

SELFLESSNESS

Text:

Korach and his followers accuse Moses of seizing power for selfish reasons.

And Moses was sorely aggrieved, and he said to God, "Do not accept their offering! I have never taken a donkey from any of them, nor have I harmed any of them."

[Numbers 16:15]

I did not receive from them even the kind of favors which a commoner receives from his fellow man; I never even borrowed a donkey from them. That being the case, my authority over them was completely for their benefit, and to improve their lot – not for my benefit or pleasure at all; and they are only complaining about my authority because they are ingrates.

[Commentary of S'forno]

Question:

After everything Moses did for the Jewish People, wasn't he entitled to the same courtesy as any commoner? Why did he have to defend himself, insisting that he had never even borrowed a donkey?

Answer:

A leader must be absolutely selfless; any shred of personal gain compromises the purity of his efforts. True – Moses had done so much for the Jews that nothing could repay him; yet if leadership had brought Moses some personal benefit – even a simple, everyday favor – his actions would no longer bespeak the same selfless love and dedication. Had Moses once borrowed a donkey, he could no longer declare unequivocally that the people's discontent was solely a reflection of their ingratitude.

Message:

It isn't enough to know we are sincere and well-meaning; our actions on behalf of others must reflect absolute purity, without an iota of self-interest. We may not be able to reach the level of Moses; but the more we strive for selflessness, the more effectively we communicate our love and dedication to the people we are trying to help.