

Lessons From Moshe's Sin

Based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Zichron Aryeh

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In this week's Parsha, the Pasuk (20:12) says, "Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon - because you did not believe in me to sanctify me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisrael, therefore you will not bring this congregation into the the land that I have given them." The Rambam in the Shemone Perakim explains their sin as follows: "Moshe sinned by calling them rebels with an expression of anger. When Moshe became angry, he came to sin. Hashem held him accountable for this, as a great person expressing anger to Klal Yisrael when the anger was unjustified or anything similar is a Chilul Hashem. This is because all of Moshe's movements were directed for success in this world and the next. Therefore, it would be unlikely that he would get angry which is inappropriate and reflective of poor character. Regarding this reason, Hashem said - you rebelled against my word, because Yisrael consisted of extremely wise people, the smallest women among them was like Yechezkel Ben Buzi. Therefore, when they saw him get angry, they knew he does not possess bad character traits, so they deduced that it must be Hashem is angry with us for requesting water, and if not for this Moshe would not have gotten angry. However, we do not find that Hashem got angry with them."

An important insight can be gleaned from this Rambam. He explains that Moshe's sin was that he misrepresented Hashem and caused the Klal Yisrael to think Hashem was angry at them when he was not. This sin was a Chilul Hashem, and considered a lack in Emunah for Moshe, resulting in Moshe and Aharon being punished that they would not be allowed to enter into Eretz Yisrael. The punishment and the consideration that Moshe's sin was a lack in Emunah seems extremely harsh. Moshe's anger seemed rational and justified, as Klal Yisrael asked for water in a disrespectful manner. Granted they weren't punished, but surely this was not the appropriate way to ask! Why is Moshe being treated so harshly?

This harsh treatment illustrates for us how devastating misrepresenting Hashem truly is. Causing someone to err in their perspective of Hashem's Middos is a Chilul Hashem, and is viewed as a lack in Emunah resulting in devastating consequences. This

lesson is extremely relevant to parents, Rabbeim, and Rabbanim, who all serve in positions in which their charges view their actions as a representation of Hashem. They must heed extreme caution and make sure that what they express is in line with the Middos of Hashem. Showing anger, criticism, overreacting and an overall lack of respect and acceptance in ways that are out of line with how Hashem treats misbehavior is a Chilul Hashem.

An additional insight can be derived from the Daas Zekainim's approach. He says, "They said listen now you rebels, can we bring out water from this rock! As if to say why are you fighting with me, are we able to extract water from this rock without Hashem? You should have used the approach of Tefillah and begging Hashem, not fighting and complaining. Since they should have explained and been more elaborate with their words, Hashem held them accountable, and said 'Because you did not believe in me.'"

Upon initial analysis the Daas Zekainim is perplexing and requires further clarification. Moshe was talking to the Dor Deah, a generation of Chochamim. How could he be penalized for not elaborating on something that is so basic? Because Moshe didn't spell out to them in full detail that he has no power to give them water, it is only Hashem, and therefore they should have Davened, he is being so harshly punished?! His hint was so clear as he said, "Can we bring forth water from this rock?" Which implies it is only Hashem. What was lacking?

An amazing insight can be derived from here that has broad ramifications. Although the generation Moshe was talking to was so great, when it comes to the Yesodos of Yahadus, its fundamental principles must be spelled out in full detail no matter the caliber of the audience. Not doing so would be considered a lack in Emunah, and result in devastating consequences. Often as parents, Rabbeim, and Rabbanim we assume the basics are known, and we only touch on it or mention it in passing without elaborating. We see from here how important it is to constantly focus on the fundamentals, explaining them in full details.