

IT'S YOUR FAULT!

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In the beginning of this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu poignantly revealed the depths of his desire to enter Eretz Yisroel and the profundity of his belief in the power of Tefilah. Having been told that he would not enter the Promise Land, Moshe nevertheless beseeched the heavens for the decree to be rescinded.

On what basis did Moshe think that the decree should have been annulled? Was it because he had done Teshuva? If so, why wasn't Aharon's decree forgiven? Is it possible to think that Moshe had done Teshuva but Aharon had not? Of course not! Moshe and Aharon had both done Teshuva!

A) To do Teshuva is a Mitzvah and Moshe and Aharon would certainly have grabbed every opportunity to do another Mitzvah. We see later in the Parsha that Moshe designated where the Cities of Refuge should be situated; (4:41) although, they would not be functional until the Jews had captured all of Eretz Yisroel. The Cities of Refuge did not have any practical application until 24 years after Moshe's death; yet, to the extent that he could, he grabbed the opportunity to participate in the Mitzvah. (see Darash Moshe) Therefore, we can be certain that both Moshe and Aharon would have done the Mitzvah of Teshuva.

B) Considering Moshe's comprehension of justice and the way G-d administers justice, Moshe would have wanted to do whatever was necessary to correct his mistake. We accept that G-d never punishes except to correct the effects of the sin and rehabilitate the sinner. Therefore, whatever G-d decreed as the consequence for the sin of hitting rather than speaking to the rock was necessary to correct the damage done by Moshe's sin. Why then would Moshe wish to avoid the necessary rehabilitation?

We understand Moshe's sin to have been, (Bamidbar 20:12) "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the nation." The sanctification of G-d's name involves expressing in word and deed our dependency upon G-d's absolute love and our acceptance of His control over all things. As the Jews received their freedom from Egypt, Moshe's job, as their "teacher," was to direct their awareness to G-d's direct involvement in their exodus from slavery and their survival in the desert. However, due to Moshe's pivotal involvement as the Redeemer and the seeming miracle worker, the Jews grew to depend much more upon Moshe's presence than upon G-d's benevolence.

In many ways, it was like a parent - child relationship. The child might intellectually know that his

parents are limited in what they can do and how much they can do. Yet, it does not stop the child from feeling dependent upon his parents for all the things he desires. In the same vein, the child readily blames the parent for not being able to do more than they can actually do. The same thing was true between Moshe and the Bnai Yisroel. They were intellectually aware that Moshe could not have done all the miracles in Mitzrayim and in the desert. However, it did not stop them from expecting him to take care of their every need and desire. Therefore, whenever they encountered the need for divine intervention their immediate reaction was to complain to Moshe rather than direct their needs to G-d.

At the end of the 40 years, it was time for the Jews to finally accept Moshe's limited involvement in their ongoing survival and accept G-d's proven love and absolute control. Therefore, G-d instructed Moshe to speak to the rock rather than hit the rock. This would have shown the Bnai Yisroel that all they ever had to do was ask for G-d's help and intervention through prayer, and hope that they merit that which they had prayed for. However, when Moshe hit the rock rather than spoke to it Moshe reinforced the nation's belief that he, Moshe, was their only medium for relating to G-d and that without him G-d would not listen directly to their prayers. In essence, if Moshe was not with them they could not trust or depend upon G-d. G-d was to be feared. G-d was awesome and majestic. G-d ruled the world with an unforgiving and exacting justice, "Before whom no living thing could possibly be judged as deserving." However, G-d was not loving, personal, caring or benevolent. G-d was distant and forbidding, and mere mortals did not stand a chance with Him, unless Moshe was there.

In order to correct the effects of Moshe's sin, Moshe could not enter Eretz Yisroel. The death of Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe would force the Bnai Yisroel to relate directly to G-d without, the intercedence of Moshe Rabbeinu or his extraordinary siblings.

Why then would Moshe have wanted to circumvent his punishment? He, more so than anyone else, desired that the Jews understand and accept their relationship with G-d. If his death would force the nation to become fully dependent upon G-d, Moshe would have willingly sacrificed himself!

We must conclude that Moshe's request to enter the land of Israel assumed that he had already done Teshuva and a solution other than Moshe's death existed to correct the misdirected dependency of the nation away from himself and toward G-d.

In verse 3:26, Moshe says, "...and G-d became angry with me because of you, and He did not listen to me..." What did Moshe mean by placing the blame on the Bnai Yisroel? True, they were a stiff-necked people who on occasion frustrated and irritated Moshe. However, we are a nation that does not shift blame for our own mistakes. Moshe was the one who hit the rock, not the nation!

The obvious explanation is that Moshe's non-entry into Israel was ultimately for their benefit, as already explained. With Moshe's death, the Jews were forced to shift their dependency away from Moshe and onto G-d. However, the narration in this week's Parsha seems to imply a new reason why G-d did not listen to his prayers. As Rashi explains, Moshe's request for clemency was made after

the battle with Sichon and Og. By then, Miriam and Aharon had already died and Moshe should have consigned himself to his fate. The fact that he still made his request implies that Moshe believed that there was good reason why G-d should have relented.

The victorious battles against the mighty warrior kings, Sichon and Og, empowered the nation to assume personal responsibility for the survival of the nation. It wasn't just Moshe taking on the Egyptians. It wasn't just the raised hands of Moshe leading them to victory against Amalek. The battle was won because each soldier willingly put his life on the line and trusted G-d. It was the first time that each one stood alone, beyond the pale of Moshe's immediate influence, and had to acknowledge G-d's personal intervention. It forced them to acknowledge that their trust should be in G-d, and not in Moshe. Therefore, Moshe believed that the damage he had done in hitting the rock rather than speaking to it had been corrected, and he would be able to enter the Promised Land. However, G-d needed more than that before He would commute Moshe's sentence.

The focus of prayer is the Shemoneh Esreh - 18 benedictions, the Amidah, when each of us stands alone before G-d. It is a personal audience with the Creator, and it is expected that we will express ourselves in a manner that reflects our absolute dependency upon G-d. Following the battles of Sichon and Og the Bnai Yisroel were ready to embrace the totality of their individual and national dependency. Had they understood the power of their prayers, the Jews would have also understood that they had the power to rescind G-d's decree against Moshe. For Aharon and Miriam, it was too late; but for Moshe, there was still enough time. If on their own the Bnai Yisroel had beseeched G-d to let Moshe into Eretz Yisroel, it would be clear that their dependency was on G-d and not Moshe. Had they done so, the damaging affect of Moshe's sin would have been corrected, and G-d would have listened to Moshe's request. However, the Bnai Yisroel had not yet attained the full understanding of the power of prayer and their dependency on G-d and they did not pray on Moshe's behalf. Therefore, Moshe said to the Jews, "Because of you, G-d did not listen to me."

15TH OF AV - THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE YEAR

The last Mishneh in Taanis states that the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur are equally joyous occasions. The forgiveness received on Yom Kippur and the annually renewed closeness with G-d are cause for great celebration. The 15th of Av is equally a time of historic atonement, intimacy, and celebration. The Talmud explains the six events that give this day its unique character.

1. As explained in previous editions, the above 20, male, generation of the Exodus died out in the desert during the 40 years of wandering. Every Tisha B'Av, 15,000 men, (of the total 600,000) would die. On the last Tisha B'av in the year 2488, the remaining 15,000 dug their graves, but in the morning none had died! Figuring that they must have made a mistake in the calendar, they continued to dig their graves every night until the 15th, when seeing the full moon they realized that G-d had rescinded the decree for the remaining 15,000! A day of forgiveness and celebration was proclaimed. (37 x 15,000 = 555,000 + 14,700 + 250 by Korach + 15,000 Deut.1:44 = 599,000)

2 & 3. In the times of the Shoftim - Judges, under the rule of Othniel, a terrible civil war broke out between the tribe of Binyamin and the rest of the nation. (approx. 2573-1188 b.c.e.) The tribe of Binyamin was decimated and a decree was issued forbidding any further marriage with the men of Binyamin. This would have resulted in the eventual destruction of the entire tribe. Additionally, all women, from any tribe, were forbidden to marry outside of their tribes. Some time later, on the 15th of Av, both decrees were lifted, allowing for all marriages between the tribes, and guaranteeing the survival of the tribe of Binyamin. The Mishna teaches that the 15th of Av was devoted to shidduchim, marriages, and the rebuilding of relationships.

4. Following the death of King Solomon, the nation was divided. Israel, was led by the evil Yeravam ben Nevat. Three years after taking the throne, he erected two golden calves in the North and South of Israel, and prohibited his people to go and visit the Beis Hamikdash. Checkpoints and other forms of restraint were instituted to discourage going to the Temple and to encourage serving the "golden calves". On the 15th of Av, around 3187-574 b.c.e., under the King Hoshea b. Elah, the decree was lifted and all of Israel was again able to go to the Beis Hamikdash.

5. "Yom Tabar Maagal - The Day of the breaking of the Axes." In the 2nd Temple, wood was scarce after the land had been unattended during the 70 year exile. Therefore, wood was very precious and expensive. To guarantee that the Mizbeach would always have sufficient wood, donations were given by the wealthiest families, exclusively for the Alter. The wood had to be completely dry to guarantee that there wouldn't be any worms. The cut off date to bring the wood into the Temple for the coming year was the 15th of Av. That was the day when the "axes could be broken" and it was a day of enormous joy and rejoicing knowing that the sacrifices could be brought for the coming year.

6. 52 years after the 2nd Temple, Bar Kochba lead an uprising against the Romans. He was so successful that some considered him to be the Mashiach. His rebellion ended on Tisha B'Av after a 3 year siege against Betar, and he died along with 580,000 others. To disgrace and demoralize the people, the "fallen of Betar" were not permitted by the Roman authorities to be buried, and were stacked as a human fence around the vineyards of the governor, Adrianus. (approx. 12 mile perimeter) For almost 11 years, until Emperor Hadrian's death, the bodies miraculously remained intact, without decomposing. On the 15th of Av, permission was granted to bury the martyred of Betar. This miracle was cause for celebration. In fact, the fourth blessing of the Birkas Hamazon (Grace After Meals) Hatov V'Hamaytiv - G-d Who is good and Who does good) was authored by the rabbis of that generation to commemorate this great miracle. This was ordained to remember the special love that G-d displayed in not allowing the martyrs of Betar to decompose before burial.

Good Shabbos.

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