

Moshe was angry with the commanders of the army...Moshe said to them, “Did you let every female live?” (31:14,15)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was angry with the officers of his army for not following his orders. They spared the Midyanite women, despite their involvement in inciting the orgies which catalyzed the plague that brought death to so many Jews. Upon reading the *pesukim*, one may question why Moshe's name is repeated in his rebuke. The Torah said that Moshe became angry. Obviously, he was the one rebuking the officers. Why did the Torah mention his name again?

The commentators explain that Moshe did not immediately rebuke them out of anger. He waited a short while until his anger subsided and then rebuked the officers. Thus, the two *pesukim* did not take place immediately one after the other. Indeed, we find concerning the laws of koshering utensils following the Midyanite war that it was Elazar *HaKohen*, rather than Moshe, who transmitted the laws. As a result of Moshe's anger, the laws became temporarily obscured from him. We find a similar critique when Moshe became cross with Elazar and Isamar (veritably, his sharp criticism was directed at Aharon *HaKohen*, but, in deference to his older brother, he spoke instead to his sons) for not eating from the sin-offering. As a result of his anger, he erred in his criticism. It was his brother Aharon who respectfully brought the error to his attention.

Clearly, Moshe *Rabbeinu's* anger is unlike the uncontrolled raw emotion which represents our anger. Ours is a corrosive emotion which can taint our mental and physical well-being. Releasing anger does not necessarily dissipate it. Anger in its own right is a form of indignation. It is the accompanying aggression which represents the problem. The Torah attests that Moshe became angry three times; each one had a negative impact on his cognitive ability. We must understand that, when speaking about the *Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael*, these negative terms are totally relative. The Torah seems to be teaching us that anger has a corrosive effect on everyone – even on our quintessential leader. This is probably the reason that the Torah points out these three instances in which Moshe became indignant.

Having said this, we must ask ourselves the realistic question: How often do we get angry? What effect does it have on us, our loved ones, and our relationship with others? In *Chinuch Malchusi*, the following meaningful and all-too-common vignette is related.

A *rebbe*, known for his punctuality, once came late to school. Apparently, he was caught in a traffic jam which had delayed him. As he walked into the classroom, one of the students walked over, raised his arm and pointed to the watch on his hand. Taking this as a slight against him for being tardy, the *rebbe* became quite angry. At first, he was about to punish the child for his *chutzpah*, insolence. How dare he call attention to the *rebbe's* late arrival? He decided to wait, to hold in his anger, to see how things would materialize.

That morning, following the recess bell, when all the classes were out for break, the *rebbe* shared

the incident and his feelings concerning the boy. How surprised (and thankful) he was to discover that, the night before, the boy had just received a brand new watch from his parents. It seems that he had excelled on a certain test, and the watch was his prize. The boy had waited patiently that morning to show his prize to his *rebbe* – because his *rebbe's* approval meant so much to him. *Chutzpah* was the furthest thing from his mind.

Now – let us imagine the scenario had the *rebbe* not held back his anger, had he instead lashed out at the youngster for his supposed *chutzpah* and, simultaneously, released his pent- up anger concerning the traffic that had delayed him that day; it would have been a disaster. The child, through no fault of his own, would have become a victim of the *rebbe's* anger. The joy of receiving a new watch, which he had wanted to share with his *rebbe*, would have quickly dissipated. Instead, a rift between *rebbe* and student that could have negative ramifications far beyond the school year would emerge. There is a time to act decisively, and there is a time when the most decisive thing to do is – not to act.