

# Speaking Before the King

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Rebbe Nachman tells a parable:

Once there was a lord who had a very competent clerk in his employ. One day he sent this clerk to oversee a distant city within his fiefdom. When the clerk arrived at his post, however, he didn't mention the lord at all, and people got the impression that the clerk was in fact the lord. Whenever they needed something from him, they would fall at his feet and show him all kinds of honor. They would address him as "Your lordship," "Your munificence," and so on.

Once the lord himself came to the city to meet with the clerk and find out why people were not doing their appointed tasks. When the clerk summoned a supervisor to answer the lord's

questions, the supervisor immediately bowed to the clerk and called him "Your greatness." When the lord began questioning him, the supervisor addressed his answers to the clerk instead. The supervisor spent much time flattering the clerk, imparting to him the honor that should have been accorded the lord. Naturally, the clerk's face turned black "like the bottom of a pot" from embarrassment. For there is no greater shame than this: that in the presence of the lord, they give *him* the honor.

Rebbe Nachman explains: The principal honor a man receives is due to the power of speech, for speech is the only thing that distinguishes man from animal. Speech corresponds to the Palace of God. When a person seeks honor through another's praise of him, or through his own speech to or about others, he is seeking honor in the King's Palace – honor that belongs to God, not to him.

Reb Noson adds that we should take care to use our speech specifically to honor God and righteous people (who, through their words and actions, reveal God to others).

Perhaps this teaching contributed to the great respect that Breslover Chassidim accorded one another throughout the generations. Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Bender recounted, "The care and sensitivity with which Breslovers treated each other is difficult to describe. They never said anything that could be construed as an insult or denigrating to their fellow in any way. They spoke with each other in a calm, tranquil manner, which is rare to find today."

*Based on Likutey Moharan I, 194; Likutey Tefilot I, 132*

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