

“The World’s Most Humble Man”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Of all the remarkable qualities of Moses, one is singled out for mention in the Torah — Moses was the most humble man on earth. (Numbers 12:3)

Genuine humility is not the absence of self-esteem. They are actually the same.

Esteem of oneself comes less from qualities than from essence — not simply what we do but who we understand ourselves to be. Genuine self-esteem mandates that I feel badly about myself at times, for I have acted in a way not worthy of the soul I was given. A great musician will reproach himself for mistakes in performance that a lesser artist would ignore. As we grow in soul we have more occasions to scrutinize ourselves and our conduct. To feel always good about oneself is to set the bar distressingly low.

Moses was humbled before the Creator of the universe. Understanding God better than any man who ever lived, he appreciated the relative position of human and Divine in the cosmos. His accomplishments grew from his character; he knew his place in the world as a leader and teacher; he was not falsely modest. Moses’ esteem grew from being in God’s image and his humility from understanding how infinitely greater is the Original than the image.