

Small Mountains

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

The Talmud relates that God gave the Torah on Sinai because Sinai is a small mountain. It is intended to teach us humility; great things can come from unassuming places.

If this is true, asks a later sage, why not give the Torah in a valley? That would really teach humility! His answer is that for a valley to be humble is no great feat. The key is to be humble if you are a mountain. Thinking yourself worthless is not humility. To understand that you have ability and yet remain modest is an achievement of character.

Why is humility the single quality that the Torah emphasizes about Moses? To remind us that humility is not an absence of gifts, but a realization that gifts are blessings, that we are only human. Combining humility with accomplishment is no easy feat; Churchill once said to his dinner companion, “All men are worms. But I do believe I am a glowworm.” No one would accuse Churchill of being self-effacing; he was a large mountain indeed. Yet he understood that human beings are flawed, fleeting creatures. All of us struggle to navigate between inflated self-regard and worthlessness. The desired balance is to be humble: a small mountain that does great things.