

Listen now, O rebels, shall we bring forth water for you from this rock? (20:10)

The commentators struggle to understand Moshe and Aharon's sin. Undoubtedly, Hashem placed demands upon them commensurate with their lofty level of virtue and holiness. Other people cannot be evaluated by the same standards used to assess Moshe and Aharon. According to the *Ramban*, Moshe's anger caused his sin. The manner in which Moshe spoke to the people, "Listen, O rebels," was not the proper vernacular with which to address *Klal Yisrael*. Moshe should have demonstrated more patience in dealing with his people.

The overwhelming question with which we are faced is: Why did Moshe become angry? What could have provoked the quintessential leader of *Klal Yisrael* to become so enraged? Indeed, we find in the *Talmud* that Hillel, the great *Tanna*, could not be provoked to anger. *Chazal* relate how two men attempted to infuriate Hillel, to no avail. Hillel was very humble. One who views himself as being "nothing" cannot get angry. Was there a greater *anav*, man of humility, than Moshe? He was the "*anav m'kol adam*," the most humble man who ever lived. Why did he become angry?

Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, cites the *Yalkut*, which sheds light on this anomaly. Moshe and Aharon were walking towards the stone, while *Bnei Yisrael* followed behind them. When Moshe stopped at the stone, a group of *leitzanim*, scoffers/ridiculers said, "Do you know that Moshe was a shepherd for his father-in-law, Yisro? Shepherds are quite proficient in finding water in the desert. He is taking us to a place where he knows that water exists. Let us select the stone from which he should give us water." Suddenly, Moshe stopped, turned to the people and said, "From this stone your thirst will be quenched." When the "*tummlers*" heard this, they said to the people: "See, we were right; he only knows how to give water from one specific stone." When Moshe heard this, he turned to the people in anger and said, "I promise you that water will only flow from the specific stone of my choosing."

Let us analyze what happened. *Bnei Yisrael* had been in the desert for almost forty years. During this time, they had been receiving their water through the "services" of Miriam's well. Now that Miriam had passed away, the merit that sustained the well had also passed. What were they to drink? The people were literally dying of thirst. They knew that short of a miracle their prospects of locating water in the wilderness were nonexistent. Moshe and Aharon gathered together the people, creating the hope that they would soon have water. We are not discussing a bit of water to tide them over. They needed a sufficient amount of water to serve millions of men, women, and children not for just a day, but for a lengthy period of time. Now, if a small group of buffoons were looking to ridicule and undermine Moshe's mission on behalf of the nation, should that have infuriated him? He should have ignored them, treating them as the fools that they were!

Horav Sorotzkin explains that Moshe *Rabbeinu* knew only too well the tragic effect of *leitzanus*, mockery/joking. After all, how did Korach guilefully ensnare his "congregation" of *talmidei*

chachamim, scholars, and heads of the *Sanhedrin*? He employed the power of *leitzanus*. He made fun of Moshe. He made a mockery of the *Torah* and the manner in which Moshe presented the laws. He blinded the people with his *halachah* "jokes." He portrayed Moshe as incompetent and inconsistent in enforcing his rules for the people.

Yes, Moshe knew very well what *leitzanus* could produce. It has the power of a plague. The people were not going to move from here unless he provided them with water from the stone of their choosing. This represents the results of joking. Moshe was not going to risk another Korach incident. If it meant acting in an angry manner, so be it. The only way to counteract the effect of *leitzanus* is through *retzinus*, seriousness. One must demonstrate determination and resolve, not permitting those who ridicule to undermine the cause of *Torah*. Yes, at times one must even exhibit anger, as Moshe *Rabbeinu* did.