

And Moshe, the servant of Hashem, died there. (34:5)

In the Talmud Sotah 13b, Chazal describe Moshe Rabbeinu's funeral: Moshe lay within the Kanfei ha'Shechinah, folds of the raiment of the splendor of the Divine Presence... The angels lamented his loss. Hashem's "eulogy" for His trusted servant began with the pasuk in Tehillim 94:16, "Who will rise up for Me against the doers of iniquity?" This seems enigmatic. A eulogy begins with and revolves around the most significant virtue, the primary aspect of the deceased's character, or his most prominent contribution to society. Was this Moshe's greatest quality? We find Moshe lauded as the most humble of men, the greatest prophet, one who is "trusted throughout Hashem's house" – the quintessential leader who spoke to Hashem, serving as the medium for transmitting the Torah to Klal Yisrael. Yet, when Hashem eulogizes him, He seems to disregard all of the above to focus on Moshe's ability to stand up to evil. Why? Obviously, those praises were the ultimate ones. Hashem waited until after Moshe had passed from this world before He expressed Moshe's distinctive quality. Furthermore, is Moshe's zeal to confront iniquity that significant? Unquestionably, it is a necessary quality for successful leadership, but was it the most illustrious of Moshe's qualities?

The Maharasha presents an alternative interpretation of this eulogy, which seems to be the version accepted in the Tanchuma. Hashem was saying, "Who will stand up to Me – when I am about to punish the wicked, when I am prepared to wipe out iniquity? Who will entreat Me on their behalf? Who will seek compassion and forgiveness for them when they sin against Me?" This idea reflects an entirely new perspective on Moshe. It presents him as the great defender, one who seeks to provide sanctuary for those who have sinned, to sort out anything positive about them, to find a way to have them exonerated, to give them a second chance. Yes, that was Moshe. It was his greatest quality.

The next time any of us looks for an opportunity to denounce, condemn, or simply "do a number" on someone who has acted inappropriately or worse, perhaps we should patiently review the situation, examine it from a positive perspective, and judge the individual reasonably. Taking into account mitigating and extenuating circumstances might make a world of difference. Apparently, it worked for Moshe Rabbeinu.

