

D'var Torah by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky for Parshas VzosHaBracha 5776 (2015)

G-d's eulogy for Moshe should consist of the most poetic words that can describe a man who fulfilled every wish and command that is imaginable of mortal beings. In summarizing Moshe's life's achievements, He should choose words that describe his remarkable humility, his unstinting devotion, and his amazing powers of calm and sensibility. He doesn't.

"And Moshe, the eved Hashem (servant of G-d) died" (Deuteronomy 34:5). Eved Hashem are the two words chosen to encapsulate the life of the greatest living legend in biblical history. Just two simple words - servant of G-d. Do those words truly do Moshe justice? How could the simplest and lowest of compliments, calling the greatest prophet a simple servant help us understand G-d's adulation for his greatest follower?

Fredrick the Great, King of Prussia during the late 1700s, was reviewing his troops when he noticed a middle-aged soldier wearing an interesting ornament. Dangling from what appeared to be an heirloom watch-chain was the spent casing of a bullet. It had been polished and shined as it replaced a watch that the soldier obviously was unable to afford.

The king, in a playful mood, pulled his diamond-studded pocket watch from his vest and held it in the sunlight. As the rays glinted off the diamonds that surrounded its face he stared at his piece intently. Then he looked at the soldier. "My dear soldier," he said in mock concern as he tugged on the exquisite piece attached to its chain. "My timepiece says that it is half past one. What time does yours tell?"

The soldier looked down at the bullet.

"Your honor," he declared with sincere humility. "The ornament that dangles from my watch chain, does not tell me the time. Rather it is a bullet."

"A bullet!" scoffed the king. "Why on earth would you wear a bullet instead of a watch?"

"To me your honor, there are no hours, minutes nor seconds. My watch tells me that every moment I am willing to take a bullet - even if it means my life - for your Majesty."

King Fredrick was so impressed with the soldier's reply that he promptly removed his exquisite royal watch and presented it to the soldier.

Mortals look for accolades that personify their own wisdom, wealth, and accomplishment. The Torah looks for accolades to identify the accomplishment of man's reason for being.

The greatest praise that the Creator of all things can reap upon his beloved are two Hebrew words -- Eved Hashem -- Servant of G-d. Moshe was totally subservient to the will of his Creator making him a mortal extension of His immortal existence. Those two words - eved Hashem -- say a lot. They say more than hundreds of pages of eulogy or tomes of accolades. They tell the raison d'etre of mortal man - to serve Hashem. As we ponder our existence as we enter the new year, it's wonderful to know those words. They help us focus on the meaning of life while keeping it's complexities quite simple. All we have to yearn for is to reach that great level of simplicity.

Chag Samayach!