

I implore! This people have committed a grievous sin. (32:31)

What did Moshe *Rabbeinu* mean by this statement? Of course the people had committed a grave sin. There was no question about this. On the contrary, by restating the offense, he was essentially adding insult to injury. In his *Ohaiv Yisrael*, the **Apter Rav, zl**, explains that when a person commits an *aveirah*, sin, the greatest punishment is the realization that he has sinned against Hashem. This does not come immediately, but, after introspection, he becomes cognitive of Hashem's eminence; and thus, the sin which he has committed takes on a different guise. How could he have sinned against the One Who gave him everything – Who continues to sustain him? He begins to realize that, by commission of this sin, he has distanced himself from the Source of all sanctity. He will slowly develop a sense of shame, which will ultimately lead to regret and remorse. He will then accept upon himself not to sin again. Indeed, one who finds himself on the level of this approach will benefit much more than if he were to experience the harshest punishment.

This is what Moshe said to Hashem. *Ana chatah ha'am chataah gedolah*, "The nation has sinned egregiously" – and they know it. What greater shame can there be? What punishment supersedes the pain they must sustain, knowing that they have sinned against their great Benefactor? The shame they are experiencing upon confronting the sin will certainly catalyze such regret that this will never happen again. For this reason, they deserve forgiveness and pardon.

How fortunate is one who achieves such a level of reflection, in which the very fact that he "sinned" is sufficient punishment for him. The realization of the blemish created by the sin, and the distance it accords the sinner in his relationship to Hashem, comprise all of the punishment the person needs.