

# NOT BECAUSE THEY SINNED!

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

The forty years were nearing their end. Forty years of extraordinary revelation of G-d's manifest majesty, glory, and benevolence was about to become the stuff of legend and faith. A generation had died and a new one had come of age. Miracles of the past, some quite unbelievable, lived on in the souls and teachings of the nation's new elders who personally remembered proclaiming between walls of water, "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him!"

Beyond the collective memories and stories of mothers and grandmothers was the ever present and unyielding reality of the three great-ones, Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe. Who could doubt the past when standing within the timeless presence of the three. Eternally young, they gazed upon the old and the new with an unqualified and boundless love. They were of one mind and soul, yet so different.

Miriam, grand lady of the nation, born to royalty, married to royalty, and the mother of royalty. Miriam, who along with Yocheved defied Pharaoh and helped save countless generations. Miriam, who had stood on the banks of the Nile and protected her baby brother as well as the destiny of a world. Miriam who had sung the song of the sea as only the angels could sing. Miriam, in whose merit G-d made the desert bloom with the divine waters of creation.

Aharon the Priest, singular in his loving demeanor and desire to heal all. Aharon the Priest, born to royalty but having grown beyond royalty. He was the source of forgiveness. He was the source of blessing. He was keeper of G-d's home and the keeper of His light.

And of course Moshe. Beyond legend and time, greater than mortal or angel. A towering figure of awesome strength and trust. The most humble of all yet the only one of his kind. Veiled in secrecy and the source of all faith. He was the prophet of all prophets and the most trusted in G-d's home. His radiance transcended all questions and his answers were the basis for all facts. In the presence of these three there could be no doubts. In their presence everyone knew that there was a G-d Who had taken His people out of bondage, lovingly given them His Torah, and miraculously brought them to the edge of the Promised Land.

In this week's Parsha we bid farewell to the three great-ones. Their work was complete. The people knew that they had been gifted with three exceptional lives for the greater good of the nation and the sanctification of G-d's name. Miriam was the first to go, then Aharon, with Moshe soon to follow. The commentaries point out that the death of Miriam preceded the "sin" of Moshe and Aharon to

show that just as Miriam's passing was unrelated to the sin of hitting the rock and therefore not a punishment, so too Aharon and Moshe's passing was not a punishment. The three had been decreed to die along with the generation they had shepherded from Egypt. The incident with the rock simply explained why it had to be so.

Who was Moshe and why did he have to die? Obviously he was human, and all humans must eventually pass on; however, why in association with hitting the rock and why before entering the Promised Land?

Starting with the incident of Miriam and Aharon speaking "Lashon Hara (slander)," the Torah painted a far richer picture of Moshe the man. The Torah highlighted two characteristics of Moshe - his humility and his trustworthiness. "Moshe was the most humble of all men? He is the most trusted in all My home." Logic dictates that Moshe's mission as the "Law Giver" was predicated upon his humility and trustworthiness. Because of Moshe's humility G-d trusted him more than anyone else. Because he was the most trusted of G-d's servants he was given the task of teaching G-d's law to the nation. We must also conclude that in the end, the sin of the rock and the timing of Moshe's death were related to Moshe's humility, trustworthiness, and his mission as the Law Giver.

The Torah describes the sin of the rock as, "Because you did not trust in Me to glorify Me before the nation." The Torah identified Moshe's failing as a failure in his trustworthiness, not a failure of his humility.

As we have studied in previous issues of the Rabbi's Notebook, Rav Hirsch details the manner of Moshe's frustration when he hit the rock. The 40 years were drawing to a close and the existence of the Bnai Yisroel was clearly a miracle. Yet, in the aftermath of Miriam's passing and the disappearance of the well that had existed in her merit, the nation began to complain. Moshe and Aharon turned to G-d for a response.

G-d did not get angry. Instead, he told Moshe what to do. "Talk to the Rock and it will give forth water." However, Moshe understood that the generation still lacked the necessary level of trust in G-d. Had they turned to G-d at their time of thirst Moshe's mission would have been a success. Instead, they turned to Moshe to once again intervene and "do a miracle." Remember, fundamental to Moshe's mission was his humility and trustworthiness. His humility was necessary so that he himself would never take center stage in G-d's relationship with His people (in contrast to Korach).

At all times Moshe's mission was to direct the people toward G-d's loving benevolence, regardless of Moshe's participation in the miracle. Every miracle performed, from sticks turning into serpents and the splitting of the sea, to food from heaven and water from rocks, Moshe was only a prop. "G-d does battle. You stand silently."

Had the people asked G-d and not Moshe for water, Moshe's mission would have been an unreserved achievement. Not only did he bring G-d's law to the people, he also brought the people to G-d. Had Moshe spoken and not hit the rock, the nation would have seen that Moshe does not do

miracles, he only asks for them - no different than anyone else. However, that is not what happened.

Moshe, the most humble man upon earth, knew himself to be nothing more than a servant doing the will of his Master. He knew that there was no magic, there was no mystery, and there was only trust in G-d's unlimited loving kindness, majesty, and power. He raised the staff that had not been seen for almost 40 years. It was the legendary staff that had "split the sea and turned the Nile into blood." It was the staff that symbolized for many Moshe's divine appointment and station. He raised it as if to say, "This staff is nothing! This staff is nothing and I am nothing! We do not do miracles! Only G-d can provide for you! Belief and trust in G-d is the only thing that there is! You wanted water- here is your water."

Rav Hirsch suggests that in the moment of passion Moshe forgot the specifics of G-d's instructions and in a show of insignificance for himself and the staff he hit the rock instead of speaking to it.

In the end Moshe did the very opposite of what he desired and what G-d intended. Instead on making himself insignificant he once again reinforced the notion that the Jews needed his direct intervention in their relationship with the Almighty. Therefore, the only way to correct Moshe's mistake was for Moshe to be physically removed from the nation. Moshe had to die so that the nation would finally understand and accept that he truly was insignificant and that G-d was all that there was.

G-d put it simply and directly. "Because you did not trust me to glorify Me in the eyes of that nation?" Was there anyone who trusted G-d more than Moshe? Wasn't Moshe's entire mission devoted to minimizing himself and maximizing G-d?

From the very start of the Torah, and repeated in every single incident that followed, humanities responsibility was to "listen and do exactly what G-d says." This theme is presented in the Torah in two ways. 1. Direct conversation with G-d Himself (e.g. Adam, Chava, with the forbidden fruit, and Moshe hitting the rock). 2. Not listening or not asking G-d's chosen prophet for direction (e.g. Cham and Noach, the Brothers and Yoseph, Nadav and Avihu, the Miraglim and Korach's rebellion).

Moshe trusted G-d with every fiber of his being and soul. G-d's word was life itself! "It is our life and the length of our days." Moshe's humility guaranteed that his devotion was unconditional and his delivery of G-d's law was exact and authentic (in contrast to Korach). However, Moshe was still human and the consequences of his humanity caused his error.

Moshe's mission was to glorify G-d's name. Regardless of motive or intent the outcome of his life had to be a greater glorification of G-d. As free willed humans we are the only creation whom G-d holds responsible for everything we do. (Adam Muad L'Olam - a person is always held responsible.) Moshe's intent in hitting the rock rather than speaking may have been born from understandable frustration; however, in the end the action did not advance G-d's glory and standing. Instead it once again confirmed Moshe's glory and standing.

The Torah's description of the event is 100% true and accurate. "Because you did not trust me to glorify Me in the eyes of that nation?" Moshe's actions, regardless of motive, did not glorify G-d! It did appear as a lack of trust. Therefore, Aharon, and Moshe, like Miriam before them, had to die. Not because they sinned but because G-d had to be center stage - not Moshe or Aharon. G-d knew, as did Moshe himself that so long as Miriam, Moshe, and Aharon lived among the nation they would always be center stage. The hitting of the rock was only proof of that human limitation and reality. Had the incident of the rock advanced G-d's glory and standing there may have still been the chance of the nation seeing G-d beyond the towering radiance of Moshe; however, once the opposite happened, there was no other choice. Like Miriam before them, they too had to die as a consequence of their humanity - not because they sinned.

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