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As If Things Weren't Bad Enough

Rabbi Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered on April 8, 1972)

Our Sidra begins by describing events in the Tabernacle on the first day when it actually was used for the service; or, if we include the *שבעת ימי המילואים* (the seven days of the consecration of the priests), the eighth day. ויהי ביום השמיני, “and it was on the eighth day.”

The Rabbis were extravagant in describing the significance of that day. תניא: אותו היום היתה השמחה לפני. “That day (when the priests first began their ministrations) was an occasion of such great joy before the Holy One, that it was equal to His joy on the day that heaven and earth were created.” The textual reasons for this equivalence between the day of Creation and the day of ministry at the Tabernacle, is the similarity of expressions in the two verses of ויהי ביום השמיני, and (with regard to creation) ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום אחד, “and it was evening and it was morning, the first day.”

Now, while we may have some kind of textual excuse for drawing this analogy, the question yet remains what the Rabbis really meant by comparing the first day of the Tabernacle to the day of creation. One of our commentaries offers an answer that is full of insight and of the greatest importance to us. He refers to the Midrash which states that עיקר שכינה בתחתונים היתה, God originally intended that His Shechinah (presence) dwell here on earth. However, when man sins, His Shechinah rises to an ever higher heaven. Thus, when Adam sinned, the Shechinah left the earth and ascended to the first heaven. When Cain killed his brother, the Shechinah rose to the second heaven. In the generation of Enosh, the Shechinah was banished to the third heaven; in the generation of the Flood, to the fourth; in the generation of the Tower, to the fifth. The events of Sodom caused the Shechinah to ascend to the sixth heaven. And finally, the persecution at Egypt banished the Shechinah to the seventh or the highest of the

heavens. In order to rectify this situation, עמדו שבעה צדיקים, והורידם לארץ, seven righteous people arose, one in each generation, and they acted so as to bring the Shechinah back down to the earth. These seven were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levy, Kehat, Amram, and Moses.

Hence, the purpose of creation was that God's presence, His Shechinah, dwell on earth. That is why the first day of creation is such a source of joy to the Holy One. On the day that the service began on the Tabernacle, the divine presence was also manifest on earth, and therefore He was as happy on this day as on the day He first created the world.

What the Sages mean to tell us in all this, is most certainly not to present us with a detailed geography of the heavens. What they are doing, I submit, is offering us a new definition of the key Jewish concepts of *חילול השם*, of the sanctification and desecration of the divine Name. To sanctify God's Name means to bring Him closer to man. To desecrate his Name is to create a distance between God and man, to make Torah appear remote, forbidding, irrelevant, impertinent. When one acts or speaks so that Judaism appears far off, and of no direct concern to living beings, he has desecrated the divine Name.

I have chosen this theme not only because of the text, but also as pretext. I am troubled by the forbidding, remote, and hostile image Orthodox Judaism has developed in American and international life. Unfortunately, this week The New York Times carried a story which again illustrated this particular species of *חילול השם*. I find it difficult to speak about the subject because it always pains me to criticize other Jews in public, certainly Orthodox Jews, and most certainly my colleagues in the Orthodox Rabbinate. Nonetheless, my conscience impells me to do so, because *במקום שיש חילול השם אין חולקין כבוד לרב*, where the divine Name is desecrated, one must not keep

silent, even if it entails speaking out against one's teachers or colleagues.

According to the news report, a coalition of Orthodox rabbinic groups came out publicly against the proposed constitutional amendment granting equal rights to women. The coalition, which asserted it represented more than one half of the 2,500 Orthodox rabbis in the United States, explained that the amendment threatens Orthodox synagogues which separate men and women at services with מחיצה; that it would jeopardize our "parochial schools" which keep separate programs for boys and girls; and that equal rights for women, as spelled out in the amendment, endanger morality in the whole of the United States.

Not being conversant with the science of statistics, I cannot state the exact degree of invalidity of the claim that this group represents more than half of the 2,500 Orthodox rabbis in the country. I was unaware that there are so many Orthodox rabbis in the United States, unless that number includes rabbis serving in every form of trade, profession, and business. Certainly, I would deny that the majority of pulpit rabbis, who feel a personal and professional responsibility for the destiny of Torah in this country, subscribe to their views. And, lest silence be interpreted as consent, let me make it clear to this congregation that this "coalition" does not represent me and the great majority of my colleagues and teachers in the Rabbinat.

This group feels that the proposed amendment threatens Orthodox practice. I personally do not believe that it does or will, simply because religion and church are essentially separated in this country. Nevertheless, to the degree that this apprehension is valid, there is legitimate ground for preparing our defense in the courts. But to oppose the amendment on the grounds that equal rights will increase immorality is to jeopardise the cause of morality! The amendment does not ask for equal rights to be immoral. It is primarily geared to the economics of this country. The sponsors of the amendment demand that women of equal competence with men should be compensated equally with men. It has nothing to do with morality; and if it does, it is morality that would demand that this right be granted and the source of economic discrimination be removed. It will simply not do to say, as one of the spokesmen of this coalition did in the news report, that those women who maintain that they do not have equal rights are arrogant and women should be feminine and not arrogant. Is arrogance really less offensive when it is a man who practices it than when it is a woman?

I am troubled too by the reference to "parochial schools." The same rabbinic spokesman asserted that in our "parochial schools" (i.e., yeshivot or day schools), boys receive "deeper academic study, while the girls focus on steno, typing, and dietary observance in the home."

This does not speak for the minority of the day schools in this country. Where Orthodox parents prefer that their girls not pursue academic careers, that is their privilege. It should be pointed out that they do not permit their boys as well to go on to advanced secular education.

But our interpretation of Orthodox Judaism is not necessarily the same as that of these parents. I am personally opposed to co-education beyond the lower grades, but more on psychological and education than on religious grounds -- certainly not because of some purported intellectual deficiency of the female of the species. If I do approve of a difference in curriculum, it is only because of the relevance to their later interests and concerns. But our girls get a Jewish education through high school, through college (where Stern College for Women was especially built for this purpose), and through the post-graduate levels up to the doctorate in Yeshiva University and other schools. I have personally encouraged as many bright young women to go on to higher Jewish studies and their Ph.D's as I have discouraged young men from doing so because they would be going beyond their depth. It simply makes no sense to speak of girls being inadequate to intellectually demanding tasks in an age when girls are learning nuclear physics, engaging in medical research, becoming knowledgeable in the mysteries of economics, and where two of the most embattled nations in the world, including Israel, are headed by women, whose popularity seems to be far greater than that of the President of the greatest country in the world.

Typing and steno are honorable professions. Anyone who runs an office can appreciate their importance and the need for talented and responsible personnel in these fields. But it is ludicrous to make of secretarianism a new dogma of a Jewish sectarianism.

At the same time I would like clearly to affirm our Orthodox position on separate seating and מחיצה in the synagogue, and especially as opposed to the extravagant reaction of the Reform rabbi in the article of The New York Times the day following.

Torah regards men and women as being of equal metaphysical value. For the value of man in the first place derives from his creation in the "Image of God," and both

men and women were created in this Image. However, equality of value does not imply identity of function. Men and women have different functions in life, and that is the way it ought to be. This difference in function is reflected in the differing conception of their roles by the Halakhah. There are those who maintain that “separate but equal” has been ruled as inherently unequal by the Supreme Court. That may be so, but the Supreme Court is not the supreme arbiter of Jewish philosophy and Halakhah. Furthermore, while this may be true with regard to the races, for there is no reason why they should function differently, it certainly is not valid with regard to the sexes, where differences in function are perfectly understandable and right. It is true that the current movement for the reassessment of male and female roles may be quite correct in showing us that we may have erred in the functions we previously assigned as rigidly belonging to either males or females. But unquestionably, despite the extravagant and often ludicrous claims of Women’s Lib, there are and should be and always will be different functions, for in a world of “unisex” both men and women will ultimately suffer.

The principle of separate seating in the synagogue must not be thought of as representing any claim of inequality of inferiority. Its purpose is to remove the distraction that may come because of erotic stimulation. If the purpose of coming to a synagogue is for American Jews to indulge in a kind of social ritual of self-identification as Jews, then there certainly is no reason for men and women to sit separately. But that is not our conception of prayer. For us, תפילה is the presentation of oneself before God, the focusing and concentration of all his thoughts on the One before Whom he stands, and hence any distraction must be banished. The ideal for prayer, so conceived, is קדושה or holiness; and the bane of holiness is eroticism: פרישה מעריות קדושה. If ten women so desire, they may organize a מנין, and conduct תפילה בציבור, public services; and in such a case, if men straggle in to such a synagogue, it is they who are guests sitting behind the מחיצה. I am told that in Boston there is a group of young Orthodox students, all girls, who are highly concerned about their role in Judaism, and have decided to pray every morning while donning the tefillin. I have no objection to that, and would encourage them. There was a time that (according to רמב”א) such behavior was frowned upon as יוהרא, or arrogance, but that was because it was an act of exhibitionism by an individual. However, the case is far different when a whole community of women has decided to accept such a מצוה. More power to them! I wish

that every man would join a מנין to lay tefillin every morning!

I will make no attempt to quote, selectively, occasional passages from our long literature showing the superiority of women. There is no use in citing stray חז”ל, for they can prove both the superior and the subordinate status of women. You can find almost any opinion of women in a literature which lasted over 25 hundred years and the quotations of perhaps a thousand different individuals. The point is that there is nothing within the Halakhah or synagogue structure that has to do with difference in value, with inferiority or superiority.

Yet, if I am to be frank — and honesty permits me nothing less than that — I must state that we do have problems. We have not yet worked out sufficiently all the issues dealing with the role of women in Judaism. (The Jewish community and Jewish philanthropy have unfortunately not been sufficiently farsighted to organize the kind of think-tanks that will allow Jewish scholars, presently overburdened beyond their capacities, to devote themselves to this and other such problems with sufficient leisure and scholarship). There are times when Jewish law does reveal what seems to be a discriminatory attitude against women. What we must do is research, and find out to what extent such problems can be ameliorated. If we should find that the contemporary standards of fairness and equality are contravened by the basic halakhic view on the role of the sexes, and that no halakhic remedy can be found that will conform to such standards, then we shall have to take our stand with Torah, clearly and unambiguously -- אם הלכה היא נקבל -- in the faith that the innate rightness of Torah and its moral justice will not only prevail, but will come to be appreciated and vindicated in the course of time. Torah was meant for the ages, while the criteria and tastes of each age rise only to fade away into obsolescence.

But I do not believe that enough has yet been done to elaborate a halakhic view that will consider all aspects of the problem, old and new, and that will take advantage of the full range of halakhic remedies available to us.

So we do have problems, and at such a time it ill behooves us to attack others, and at the same time to expose ourselves to even greater attacks by them.

As if things were not bad enough with the abominable public image of Orthodox Jewry in this country; as if the “Orthodox” attack on Shaare Zedek hospital; the “Orthodox” threats against pathologists in Israel; the pickets of Chasidim against Golda in this country; the proclamation by a Rosh Yeshiva discouraging or forbidding

Aliyah because of Women's National Service in Israel -- as if all these things were not bad enough in the way they paint the picture of Orthodoxy, we now have this intemperate, injudicious, and extravagant statement, in the name of the majority of Orthodox rabbis in America!

These people have kicked the Shechinah tip to the highest heaven. They have made Torah Judaism appear as exotic and alien, as remote and intolerant and benighted. What a חילול השם!

We have, as I have stated, problems both in the application and in the interpretation of Torah to the present generation. There always were problems of this kind, there are, and there always will be, because that is the nature of Torah and its applicability. But if we do not have an adequate answer that will prove satisfactory, then let us be wise and keep silent. There was a great Talmudist (Rabbi Yoseph Dov Soloveitchik of Brisk) who said: נישט אלס וואס מען טראכט דארף מען זאגען נישט אלס וואס מען זאגט דארף מען שרייבען און נישט אלס וואס מען שרייבט דארף מען דרוקען. *Not everything that one thinks ought he to say, not everything that he says ought he to write down, and not everything that he writes ought he to print.*

I disagree with both extremes — the extreme that feels that “relevance” is the only criterion of religion, and that therefore Torah must always be “with it,” that every new fad must be accepted as the latest dictate of modernity, and that we must make efforts to show that Judaism not only now but always has anticipated this point of view. Such super-modernistic apologetics are not only unobjective and untrue, but downright silly. But the opposite is equally dangerous. There seems to be a tendency on the part of some Orthodox rabbis, in reaction against the “relevance” kick, to show that Torah always opposes modern culture and tastes and sensitivities. In order to show this, they

seem to feel that it is necessary to paint Torah in the most benighted colors, to make Judaism appear as impossible of achievement and to make certain that no one of culture or learning will want to have anything to do with it. I never understand why some of our brethren seem to be set by suicidal drives, by a kind of collective spiritual masochism.

This unfortunate publicity has not served us well. It will accomplish nothing for the legal defense of our status, but will give the impression that we are far away and far out, as if the Shechinah is in the seventh heaven, and Orthodox Jews out of this world, and the Halakhah inaccessible and unattractive.

This is not the way of Torah, about which it is written that דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום, “Its ways are the ways of pleasantness and all its paths peace.”

This is not out דרך or the היהדות דרך. Our “way” is to bring about כיום שנבראו בו שמים וארץ, to make God rejoice as in the day that heaven and earth were created; to bring Him down to earth, into close rapport with man; to make Torah appear in its most attractive form. It is our task to speak out courageously and bravely when Torah offers a judgmental criticism of our contemporary standards and deeds; but, at the same time, to show how it can be fulfilling and enlightening to men and women in all ages.

When one acts so that Torah appears primitive and unjust and infinitely removed, he is irresponsible and is in violation of the great transgression of the desecration of God's Name.

Our task is to invoke God, to appeal to Him to come down to us. לכול קוראיו, קרוב ה' לכל קוראיו, the Lord is close to all those that call upon Him. He will certainly respond – but under one condition: לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת, only to those who call upon Him באמת, with truth and sincerity, with honesty and sensitivity.

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When Leaders Atone

Dr. Erica Brown

A new museum just opened up in Brooklyn, curated by a licensed psychologist. The Museum of Failure is a collection of projects and products from around the world that flopped. It's easy to ask, “What were they thinking?” with hindsight. It's harder to recognize that some failures turn into innovations. The museum is designed to help people take a meaningful look at mistakes and risks and accept that there is often progress hidden in failure. But not always. Sometimes, failure is just a soul-

crushing realization that is relived again and again.

In the ancient world, failure was often acknowledged and atoned for with the giving of a sacrifice. A sacrifice could not re-set or erase a mistake but created a ritualized break from it that required a significant loss or renunciation from the giver, let alone the animal. When we use the word sacrifice today, we usually mean that someone is ready to give up something of personal importance for a belief or an ideal or to achieve a particular result. On some level, the

giving has to hurt to be meaningful.

The laws surrounding all sacrifices in Vayikra, the book of Leviticus, are highly detailed. Moshe Halbertal, in his book *On Sacrifice* explains that ritual, in the case of sacrifices, “is an attempt to grapple with the inherent unpredictability of rejection.” When we give a gift to God, whether out of thanks or guilt, it is not like a human gift cycle. In a human gift exchange, I give a gift to you on the presumption that, when the occasion calls for it, you will do the same for me, as part of a normative social standard. It’s an expression of social capital.

But when a person gives a gift to God or to any authority figure, there is no expectation of reciprocity. We give gifts to superiors to seek their approval, to appease them, or to put ourselves in their good graces, not to get a reciprocal token of their affection. With such gifts, we might worry that the gift will be ignored or even rejected, as was the case for Cain early in Genesis: “...to Cain and his offering [God] paid no heed. Cain was much distressed, and his face fell” (Ge. 4:5). Sometimes, as in the story of Cain, no explanation for this dismissal is offered.

To avoid rejection in such gift giving, we do as much research as we can to get it right. Halbertal reasons that all the details and protocols about sacrifices related in the book of Vayikra serve as a “shield for the human approaching God. Any change in the protocol might be lethal... The one who is offering a sacrifice wished to appear before God, to be made visible... And yet being in the spotlight before power can be terrifying.” Halbertal warns that those sacrificing should not have “wrongly presumed intimacy” with the Divine, the way that two of Aaron’s did.

In this week’s Torah reading, Shmini, Moses said: “This is what God has commanded that you do, that the Presence of God may appear to you. Then Moses said to Aaron: ‘Come forward to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering, making expiation for yourself and for the people; and sacrifice the people’s offering and make expiation for them, as God has commanded’” (Lev. 9:6-7). This must have been, using Halbertal’s explanation, the most terrifying sacrifice of all. Part of Aaron’s job as a Kohen Gadol, a High Priest, was to seek expiation for himself and his people. Failure was assumed with the job description. It’s impossible to serve others as a leader and not make hundreds of mistakes, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote in *Lessons in Leadership*, “Leaders make mistakes. That is an occupational hazard of the role.

Managers follow the rules, but leaders find themselves in situations for which there are no rules” (“The Unexpected Leader,” *Vayigash*). Where there are no clear guidelines or precedents, leaders must rely on common sense, instinct, and experience. It’s easy to get it wrong.

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra’s commentary on Lev. 9:7 explains Aaron’s role here: “There is a divine command that you make atonement for yourself and for all of the people. You will atone for yourself with a sin offering bullock. Afterwards you will atone for the congregation by offering the people’s sacrifice, for a person cannot atone for another unless he has been purified from all sin.” It’s not only that a leader must be cleansed of sin in order to represent others on the altar; in order to achieve atonement, the leader must confess his own sins first. Leaders might complain about or belittle their followers or regard themselves as superior. The atonement sacrifice only worked because the High Priest first catalogued his own transgressions, making him humbly aware of his own smallness before he confessed on behalf of the people.

Imagine, for a moment, if all leaders today – in every field - had a day of atonement, when they had to spend an entire day both reflecting on and confessing their mistakes and carrying the wrongdoing of those they serve so that they might ask forgiveness. Perhaps many of today’s scandals involving the narcissistic, even criminal behaviors of politicians, CEOs, celebrity athletes, and entertainers might be kept in better check. Such leaders do not take responsibility for others because they also do not feel accountable themselves. Every day, every newspaper carries such headlines.

In contrast, the High Priest is accountable for himself and for everyone else. It’s an astonishing model of leadership. Gifford Thomas, in his article “Leaders Take All The Blame and Give Away All The Credit” (May 8, 2020) writes that leaders “take responsibility... for EVERYTHING. They turn each misstep into an opportunity to learn from the mistake instead of pointing fingers: they pull the thumb and ask themselves ‘what could I have done differently?’” In a total shift of mindset, leaders “find a lesson while others only see a problem. They privately address their subordinates’ mistakes with them, but take the blame publicly without dissent. If someone slipped up, they pick them up, they don’t point the finger and pass the blame.”

The greatest act of responsibility as a leader is to hold the mistakes of others as your own. On the one hand,

leaders cannot be liable for every failure of his or her followers. On the other hand, responsible leaders must always reflect on the problems in a culture that they are ultimately responsible for by asking three essential questions:

- Is there anything I could have done to prevent this problem?
- What did I contribute to this problem? (Possibly by

Take A Good Look

Rabbi Joshua Hoffman z"l

Following the inauguration of the mishkan, God tells Moshe and Aharon to speak to the nation and tell them which animals they may eat and which animals they may not eat. The Midrash Tanchuma, cited by Rav Alter Chanoch Henschel Leibowitz, zt"l, in his *Chidushei HaLeiv*, says that God, as it were, grasped each of the animals and showed them to Moshe, so that they would know precisely what each animal looked like. The Midrash adds that one should not be puzzled by the fact that God did this, because He also showed each animal in the world to Adam before he assigned them names. Why, asks Rav Leibowitz, was it necessary to show the animals to Moshe? In regard to Adam, we can understand that he needed to see each animal in order to understand its nature and give it the name which fit its essence. However, in regard to the kashrus status of the animals that God was teaching to Moshe, the situation was different. After all, God gave Moshe specific signs, of split hoofs and chewing the cud, by which to identify which animals are fit to eat and which are not. Why was there a need to actually show Moshe the various animals? Apparently, answers Rav Leibowitz, there would be an added clarity gained through this process, and, when it comes to teaching Torah, there is no end to the need to delve into every detail, in order to increase one's understanding. This was a lesson that Moshe needed to learn before teaching the laws of kashrus to the nation. The connection to Adam, says Rabbi Leibowitz, is that just as the assignation of names to the animals by Adam, which defined their function in the world, constituted part of the creation process, as the Ramban says in parshas Bereishis, so, too, clarity in Torah completes the creation process, since the existence of the world is dependent on the study of the Torah by the Jewish nation.

One question that Rav Leibowitz does not ask in regard to the midrash he cites, is why this lesson of the

ignoring it or not taking it seriously enough)

- What can I learn from the way I handled this problem that might prevent failure in the future?

Ultimately, a leader is always a learner who understands the importance of direction, reflection, and course correction.

So what failure have you experienced that's been your greatest teacher?

importance of clarity in the teaching of Torah, and its connection to the completion of the creation process, needed to be taught at this particular point in time, after the inauguration of the mishkan. That question, however, may be answered very simply, by citing another midrash, which says that the joy experienced on the eighth day of the inauguration was similar to the joy experienced when the world was created. We have noted in the past that the Netziv, in his introduction to the book of Shemos, mentions that the Bahag refers to that book as 'sefer sheni,' or the second book. The reason for this, explains the Netziv, is that while the first book of the Torah describes the physical creation of the universe, the second book describes the spiritual creation, through the giving of the Torah. The Ramban writes that the function of the mishkan was to serve as a continuation of the process that was witnessed at Mt. Sinai when the Torah was given. According to the Ramban, the mishkan is referred to, in parshas Pekudei, as the 'mishkan he-edus,' or the sanctuary of witness, because it housed within it the Torah, that was given at Sinai, in the ark. Through the Torah housed in the mishkan, says the Ramban in parshas Terumah, God's presence would continue to dwell among the nation on a constant basis (on a larger level, this concept can find application even today, because it is through the Torah that we have access to God, as Rav Chaim of Volozhin explains in his *Nefesh Hachaim*). Thus, the giving of the Torah to the Jewish nation, and its subsequent placement in the mishkan, constituted the spiritual completion of creation, and, therefore, the joy experienced at the inauguration of the mishkan paralleled the joy experienced at the physical creation of the universe. In this context, we can understand why the lesson that God taught Moshe in regard to clarity in Torah teaching was appropriate for that time, following the inauguration of the mishkan.

I believe, however, that there was a further need for that lesson to be taught specifically when it was, directly following an exchange between Moshe and Aharon on a certain point in Torah law. As the Torah describes it, Moshe became angry when he saw one of goats brought as part of the inauguration process being burned on the altar. He asked why it wasn't being consumed, and Aharon replied that it would not be fitting for him, as an *onein*, one who had just sustained the loss of relatives for whom he was bidden to mourn, to consume that particular offering. Without getting into the details of the halachic debate between Moshe and Aharon, Moshe, in the end, accepted Aharon's argument. The rabbis tell us that this was one of several times that Moshe forgot the halacha as a result of becoming angry. Perhaps, then, God taught Moshe the lesson of the importance of providing detailed information and analysis in reaching Torah at this time, because teaching in this way requires patience, and Moshe

had just forgotten a halacha because of his misplaced anger. Moshe was, therefore, in a better position to appreciate the need for clarity in teaching Torah because of what he had just experienced, and perhaps that is why God chose that particular time to teach him that lesson. Why it was specifically the laws of *kashrus* that were used as the vehicle to convey this message, is a separate issue, which we have discussed in the past, in regard to a midrash in *parshas Tazria*. In short, however, we can suggest that teaching the laws of *kashrus* after the inauguration of the *mishkan*, which constituted the spiritual completion of the universe, parallels the commandment to Adam, whose creation constituted the completion of the physical creation of the universe, to eat from the other trees of the garden and not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (the interested reader is referred to the last piece on *Shemini* in Rav Nissan Alpert's *Limudei Nissan* for further elaboration).

Holiness from Heaven, Holiness from Earth

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

On the eighth day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, Aharon was designated as the *kohen gadol*. Why wasn't Moshe chosen for this position? Chazal (*Zevachim* 102a) explain that this goes back to the original encounter of Moshe with Hashem at the burning bush. There, Hashem told Moshe to take the Jewish People out of Egypt. Moshe refused, spending seven days arguing with Hashem. He said he was not fit to be the messenger to redeem *Bnei Yisrael*. Finally, Hashem got angry at Moshe, who then relented. Hashem sent Moshe together with Aharon to take the people out of Egypt. Chazal say that since Moshe argued for seven days with Hashem until He forced him to go, Moshe was punished. Actually, according to the Midrash, Moshe was punished in two ways.

For the first seven days of the *Mishkan's* inauguration, Moshe functioned as the *kohen gadol*. However, on the eighth day, Hashem told Moshe that he would no longer be *kohen gadol*. Aharon would take this position instead. This was a source of disappointment for Moshe. He thought he would continue to serve as *kohen gadol* together with Aharon. This role was taken away from Moshe as a punishment for his seven-day refusal to serve as redeemer from *Mitzrayim*.

Furthermore, forty years later, Moshe experienced a

second great disappointment. Starting on *Rosh Chodesh Adar*, he prayed for a whole week to gain entry into the Land of Israel. On the seventh day of *Adar*, Hashem told Moshe, "You will not be able to go into the Land of Israel. You will die outside of the land." This, says the Midrash, was also a punishment for Moshe for not accepting his mission to redeem the Jews forty years earlier. Here, Moshe davened for seven days and Hashem refused his request, just as Moshe had refused Hashem's request for seven days.

The *Shem Mishmuel* explains this Midrash on a deeper level. How do these two punishments address Moshe's refusal *middah k'neged middah*? How does the loss of the position of *kohen gadol* and the ability to enter Israel relate to Moshe's hesitation to take on the role of redeemer of the people from Egypt? Of course, we see the superficial connection of seven days. But as we have learned, *Chassidus* always prefers a deeper, thematic explanation.

Moshe's Mission

What did Moshe Rabbeinu think when he was originally told by Hashem to redeem the Jews? He thought he was not worthy of the job. His first response to Hashem was, "*Shlach na b'yad tishlach*. Send someone other than me as the redeemer" (*Shemos* 4:13). What kind of audacious refusal is this? Even in his first experience as prophet, we

would expect Moshe to still be an eved Hashem, a faithful and obedient servant of God. Why did he deny God's request?

Moshe denied Hashem's request because he was very humble and thought he was unfit for this mission. He would need to convince the Jews to believe in Hashem and to develop the courage to stand up to Pharaoh and their taskmasters. This meant he would have to lead a slave revolution. This would be a dangerous mission. He would then have to go Pharaoh and convince him to release the slaves. This mission would require someone with amazing qualities of leadership, the ability to inspire the people and to negotiate with Pharaoh. Moshe felt unqualified, so he thought he should not be Hashem's messenger.

Nonetheless, Hashem chose him. Hashem saw that Moshe had this potential to lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, even if Moshe himself was unaware of it. We understand Moshe's humility. But still, the question persists: Why did he refuse a direct command of God?

Why Did Moshe Refuse?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Moshe Rabbeinu thought that Hashem was choosing him specifically because he was inadequate. Moshe thought that the Jews did not deserve a qualified leader. They were at the forty-ninthth level of tuma. Slavery had taken its toll, and the Jews had sunk to horrible lows, including idolatry. Eventually, the time came for redemption. But Moshe thought, "The Jews do not deserve a qualified leader. Why is Hashem choosing me? Only because I am truly inadequate to the task. If God is sending me, of course I will succeed. But it will be a long and arduous process. As an unfitting and unqualified leader, I don't want to be the cause of more Jewish suffering that will probably happen along the way. Why should I be the one to do this? Let someone else be chosen."

This was a pessimistic way of looking at things, but it was realistic. Moshe said to Hashem, "Obviously, You have a reason for choosing me, but please let me not be the emissary for a painful redemptive process. I would rather not be part of a painful exodus."

This objection displayed the amazing qualities of Moshe. It reflected his humility and his honest self-appraisal. At the same time, it was a statement and a stance that he took in order to help the Jewish People. He wanted them to be redeemed without suffering any more pain.

But Moshe's mistake was that Hashem knew all of this. While He allows people to argue and to pray in general, in

this case, Moshe should have realized that if Hashem said to go, then Moshe's own logical and noble objections had no place. Even if the exodus would be painful, Hashem's will was for him to go do it, and Moshe should have accepted the difficult charge and painful mission.

When Hashem Gives Us a Mission

Hashem sometimes sends us against our will to be agents of things that may cause pain along the way. Nevertheless, we must fulfill our mission.

As parents, we sometimes need to punish our children. It pains us, but do we have a choice? No. Grandparents do have a choice, and none of us has to—or should—discipline other people's children. But, as parents, we have to experience the sweet part of raising children as well as the bitter part. If a parent never disciplines his child, the child will surely be damaged. The bitter pill of punishment is part of being responsible, helpful, and effective parents. "*Choseich shivto sonei b'no*. Not to punish one's child is to hate the child" (Mishlei 13:24), said King Shlomo. Sometimes, Hashem wants us to be the agent to deliver that bitter pill. We have to do it, no matter how uncomfortable we may feel.

Moshe knew he couldn't do an adequate job. He knew there would be many failures along the way with his inadequate talents. He wasn't a great speaker or negotiator. He wouldn't be able to convince the Jews to believe or Pharaoh to free the Jews. He should have known, though, that once Hashem chose him, he was chosen, no matter how unpleasant the mission would be under his leadership.

This was Moshe's unfortunate situation. He was told by the Master of the universe to be His agent to take Jews out of Egypt. But he knew, based on his awareness of his talents, that there would be many failures along the way. He wouldn't be able to inspire the slaves properly. This might bring disillusionment and other disasters to the Jews before redemption came. But since Hashem requested it of him, he should have acceded. He should have said, and so should we, "If Hashem wants me for this mission, I will accept it."

But Moshe argued for seven days. Generally, Hashem lets people disagree with Him and try to persuade Him to do things differently. But Hashem told Moshe that this decision was unchangeable. Once this message comes through, one is not supposed to argue or continue praying. It is God's unchangeable will, and it must be this way absolutely. When Moshe nevertheless continued to refuse the mission, Hashem became angry with him, as the Torah states.

What Types of Prayer Are Appropriate?

I once heard an important distinction from my teacher, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l. We are supposed to pray for Hashem not to do things that upset us. We pray for sick people to become well. We pray for people to have wealth and for Israel to have peace. But if Hashem decides not to answer our prayers and a tragedy occurs, we don't pray to complain. We may pray to find out what we should do after the tragedy to remedy the situation. Once a tragedy happens, we don't ask “why,” we ask, “what.” “What am I supposed to do now? What should we do to move forward?” At this point, we must bow our heads and accept God's will, though we cannot fathom it, because we are His creatures.

Hashem's inexorable will was for Moshe to be redeemer, no matter how much trouble it would cause the Jewish People, and it was wrong for Moshe to pray to change this.

If Hashem doesn't say it in such an unalterable way, then man does have a right to question, to pray, and to try to convince God to do things differently. Chazal say that a person can pray even when the sword is against his throat. Sometimes, though, Hashem's decision is etched in stone. The job of man then is to submit and accept. This was the case with Moshe and his God-given mission to lead the Jews out of Mitzrayim.

Moshe's Punishments

Moshe was not allowed to go into Eretz Yisrael, even after seven days of beseeching. He was also not allowed to be the kohen gadol. How do these punishments fit his sin?

The Gemara (Sota 14a) asks: Why did Moshe want to enter into the Land of Israel? Was it because he wanted to taste the delicious fruits of the land? That reason is unbecoming of Moshe's stature. Rather, says the Gemara, he wanted to fulfill the *mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz*, to perform the unique mitzvos that can only be fulfilled in Israel. Moshe wanted to build the Beis Hamikdash and keep the laws of shmitta. He wanted to separate terumos and ma'asros, give gifts to a kohen and a levi, eat ma'aser sheini in Jerusalem, etc. Why did Moshe feel it was so important for him to do these mitzvos? We can assume that Moshe did mitzvos during all of his waking hours. Who knows how much he ever slept? He went to Har Sinai for forty sleepless days and nights—three times! He was doing mitzvos all the time, especially the great mitzva of learning Torah. Why did he so desire to do the mitzvos of Eretz Yisrael?

Rav Chaim Vital explains that the human body has 248 limbs. Correspondingly, there are 248 positive mitzvos.

Additionally, the soul of a Jew has 248 spiritual parts, corresponding to the 248 parts of the body. When a person does all these mitzvos in the proper way, he creates spiritual energy for his body. Moreover, he creates positive spiritual energy for the limbs of his soul. The purpose of mitzvos is to perfect the parts of the soul. Moshe Rabbeinu knew this secret. Without the mitzvos of Eretz Yisrael, he knew he would be missing the level of soul perfection with which those mitzvos would endow him.

Moshe's perfection would obviously be good for the Jewish People. He was their leader. His soul was a universal soul that included all the Jews within him. His perfection would help the people. The Kabbalists and Midrashim (Batei Midrashos 2, Midrash Aggada 80 on Ha'azinu, Alshich 80 on Va'eschanan) write that if Hashem would have allowed Moshe to enter into Eretz Yisrael, he would have been able to prevent the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash forever. He would have built the Beis Hamikdash and it would have stood for eternity. Without Moshe's entry into the land, it took more than 400 years just to build the Beis Hamikdash. Then it lasted only for another 410 years until it was destroyed.

The Positive Side of Moshe's Punishments

We lost a great thing once Moshe did not enter the land. But the Shem Mishmuel explains that this shortcoming was a hidden blessing. Our Sages say that while the Jewish People were in the land for over 800 years, they performed many horrible aveiros, including idolatry, murder, and sexual misconduct. God decided that the time had come to punish and even abandon them. According to the scales in heaven, God could have allowed the nations of the world to destroy the Jewish People, like the Nazis tried to do. But since there was a Beis Hamikdash, Hashem decided to destroy it instead. Instead of destroying the Jewish People, God punished the Jews in a different way, by pouring out His wrath on the stones and wood of the Beis Hamikdash. Then, even though many Jews were killed, the people as a whole survived.

Had Moshe built the Beis Hamikdash, the building would not have been destroyed, but the people would have been obliterated (God forbid). Because the Beis Hamikdash was not built by Moshe, though, it was short-lived. The punishment of its destruction replaced the total annihilation of the Jewish People, who had sinned so gravely in the land.

Moshe's inability to build the Beis Hamikdash or to go into the Land of Israel, though they seemed like

punishments, turned out to be a blessing for Israel. Moreover, they reflect Moshe's original sin. Moshe originally refused the mission of leadership in Egypt because he didn't want to be a cause for the people's punishment.

He insisted, "I am inadequate to serve as leader. I will cause hardships to befall the people." By not entering the land, though, Moshe did prevent an extra level of punishment from befalling the Jews. Because he didn't enter the land, the Beis Hamikdash was only temporary. Ironically, the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash saved the Jews from personal and national destruction, which is what Moshe wanted to avoid all along, from the very beginning of his encounter with Hashem.

Moshe's original claim was that the interests of Israel are most important. Therefore, losing the opportunity to go into the land and perfect himself with its mitzvos turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the people. They were able to physically survive the catastrophic destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

Why Moshe Couldn't Be Kohen Gadol

The second unattained request of Moshe was that he be the kohen gadol. He served in that position for seven days, but thereafter, Hashem granted Aharon the privilege of serving as kohen gadol. Why did Moshe want to be the kohen gadol? And why didn't Hashem allow him this position?

The Arizal says that every Jew should ideally go through a kohen, levi, and yisrael lifestyle. The soul needs to perform all of the different mitzvos. Some mitzvos are done only by a yisrael, some only by a levi, and some only by a kohen. A Jewish soul has to get some life experience as each one. Moshe was a levi, and he wanted to be a kohen in order to perform the mitzvos of a kohen. The kohen gadol has the most mitzvos of any kohen, such as the avoda of Yom Kippur. Moshe wanted to serve as the kohen gadol so that he could perfect his soul on every level. Hashem again turned him down. Why?

Moshe—Holiness Too High?

Moshe attained a higher level of holiness than Aharon. Moshe was the mind and the neshama of the people. Aharon was the heart. Aharon represents the ruach and emotions of the soul. Aharon the kohen was a people person, *ohev shalom v'rodeif shalom*. He didn't just sit in the Beis Hamikdash; he was running around talking to people and getting involved in personal and social issues. He helped make peace between friends and between man and wife. For Moshe to be kohen gadol would have been

wonderful for his personal spiritual level. But being so elevated had a down side. It detached Moshe from the people in the street.

Aharon was not as great as Moshe. Because of that, though, he was closer to the people. He could reach out to the people in a more effective way than Moshe could. In a striking paradox, the greatest of all people had a great flaw in that other people could not relate to him so well. For Am Yisrael, it was better for Aharon to be the kohen gadol, not Moshe. Moshe would have been too spiritually high for them to relate to. The kohen gadol is supposed to perform the sacred service, but he also has to be the bridge to bring the people closer to Hashem. Aharon was able to accomplish this, but not Moshe. For the sake of the Jewish People, Hashem decided that Aharon should be the kohen gadol, not Moshe.

This was in line with Moshe's sin. Moshe sinned through his refusal because he held the Jewish People's interests at the highest level. He didn't want to bring pain and punishment upon them even if it would be part of a redemptive process. He thought his inadequacies would bring the people unnecessary pain. Now, one of his precious dreams, to be the kohen gadol, was not granted. It was better for Israel that Moshe not be the kohen gadol. He had to give up one of his dreams for the betterment of Israel.

Shabbos and Yom Tov

Along these lines, the Shem Mishmuel explains the different natures of two categories of holy days. Shabbos is in a category by itself. The second category of holy days is Yom Tov, which the Torah calls mikra kodesh.

What is the difference between these two kedushos? The holiness of Shabbos can be compared to the holiness of Moshe. The holiness of Yom Tov can be compared to the kedusha of Aharon. Shabbos is very holy. Hashem Himself sanctified Shabbos on the seventh day of creation, before there were any Jews in the world. He made it holy with His own hands, as it were. Shabbos is a holy day throughout every level of heaven. Our Shabbos experience in this world is a little touch of the sublime, holy Shabbos in the higher worlds. Shabbos has the essence of God's holy presence, the Shechina.

Yom Tov is a holy day, but it is not like Shabbos. The holiness of Yom Tov does not come directly from Hashem. It comes from the Jewish People. The closing bracha in the Yom Tov blessing in Shemoneh Esrei is, "*mekadeish yisrael v'haz'manim*." God sanctified Israel and Israel sanctifies the holidays. The holiness of Shabbos comes from above; it is

the holiness of God Himself coming down through all the different spheres into our world. Yom Tov holiness is mikra kodesh, it is “declared holiness.” It is holiness that comes from below—from Israel.

The holiness of Shabbos is much greater than Yom Tov. On Shabbos, the restrictions of melacha are much greater, both in the number of restrictions and in the severity of their punishment. This reflects the higher magnitude of holiness of Shabbos. Ironically, more people get inspired by a Yom Tov than by a Shabbos. This is puzzling. Shabbos has more holiness, more revelation of God. Why are people more inspired by a Pesach Seder than by a Shabbos? Many more Jews observe the Seder on Pesach than keep Shabbos or make kiddush on Friday night. The Shem Mishmuel explains that the holiness of Shabbos is so high that many souls cannot appreciate it. A person needs to have a refined and sensitive soul to touch and be touched deeply by the Shabbos. Yom Tov, however, comes from the masses of Israel. It is a lower level kedusha. More people can connect to it; it is more accessible. Shabbos relates to the *moach*, intellect. Not many people have such a refined intellectual presence. But Yom Tov addresses the heart, it speaks to the emotional level of a person.

Many Jews have a Jewish heart. They may not know much Torah, but they still have the feelings of a Jew. Halacha teaches that Shabbos does not have the mitzva of *simcha* (joy), while Yom Tov does. Shabbos has *oneg*, it is a sweet experience. But it is not joy.

It is higher than joy, it is at the neshama level. But Yom Tov is joy. Half of the joy of Yom Tov is *lachem*, “for you,” eating good meals, etc. The other half is for Hashem. Shabbos, though, is completely for Hashem.

Triplicate Holiness: Moshe, Shabbos, and Yerushalayim

Hashem used many different energies in creating the world, including the energies of people, places, and time. Chassidus teaches that every aspect of holiness that we know of can be found in each of these three dimensions.

Shabbos in time comes every seventh day. In what place do we find the holiness of Shabbos? Yerushalayim is the place of Shabbos, it is the place of God’s throne. The Shechina in Yerushalayim is never bateil. God’s presence is never destroyed, even if the city looks desolate. God is still a resident of Yerushalayim. The kedusha of Yerushalayim is immutable and exalted, like the holiness of Shabbos. It is a heavenly, eternal holiness.

Where in the realm of human souls do we encounter

the holiness of Shabbos? In Moshe. He had the joy and pleasure of Shabbos. As we say in the Shacharis prayer of Shabbos, “*Yismach Moshe b’matnas chelko*. Moshe rejoices in his portion.” It follows, then, that Moshe is also the soul of the city of Yerushalayim.

Had Moshe actually merited to build Yerushalayim, the city would never have been destroyed. If the soul of Moshe would have joined the city of Moshe and the time of Moshe (Shabbos), it would have been eternally indestructible. It would have been an amazing merger of these highest-level energies. But, as we just discussed, it never happened because God did not allow him into Yerushalayim.

Triplicate Holiness: Aharon, Yom Tov, Eretz Yisrael
Aharon, whose level of soul holiness was lower than Moshe’s, is the holiness of Yom Tov. While Shabbos is a day that touches the developed and refined intellect, Yom Tov is a day of the heart, a day of emotions. It is a day of Aharon Hakohen.

The place of Yom Tov is Eretz Yisrael, the whole of the Land of Israel. The whole land celebrates Yom Tov with the mitzva of aliya l’regel. The Jews would bring the produce of Eretz Yisrael to the Beis Hamikdash for korbanos and ma’aser sheini. Aharon is the spirit of the Land of Israel.

To Be Like Moshe and Aharon

This is why Hashem, in His infinite wisdom, decided that Moshe could not enter Eretz Yisrael. And this is why Aharon would be the kohen gadol, not Moshe. The Jews needed the heart of Aharon combined with the mind of Moshe, a combination integral to the Jewish People.

This idea of the Shem Mishmuel is wonderful. We should try to apply it in our own lives. Sometimes, we need to identify with Moshe. We must study Torah, keep Shabbos, and identify with Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash. And sometimes, we need to identify with Aharon Hakohen, the emotions of the Torah. We need to reach out and connect with other Jews.

We must study Torah and teach Torah like Moshe, and we have to act like Aharon, loving and seeking peace. We must keep the mitzvos bein adam lachaveiro, keeping people together in service of Hashem.

Our deepest prayer is that we merit the holiness of Shabbos at its highest level and the holiness of Yom Tov as well. May we be reunited with our greatest Torah leaders, Moshe and Aharon, as we celebrate the building of the eternal Beis Hamikdash. May we see it soon in our days!

The Little Steps that Lead to Big Accomplishments

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

As the narrative of this week's parasha, parashat Shemini, opens, we encounter Moses and Aaron on the eve of one of the most joyous days for the entire Jewish people. The construction of the *מִשְׁכָּן*--Mishkan--the Tabernacle, had been completed, and the investiture of the priests--Aaron and his sons, was about to take place.

The inauguration of the priests consisted of a complex, but majestic, ceremony. A series of representative sacrifices were brought: a he-goat for a sin offering, a calf and a sheep for an elevation offering, and a bull and a ram for a peace offering. These various animals were to represent atonement for the Golden Calf, as well as commitment to leadership, eternal freshness, and resolve to work actively on behalf of G-d. The meal offerings that were brought together with the animal offerings were a means of "praying" for economic well-being.

After having completed his first day of performing the sacrificial service, Aaron blessed the people by reciting the priestly blessing for the first time. He raised his hands, as is the custom of priests today, and pronounced the tripartite blessing.

After this, Scripture, in Leviticus 9:23, informs us: *וַיָּבֹאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד*, *Moses and Aaron came into the Tent of Meeting*. Our rabbis ask why was it necessary for them to enter the Tent of Meeting? Rashi quoting the Sifra, offers two explanations. He suggests that Moses went into the sanctuary with Aaron in order to teach Aaron how to perform the incense ceremony that was to take place on the golden altar. A second explanation, cited by Rashi, is that Aaron was upset that despite all of Aaron's efforts and preparations, the *שְׁכִינָה*, the Divine Presence, had not yet rested upon the *מִשְׁכָּן*, the Tabernacle. Blaming himself, Aaron maintained that the Shechina was avoiding him because of his role in the sin of the Golden Calf. Immediately, Moses entered the Tent of Meeting and, together with Aaron, prayed for G-d's mercy. Soon after, the Shechina appeared and rested upon the Mishkan.

Students of the bible often ask themselves what is the reason for the Torah's use of a particularly unusual word or phrase. Our verse in Leviticus 9:23 states: *וַיָּבֹאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן*, and Moses and Aaron "came" to the Tent of Meeting. The verse could have simply stated that they "entered" the tent of meeting. What is the point of emphasizing that they

"came"--as if to underscore the process of walking? Rashi points out, *מָה יְרִידָה מֵעֵין עֲבוּדָה, אֲףִי בִיָּאָה מֵעֵין עֲבוּדָה*, *just as descending (from the altar) is related to the sacred service, so too, is "coming" related to the sacred service.*

Because of the importance of the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the investiture of the priests into the service of the Tabernacle for the very first time, every textual detail describing the ceremonies is magnified and analyzed with intense scrutiny. But, it was not only at the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the investiture of the priesthood that "descending" and "coming" played a critical role. In fact, at all future services, approaching the Tabernacle and walking down from the altar were considered integral parts of the sacred service, not to be treated lightly.

I often think of this lesson and wonder what possible message it may convey for contemporary times. Oftentimes, we find ourselves in an unenthusiastic mood, or simply too tired to perform our religious commitments, our familial obligations and sometimes even our business responsibilities. I am quite certain that I am not the only one who, at times, wakes up in the morning saying: "Oh, just let me stay in bed for a few more hours and worry about my responsibilities later!"

It is at such times, when we are filled with mental fatigue or physical inertia, that we reflect upon our labors, and suddenly recognize their importance. It may be that we are expected to teach a class of eager students or participate in a prayer service with others who depend on us or attend a significant business meeting. So, we quickly readjust our mental attitudes, and, somehow, summon the strength to make our way to our appointed destinations. Eventually, we arrive and do our "thing." Yet, we usually give little thought to those little footsteps that were necessary to transport us to that destination.

It is here, in parashat Shemini, that the Torah informs us that we need to especially appreciate those seemingly inconsequential footsteps. The Torah, in effect, teaches that walking toward the mitzvah or toward the ultimate goal is really part of the actual mitzvah and an integral part of the goal. I would even be so bold to suggest that shlepping one's body out of bed to go to shul when not in the mood, is actually part of praying itself. Even a person who comes and sits like a zombie at the service—is performing a

significant spiritual act! Every step that was taken to make this happen is important and valued in G-d's eyes.

The Torah teaches us that those "little efforts" are of major significance, since they are the ones that make the big accomplishments possible. These little efforts are

The Challenge of "I Was Wrong"

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

The Torah tells us of a tense exchange between Moshe and Aharon after the tragedy of the death of Aharon's two older sons. Normally, an onein – a person on the day of an immediate family member's death – is prohibited from eating the meat of sacrifices. However, due to the special occasion of the Mishkan's consecration, an exception was made, allowing Aharon and his sons to partake of the day's sacrifices despite their status as onenim. A question arose as to the scope of this exception, whether or not it applied to all the sacrifices offered that day. Moshe at first criticized Aharon and his sons for failing to eat the meat of a certain chatas (sin-offering), assuming that this was included in the extraordinary provision suspending the normal restrictions of aninus. Aharon, however, pointed out that this sacrifice was in fact bound by the usual restrictions. The Torah relates, וישמע משה ויישב בעיניו – Moshe accepted Aharon's correction (10:20).

Rashi comments: הודה ולא בוש לומר לא שמעתי – this pasuk praises Moshe for conceding that he erred.

We must wonder, would anything less have been expected of Moshe Rabbeinu? Would we have thought that Moshe would stubbornly insist that he was correct, even though he wasn't? We all know people who never admit to being wrong, who assume that anything they say, decide or think must be correct, and are never prepared to say that they erred. But why would we ever think that Moshe was such a person?

Rav Leib Chasman and Rav Yechezkel Levenstein answer this question based on the concept of הקב"ה מדקדק עם הצדיקים כחוט השערה – Hashem is especially strict in holding the righteous accountable for even minor mistakes. Moshe's hitting the rock, for example, was not an especially egregious misdeed, but nevertheless, he was severely punished for this act, because a person on his level of piety is held to a more exacting standard than the rest of us. Rav Chasman and Rav Levenstein explain that if a person is held accountable for even minor wrongs, then he deserves

extremely valuable and must be regarded for what they are--essential parts of the sacred or valued ultimate goal. Those little steps are not mere "small stuff." They are the fundamental building blocks of the "big stuff," and are to always be regarded with the utmost respect and value.

to be praised even for minor good deeds. If the Torah held Moshe to a strict standard, criticizing his slight infractions, then it must, at the same time, underscore his admirable actions, even if they are entirely expected and unsurprising.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, in Sichos Mussar, offers a different answer, noting that Moshe could have found a reason to insist on his position. By conceding that he erred, he ran the risk of undermining the transmission of the Torah. People might have then claimed that just as he erred in regard to this matter, he may have misinterpreted the Torah he received from God, or forgot some information. They might have then concluded that they could not trust anything he says, because it might have been communicated in error. Moshe had an excuse to dishonestly insist that he was correct – but he nevertheless chose honesty. He had a readymade excuse to stick to his guns, but he still spoke the truth.

I would suggest, very simply, that Moshe deserves praise because it is exceedingly difficult to admit having made a mistake. Yes, even for Moshe Rabbeinu – it is very hard to say, "I was wrong."

Parents do their children a great favor by modeling humility, and accepting responsibility for the mistakes they make. When parents apologize for being unnecessarily angry, for doing and saying things which should not have been done or said, they teach their children the vital lesson that we must all be prepared to say "I was wrong." Precisely because this is such a difficult thing to do, it is imperative that we show our children how it is done, that we all at times make mistakes, and that the proper response to mistakes is not stubborn denial, but humbly acknowledging them, owning them, and taking responsibility.