an activist. As Rambam pointed out (Shemoneh Perakim 4, p. 67), humility and self-esteem are necessarily complimentary. One is to believe in oneself and in one’s convictions while simultaneously expressing those beliefs and convictions in a way that acknowledges the infinite presence of the Ribbono Shel Olam in all of one’s work. For Rambam, humility is a moderate trait that should prevent one from acting arrogantly or from acting in a self-deprecating manner.

May we all be blessed to take on practices that assist us in becoming beings of progress that stand on the “shoulders of giants,” as Newton famously articulated, while also maintaining consciousness of our human frailties and imperfections.