

REFLECTING ON G-D

by Rabbi Moshe Peretz Gilden

With the Jewish people complaining of thirst, Moshe and Aaron retreated to the Tabernacle for Divine guidance. They were instructed to speak to a specific rock and it would provide the needed water. Moshe inadvertently spoke to the wrong rock, and, lacking an alternative approach, chose to employ a tactic G-d instructed him to use in an earlier circumstance: hitting the rock (see Rashi, Bamidbar/Numbers 20:11). G-d, in his infinite compassion, allowed the water to flow forth from the rock, but Moshe and Aaron were chastised and punished. "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the Land I have given them." (20:12) Bringing forth water from a rock in the middle of a desert is quite a miracle. In what way did Moshe diminish the honor of G-d?

Rabbi Yosef Albo (1380-1444; Rabbi of Saragossa, Spain and later Castille; proficient in medicine, mathematics and philosophy and famous for his religio-philosophical work Sefer Halkkarim/Book of Principles) explains that one branch of the belief in Divine Providence is the understanding that G-d bends nature to the will of righteous believers. As the need arises, they have the ability to pray for a miracle and G-d grants their wish. Tanach (the Bible) is replete with incidents of prophets and great individuals in Jewish history who performed miracles. Here, too, Moshe should have prayed for a miracle from the outset and not withdrawn to the Tabernacle.

Meshech Chochmah (Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk; 1843-1926; foremost Torah scholar of his time) elucidates that throughout Moshe's leadership of the Jewish people G-d determined when it was appropriate to utilize a miracle - in contrast to later prophets who announced that a miracle would occur and G-d responded by fulfilling their call. Moshe chose a different *modus operandi* because of his humility. Whereas other prophets would physically tremble when they were receiving their prophesy, making it readily evident that the forthcoming miracle was coming from a higher power, G-d communicated with Moshe as a person speaks to his friend. Without the visible trembling, Moshe feared the masses would believe the miracles actually came from him, as if he possessed some Divine power, so he always requested Divine assistance and let G-d formulate the method to address the quandary.

The exception to Moshe's rule was the events involving Korach in last week's parsha. When Korach rebelled and publicly questioned the legitimacy of his leadership, Moshe proclaimed that a miracle would happen and G-d opened the earth, which swallowed Korach and his co-conspirators, just as Moshe had stated. Moshe broke his own rule because the situation mandated a display of his

spiritual greatness and the intimacy of his relationship with G-d - to demonstrate G-d's endorsement of his leadership.

Now, Moshe reverted to his original practice. But the nation now knew that he had the ability to call for miracles, and, not appreciating the unique nature of the Korach situation, they questioned why he was only willing to do so for the sake of his leadership but not for the Jewish people at a time of distress. Moshe's decision to not openly call upon the rock to give water at a time that the needs of the masses mandated such a miracle desecrated the Divine name, a great dishonor to G-d.

We are all leaders - as teachers, as parents and even as peers. We must appreciate that our actions are watched and interpreted - even misinterpreted - reflecting on us and, more significantly, as Jews, reflecting on the Jewish people and on G-d.

Have a good Shabbos!

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