

# Additional Resources for *Changing the World from the Inside Out* by Rabbi David Jaffe

## Learn the Sources - Anava/Humility

What image comes to mind when you think of a humble person? Perhaps an unassuming, quiet person who holds himself back and doesn't take up a lot of space? In the English language humility is synonymous with meekness. A humble person could never be a leader of a company, organization or movement. However, a Jewish understanding of humility is more complex. We start our exploration of this middah with the one and only instance of the word Anavah in the Five Books of Moses – a description of Moses as the most humble person on the earth:

### Numbers 12:3

**א** וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמֹשֶׁה, עַל-  
אֲדוֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכְּשִׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח: כִּי-  
אִשָּׁה כְּשִׁית, לָקַח.

**1** And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman.

**ב** וַיֹּאמְרוּ, הֲרַק אֶל-בְּמֹשֶׁה דְּבַר  
יְהוָה--הֲלֹא, גַם-בָּנוּ דִּבֶּר; וַיִּשְׁמַע,  
יְהוָה.

**2** And they said: 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only with Moses? has He not spoken also with us?' And the LORD heard it.--

**ג** וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה, עָנָו מְאֹד--מִכָּל,  
הָאָדָם, אֲשֶׁר, עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה. {ס}

**3** Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than any man on the face of the earth.-- {S}

Rashi on Numbers 12:3	רש"י על במדבר פרק יב פסוק ג
Humble – Low and a Savlan	ענו - שפל וסבלן:

*A Savlan is someone who can bear a burden. How does Moses express his Anava?*

Ramban on Numbers 12:3	רמב"ן על במדבר פרק יב פסוק ג
NOW THE MAN MOSHE WAS VERY HUMBLE – This [is stated] to tell us that G-d was zealous for Moshe's sake on account of his [great] humility, since he would never <b>answer</b> the	(ג) וטעם והאיש משה ענו מאד להגיד כי השם קנא לו בעבור

<p>injustice [meted out to him] even if he knew about it...</p> <p>In the midrash (sifre) it says, “Rabbi Nathan says: They spoke against Moshe even in his presence, as it is said, ‘And the Eternal heard it. Now the man Moshe was very humble,’ and he restrained himself about the matter” [According to the midrash, therefore, Scripture] mentions Moshe’s humility in that he endured [their insult] and <b>did not answer them back</b>, and that G-d was [therefore] zealous for his sake.</p>	<p>ענותנותו, כי הוא לא יענה על ריב לעולם אף אם ידע</p> <p>ור"א מפרש ואמר כי הוא לא היה מבקש גדולה על שום אדם, ולא יתגאה במעלתו כלל אף כי על אחיו, והם חוטאים שמדברים עליו חנם</p> <p>אבל בספרי (בהעלתך ק) רבי נתן אומר אף בפניו של משה דברו בו שנאמר וישמע ה' והאיש משה עניו מאד, אלא שכבש משה על הדבר יזכיר ענותנותו שסבל ולא ענם, והשם קנא לו:</p>
--	--

*The fact that the Torah calls Moses the “most humble man on earth” tips us off that humility need not imply taking a back seat and letting others lead. Moses confronted Pharaoh, he led the Israelites out of slavery and challenged both God and the people at moments of crisis during their sojourn in the desert. A Jewish definition of humility is something akin to healthy self-esteem. All middot exist along a continuum. For example, apathy and uncontrollable rage sit on a continuum where patience and appropriate anger are found in the middle. True humility occupies a middle space between self-deprecation and arrogance. In the case of Moses, the commentators relate Anavah to the way Moses responds or does not respond.*

*How does Moses’ response reflect Anava?*

*What do think the connection is between Anava and forbearance (Savlanut – see Rashi)?*

*How have you responded with Anava or not to something recently?*

*The following are two additional examples of humility in Jewish sources.*

Talmud Bavli Brachot 6b	תלמוד בבלי ברכות ו:
<p>Rabbi Helbo said according to Rav Huna: Anyone who makes a set place (Makom) for his prayer, the God of Abraham helps him. When he dies it is said about him that he was an Anav (humble person), a Hasid (a pious person) and one of the students of Abraham our ancestor.</p> <p>From where do we know that Abraham our ancestor had a set place for his prayers?</p>	<p>אמר רבי חלבו אמר רב הונא כל הקובע מקום לתפלתו אלהי אברהם בעזרו וכשמת אומרים לו אי עניו אי חסיד מתלמידיו של אברהם אבינו</p>

<p>It is written (Genesis 19: 27): “The next morning, Abraham hurried to the place (Makom) where he had stood (Amad) before Hashem.”</p> <p>An standing implies prayer as it says (Psalms 106:30): “Pinchas stepped forth and intervened...”</p>	<p><b>ואברהם אבינו מנא לן דקבע מקום</b></p> <p><b>דכתיב וישכם אברהם בבקר אל</b> <b>המקום אשר עמד שם</b></p> <p><b>ואין עמידה אלא תפלה שנאמר</b> <b>ויעמוד פינחס ויפלל:</b></p>
--	--

*What is the relationship between making a set place for prayer and Anava? Dr. Alan Morinis writes that the main issue is about space<sup>1</sup>. When we say that this seat is mine, we are also saying that that other seat is not mine. By making a set place we are also giving space to others. According to Morinis, this is the key to Anava. The Anav knows how much space to take up in any situation. When our Anava is out of balance we take either too little or too much space. Think about yourself in different situations. Are you always the first one to talk in meetings or groups? Do you speak several times before others speak at all? If so, you may be taking too much space. Or are you the kind of person who hangs back and either doesn't talk at all or says one thing just before the program leader closes the discussion? You may be taking up too little space. Our goal is to take the right amount of space in each situation.*

*Do you think you generally take too much space or too little space?*

*How would your life be different if you took more, or less space?*

*How could you create more space for others, God, etc?*

*A different perspective on Anava involves our ability to show up as needed in any particular situation. When God calls to Abraham at the beginning of the Binding of Isaac story (Gen. 22) or when the angel calls to Moses from the burning bush, both men respond, “Hineini/Here I am.” An ancient commentary to the Torah says that this term “Hineini” implies Anava and readiness to take action.*

Genesis 22:1-2

**א וַיְהִי, אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה,  
וְהָאֱלֹהִים, נִסָּה אֶת-אַבְרָהָם; וַיֹּאמֶר  
אֵלָיו, אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי.**

**1** And it came to pass after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him: ‘Abraham’; and he said: ‘Here am I.’

**ב וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךָ אֶת-יִחִידְךָ  
אֲשֶׁר-אֶהְבֶּתָּ, אֶת-יִצְחָק, וְלֶךְ-לְךָ, אֶל-**

**2** And He said: ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you.’

<sup>1</sup> Everyday Holiness, Dr. Alan Morinis, Chapter 7

אָרץ הַמִּרְיָה; וְהֶעֱלֵהוּ שָׁם, לְעֵלָה, עַל  
אֶחָד הַהָרִים, אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים.

Rashi on Genesis 22:1	רש"י על בראשית כב:א
Here I am/Hineini – This is the response of the pious. This (Hineini) implies Anava/humility and alacrity.	הנני – כך היא עניינתם של חסידים לשון ענוה הוא ולשון זימון:

*What is humble about saying “Hineini/Here I am?” “Here I am” implies being fully present. When I am fully present I set aside what I might have thought was important for something else that is calling me from a deeper place. Abraham and Moses heard God calling. What is the equivalent for us? As dedicated as I am to spiritual life, I’ve never heard a non-embodied voice call to me. I think the equivalent, for me, is deep intuition. For many of us it is hard to tell the difference between intuition and general noise that goes on in our heads. But when we can make out our true inner voice, are we ready to put our other priorities aside and say, “Hineini/Here I am.” To do so takes conviction and deep trust in ourselves and our spiritual life. This inner-confidence is also Anava.*

*What is a Hineini/Here I am moment you can remember? You can also choose a moment that you didn’t say “Hineini.”*

*How was this moment connected to Anava?*

*Who is a role of model of Anava for you?*

*What is one thing you can do to live with more Anava?*

## ***For Further Study***

### ***Anava/Humility***

The following Talmudic, Medieval and Modern sources present different aspects of Anava:

#### **Source 1: Talmud Bavli Gittin 55b-56a**

אקמצא ובר קמצא חרוב ירושלים דההוא גברא דרחמיה קמצא ובעל דבביה בר קמצא עבד סעודתא אמר ליה לשמעיה זיל אייתי לי קמצא אזל אייתי ליה בר קמצא אתא אשכחיה דהוה יתיב אמר ליה מכדי ההוא גברא בעל דבבא דההוא גברא הוא מאי בעית הכא קום פוק אמר ליה הואיל ואתאי שבקן אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי פלגא דסעודתיך אמר ליה לא אמר ליה יהיבנא לך דמי כולה סעודתיך אמר ליה לא נקטיה בידיה ואוקמיה ואפקיה אמר הואיל והווי יתבי רבנן ולא מחו ביה שמע מינה קא ניחא להו איזיל איכול בהו קורצא בי מלכא אזל אמר ליה לקיסר מרדו בך יהודאי אמר ליה מי יימר אמר ליה שדר להו קורבנא חזית אי מקרבין ליה אזל שדר בידיה עגלא תלתא בהדי דקאתי שדא ביה מומא בניב שפתים ואמרי לה בדוקין שבעין דוכתא דלדידן הוה מומא ולדידהו לאו מומא הוא סבור רבנן לקרוביה משום שלום מלכות אמר להו רבי זכריה בן אבקולס יאמרו בעלי מומין קריבין לגבי מזבח סבור למיקטליה דלא ליזיל ולימא אמר להו רבי זכריה יאמרו מטיל מום בקדשים יהרג אמר רבי יוחנן ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבקולס החריבה את ביתנו ושרפה את היכלנו והגליתנו מארצנו

A man named Bar Kamtza sought revenge on the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem who had offended him. He went to the Roman governors to inform them that the Jews were rebelling. To prove his point, he told the Romans to send a sacrifice to the Temple. Normally such a sacrifice would be offered up, but Bar Kamtza caused a minor blemish on the animal that was unnoticeable to the Romans, but that he knew the Temple priests would see. Because a sacrifice must be blemishless, Bar Kamtza knew that the priests would be bound to refuse to accept the offering. This refusal would be the “proof” that the Jews were in rebellion against Rome.

When the sacrifice came before the priests in the Temple, they immediately spotted the hidden blemish, as Bar Kamtza knew they would. But what he may not have anticipated was that they immediately understood what was going on. Someone suggested that they go ahead and offer the sacrifice anyway. Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas, however, argued that if they did that, people would draw the incorrect conclusion that it was permitted to offer blemished sacrifices.

It was then suggested that Bar Kamtza be killed to prevent him from telling the Romans and endangering the Jewish people. Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas responded, saying, “If we do so, people will incorrectly think that those who inflict blemishes on sacrifices are put to death.”

As a result of the priest’s unwillingness to accept either course of action, Bar Kamtza succeeded in his plan. The sacrifice was denied, and as Bar Kamtza had planned, the Romans took this to mean that the Jews were in rebellion. The Romans attacked and ultimately destroyed the Temple. The Talmud concludes, “The humility of Rabbi Zechariah ben Avkulas caused the loss of our home, the burning of our sanctuary, and our exile from the land.” (Talmud Bavli Gittin 55b-56a as paraphrased in Everyday Holiness, Dr. Alan Morinis pgs. 48-9)

Questions for Consideration:

In what ways was Rabbi Zechariah an Anav?

The Talmud is quite critical of Rabbi Zechariah. What was wrong with his Anava?

As a leader what experience have you had with similar Anava challenges?

**Source 2: Rabbi Bahya Ibn Pekuda (11<sup>th</sup> Century, Spain) Introduction to Duties of the Heart (Hovot HaLevavot)**

When I planned to execute my decision to write this book, I saw that one like me is unworthy of writing a book such as this. I surmised that my ability would not suffice to analyze all the necessary aspects, owing to the difficulty which I perceived and to my wisdom being insufficient and my mind being too weak to grasp all of the issues, and that I am not fluent in the Arabic language in which I wrote it. I feared that I would toil at something that would evidence my inability, and that it would be a presumptuous undertaking, so that I considered changing my mind and abandoning my previous decision.

But when I designed to remove this laborious burden from myself and desist from composing the work, I reconsidered and became suspicious of myself for having chosen to rest and to dwell in the abode of laziness in peace and tranquility, and I feared that it was the desire of the [evil] passion which was placing this thought [within me], ...and I know that many minds have been lost out of apprehension, and many losses have been caused by fear...if all those involved in good causes...were to remain silent and still until they could completely attain their ideal, no man would ever say a word after the Prophets...who were chosen by God...

Questions for Consideration:

How does R. Bahya model the types of Anava we saw above in Moses and Abraham?

What experiences have you had with this type of decision?

**Source 3: Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook (d. 1936, Palestine), The Moral Principles (Middot HaRayah)**

Anava/Humility completes, or makes whole, Ratzon/Will. It is for this reason that [Anava/Humility] is the best vessel for receiving all blessing.

**הענוה משלימה את הרצון, ובזה היא הכלי היותר טוב לקבל כל ברכה**

Questions for Consideration:

What do you think it means for Anava to complete or make “Ratzon/Will” whole? How does this change if we are talking about human will or Divine will?

What do think the connection is between Ratzon/Will and blessing?

How does Anava function as a vehicle for blessing in the Moshe and Avraham stories? In other stories from the written and oral Torah?

How has Anava functioned as a vehicle for blessing in your own life?