

Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael. (20:12)

To use the word “sin” with regard to Moshe *Rabbeinu* is misleading and a distortion of our quintessential leader. Even the word “err” is deceiving, since Moshe neither sinned nor erred – on our relative level. On his supreme level of closeness to the Almighty, his action – or inaction – concerning the rock which brought forth water for the nation, is considered erroneous or, possibly, even sinful. This goes with the territory of leadership. So much more is expected of a person when he achieves such spiritual distinction; the exactitude that is demanded of him can be his undoing. Entering into *Eretz Yisrael* together with the people he led out of Egypt became a non-realistic goal. Hashem said “No, because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of *Bnei Yisrael*.”

The commentators all grapple with the meaning of this *pasuk*. To say Moshe manifested a lack of *emunah*, faith -- or that he refused to provide the nation with opportunity to achieve even greater faith in Hashem -- is a most difficult statement to understand. This is why *Ramban* refers to the “sin” of Moshe as “a great secret of the mysteries of the Torah.”

Rashi takes the most basic view, that Moshe erred in hitting the rock, rather than speaking to it. Regardless of Moshe’s rationale – Hashem had commanded him to speak – he struck. This is a breach. In his *Shemoneh Perakim*, *Rambam* explains that Moshe’s error was in excoriating the people, becoming angry with them. Torah leaders are agents of the Almighty. To lose one’s cool (in the eyes of the people) is a poor representation of Hashem. The other commentators build upon these two thoughts.

The *Chidushei HaRim* offers a novel approach. He focuses upon the word *l’eineihem* (20:8), before their eyes. Hashem instructed Moshe and Aharon to speak to the rock in such a manner as to invoke a vision in the eyes of the people. It was important that they see something rather than merely know it. Obviously, this demands a transcendental sort of vision, since one sees activity and hears sound. To see sound goes beyond the norm – a level of transcendence reached by *Klal Yisrael* when they stood at *Har Sinai* and witnessed the Revelation. At that time, they were able to see what is normally heard. Here, too, Hashem wanted the nation to have unquestionable knowledge of Hashem’s ability to provide people with whatever is needed for them in order to serve Him properly. Since Moshe preempted this opportunity by striking the stone, he achieved providing water, but the perception that Hashem sought for them was unfortunately undermined.

Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m’Berditchev, suggests that the variant explanations of *Rashi* and *Rambam* are actually one. Two types of *mochichim*, individuals who issue rebuke to people, indicate varied approaches towards conveying their reprimands. One takes a positive approach: exalting the people; reminding them of their illustrious lineage; their ability to come closer to the Divine through *mitzvah* performance, thus giving Hashem great satisfaction. The other *mochiach* employs the “how dare you” approach: settling on the negative effects of sin; our lack of

appreciation and gratitude to the Almighty; our puny physical nature etc. One exalts, encourages, uplifts; the other focuses on the “black and white,” the stark truth, our obligation to serve the One Who gives us everything.

Let us now see how these divergent approaches play themselves out in the context of the command to “speak to the rock.” Had Moshe spoken to the people positively, recognizing their amazing potential, lauding their exceptional ability to elevate themselves to the level of the Ministering Angels, it would have been sufficient merely to speak to the rock and water would have flown freely. Since, however, Moshe became impatient with their insolence, saying to them, *Shimu na ha'morim*, “Listen now, o’ rebels,” focusing on their negative attitude, their lack of gratitude and respect, speaking to the stone was no longer an option. It was necessary to strike and force it to issue forth the water.

These two approaches each served our people in their battle against the scourge of *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, which attempted to destroy the spiritual fiber of our people, as it set its sights on reforming traditional Judaism. It began over two centuries ago in Germany and picked up speed in Russia and Eastern Europe. It claimed thousands upon thousands of Jewish lives. Two primary forces arose as a spiritual response to counter the malignancy that was metastasizing through our people. While this should not serve as a history lesson, I find it important to relate some of the background and rationale for the demographic growth of *mussar*, ethical character refinement, movement in Lithuania, and, by extension, the *yeshivah* world, and *Chassidus* in Ukraine, Galicia, southeastern Poland and part of Hungary. These two movements certainly overlapped and, at their onset, there were antagonists to both. They have in many ways, however, come together and have adapted each other’s positive approaches. There is no question that, had they not been on the scene, Orthodoxy would have suffered even greater spiritual casualties, having fallen prey to the secular strains of infamy that has devastated so many of our people.

Each of these groups had diversity from within their movement. Nonetheless, they were unified on a global sense. As much as *mussar* expositors were willing to acknowledge the positive aspects of intellectual pursuits, this was only if it did not in any way hamper religious values. This was quite possibly one of the strongest reasons to oppose the *Haskalah*, which was bent-set on doing away with religion altogether. *Chassidus* would have nothing to do with anything even remotely connected with *Haskalah*.

As explained by *Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl*, himself a student of Slabodka, the *Mussar* movement bespoke the psychological makeup of Lithuanian Jewry, which was engaged in a bitter struggle against materialism and skepticism. Survival was contingent upon a return to its pristine sources. They did not live in the past. They understood where the world was going and the danger to Torah living that it proposed. They felt, however, that by restoring the focus of the individual Jew to the core principles of man’s relationship with Hashem, by focusing on the improvement of the soul and serious consideration of one’s ethical character, they would develop a stronger, more committed Jew, whose sense of pride lay in his closeness with the Almighty.

Careful introspection and unwavering commitment to the perfection of the mind are primary principles of the *mussar* approach. Thus, intellectual progression is the course to follow. *Chassidus* focuses on the heart, on joy and enthusiasm, on excitement in Jewish service. Hence, it is more preoccupied with the external – singing, dancing, celebrating the excitement of being a *Yid*. In contrast, *mussar* turned inward, toward the soul and the mind.

Horav Avraham Elya Kaplan, zl, who preceded *Rav Weinberg* as Rector/*Rosh Yeshivah* of the Hildeshaimer Seminary in Berlin, was himself also a Slabodka *talmid*, student. A brilliant *Talmudist* and intellect, he was a close disciple of the *Alter* of Slabodka, one of *Horav Yisrael Salanter's* (founder of the *Mussar Movement*) close students.

He notes that, whereas *Mussar* demands intense, detailed work on one's *middos*, a process that produces incredible, outstanding personalities, such as the *mussar* greats we have all come to revere and admire, *Chassidus* does not place extreme focus on personality correction. *Chassidus* teaches the importance of the ecstatic, transcendent personality, which gives one joy in living and pride in the opportunity to serve Hashem.

He points out that *mussar* is often satisfied with the Jewish strengths of *Chassidus*: its stalwartness in not submitting to the environment; its heartfelt openness *bein adam l'chaveiro*, between man and his fellowman; its readiness to dedicate itself to a lofty purpose, even to the point of self-sacrifice; its youthful exuberance in *mitzvah* performance – a fervor which extends into old age. In contrast, *mussar* views *Chassidus* as too external, too theoretical and abstract. As much as *Chassidus* certainly delves into the profundities of the greatest Torah problems in relationships of man to G-d and man to man, it hardly focuses on the self of a person, so that he might engage in introspection, to consider where does he stand in relation to his world and in relation to his obligations in this world. *Rav Kaplan* discerns between the *nigun*/song/tune (which is a primary act of *deveikus*/cleaving to Hashem, experienced by the *chasid*) that wells up from the heart and has its source in the soul, and the transient moods not associated with the true essence of the *chasid*.

In sum, these two approaches, although divergent -- with one focusing on positive, joyful expression, and the other placing emphasis upon negating and expunging all materialistic and skeptic tendencies in order to focus on increasing one's fear of Heaven – both maintained the common goal of bringing the Jew closer to Hashem and increasing his observance of *mitzvos*.