

“Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore, you will not bring this congregation to the land.” (20:12)

The commentators struggle to understand Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s sin. Some say that he was told to speak to the stone, and he hit the stone instead. Others say he spoke with anger to the people. In his *Sefer Halkrim*, *Horav Yosef Albo, z.l.*, gives a meaningful explanation. One of our principles of *emunah* is that Hashem bends *teva*, nature, to the needs of His faithful. Anyone who does not believe that Hashem fulfills the will of a *tzaddik*, righteous individual, denies the very basis of the Torah. It is especially true that when the opportunity to sanctify Hashem's Name exists, the *tzaddik* must publicize the fact that nature subordinates itself to the will of His faithful.

The *Baal Halkrim* continues, saying that a *tzaddik* or *Navi* who stands at the helm of the Jewish People at a time when they are in an *eis tzarah*, period of anguish, and does nothing – standing there with “folded hands” – increases the chance for a *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name. By doing nothing, he indicates that he himself doubts if nature will subordinate itself to him. When the *tzaddik* demonstrates a lack of security – it is a *chillul Hashem*.

“Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*” – Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon should not have come “running” to Hashem in reaction to the people's demand for water. They should have been immediately proactive; when they were asked to produce water, they should have done so. That would have been a *Kiddush Hashem*. If they would have decreed water, Hashem would have listened to them, and the Name of Hashem would have been sanctified.

This is a very compelling explanation. Indeed, why did not Moshe and Aharon do just that, decree that water should flow freely from the stone? Why did they not show that nature is subordinate to their will? This question actually applies to many more instances throughout the forty-year sojourn of the Jewish People in the desert. Why did they not do something?

The *Meshech Chochmah* explains that with the spiritual zenith that Moshe achieved, there was an overwhelming fear that the people might deify him. They might forget that he is only a *tzinor*, medium, through which Hashem grants His blessing. He is a *shaliach*, agent of Hashem.

While this would have been a valid excuse until the episode of Korach and his assembly, when they disputed Moshe's leadership, when they likened him to just any other *Navi*, they crossed the line. Moshe had to put his foot down – and he did. He was different, having been selected by Hashem to be the *Adon HaNeviim*, master of the prophets, the leader of *Klal Yisrael*. Now that Moshe had already asserted his position during the Korach rebellion, he should do likewise when *Klal Yisrael* are in need of water. Does he only believe in affirmative action where his leadership is impugned, reverting to his “study” when it affects the general public? This constituted the *chillul*

Hashem. When people do not understand the actions of a *gadol*, *Torah* leader, it can lead to severe repercussions.