

And now if You would but forgive their sin! – but if not, erase me now from Your book that you have written. Whoever has sinned against Me I shall erase from My book... And now lead the people. (32:32,33,34)

The Torah narrative relating the dialogue that ensued between Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Hashem is enigmatic. First, to which *sefer* is Moshe referring? Second, Hashem's response to Moshe's demand that his name be erased from the "book" appears, superficially, to suggest that Hashem was dismissing Moshe with prejudice. Yet, Hashem immediately tasks Moshe with leading the nation. How did indignation disappear only to be replaced with compassion? *Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl (Seridei Eish)*, explains this as part of an earlier *pasuk* in which Hashem says to Moshe, *V'Ata hanichah Li v'yichar Api bahem, v'e'escha l'goi gadol*; "Desist from Me. Let My anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them, and I shall make you a great nation" (Ibid. 32:9). The commentators explain that Hashem was "compelled" to offer Moshe to become the progenitor of the new *Klal Yisrael* (after He would destroy the present group) due to the promise He had made to the *Avos*, Patriarchs, that their descendants would become a great nation. If Hashem were to do away with the present sinners, He would have to start over again with Moshe as the leader and progenitor of *Klal Yisrael*.

This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is the meaning of *Sifrecha asher Kosavta*; "Your book which You wrote." Moshe was protesting, "Remove me from the *v'e'escha l'goi gadol*. You wrote, 'I will make you into a great nation.' I do not want to be the one to establish a new nation on the graves of the present nation. Erase me from that promise. If they go under – I go under. If they die – so do I!"

Immediately, the Heavenly Throne began to shake, and Hashem's anger was overwhelmed with His infinite compassion. He said, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I shall erase from My book." This means, "I will erase the *Va'achaleim*, 'And I will destroy them.' Now, you go lead the people. You are worthy of being their leader."

To recap: Moshe said to Hashem, "I do not want You to destroy the nation and appoint me as its new progenitor. I refuse to watch them die while I live. If they die – so will I!" When Hashem heard these powerful words emanating from Moshe, when He saw the extraordinary *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, manifest by Moshe for *Klal Yisrael*, He rescinded His decree and they were spared.

Moshe *Rabbeinu's* love for *Klal Yisrael*, his outstanding compassion, "moved" Hashem, so that he replaced his anger with compassion. A powerful lesson may be derived from here. We often come across brothers or sisters who have descended to the nadir of depravity. We have no question that such people, under ordinary circumstances, do not warrant Divine compassion – but retribution. When Hashem sees the compassion that we show to them, however, the care and love we extend

to them in order to bring them back – He reaches out to them and welcomes them home. Moshe showed us the way. He opened up his heart and risked his life, his