



# The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



**Sefer Shemot**

**Parshat Bo**

**Sh'vat 5781 / January 2021**

## Outburst!

*By Robert Aeder*

Moshe is arguably the leader of the Jewish people who faced the most difficult tasks. Shepherding Israel through the establishment of nationhood, he dealt with rejection and rebellion and managed challenges to the physical, mental, and spiritual well being of his people.

It's no wonder that he loses his cool from time to time.

Exhibit A: After the plague of darkness, Pharaoh threatens Moshe with death if he returns:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ פְרֹעֹה לֵךְ מֵעַלֵּי הַשָּׁמַר לֵךְ אֶל־תִּסְרֶף רְאֹת פָּנָי כִּי בְיָוֹם רִאִתְּךָ פָּנָי תָּמוּת

Pharaoh said to him, “Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die.” (Shemot 10:28)

Moshe is ready with a quick retort:

כִּן דַּבַּרְתָּ לֹא־אֶסְרֶךָ עוֹד רְאֹת פָּנָי

You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again! (Shemot 10:29)

At first glance, Moshe's reply appears to be a minor outburst. According to some commentators, however, Moshe's response is so uncalled for that Hashem decided to cross a line and appear to him within the palace to defuse the situation and set the narrative back on course.

*To some  
commentators  
Moshe's response was  
uncalled for*

Why? What has Moshe done to merit such intervention from Hashem?

Looking at other examples of Moshe's reactions might help us decipher the answer.

Earlier in Shemot, after his first interaction with Pharaoh and the Jewish people—which, as we know, didn't go his way—Moshe immediately complains to Hashem about his situation.

וַיָּשָׁב מִצֵּה אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי לָמָּה הִרְעִיתָהּ לְעַם הַזֶּה לָמָּה הָיָה לָמָּה זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי

Then Moshe returned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me?” (Shemot 5:22)

In next week's Parsha, Parshat Beshalach, during the first set of water debacles at Refidim, we see Moshe react to strife once again:

וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר מָה אַעֲשֶׂה לְעַם הַזֶּה עוֹד מֵעַט וְסָקְלֵנִי

Moshe cried out to the LORD, saying, “What shall I do with this people?  
Before long they will be stoning me!” (Shemot 17:4)

In each case, Hashem provided calm reassurance that Moshe will be successful: His ask of Pharaoh will eventually work out, or he will confidently come back to the people and provide them the water that they need.

Compare these last two reactions to the most well known of Moshe’s flare-ups, the final water incident within the Wilderness at Kadesh. Moshe accosts the Jewish people:

וַיִּקְהָלוּ מִשָּׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַקְּהָל אֶל־פְּנֵי הַסֵּלַע וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהֶם שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַמְּרִים הַמִּן־הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצֵיא לָכֶם מַיִם:

Moshe and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock, and he said to them, "Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?"

In this case, Hashem calls out Moshe for stepping over the line and punishes him with the ultimate tragedy of not leading the Jewish people into Israel.

I'd like to suggest that, in two ways, Moshe's sharp reaction to Pharaoh in our Parasha could actually be seen as most similar to this final outburst, and that is why Hashem intercedes. After the penultimate plague, Moshe's outburst is both "off script" and directed at another person (as opposed to God himself). As a leader and a prophet, Moshe has a responsibility to represent

*Moshe's outburst is "off script"*

Hashem's words and plan exactly. Hashem is willing to tolerate Moshe's bouts of anger and frustration, so long as they are directed at God. Deviations of the sort that we see in this week's Parsha, where Moshe directs his anger at other people, no matter how deserving they may be of his wrath, become a big deal. As a representative of God, Moshe cannot let his thoughts or feelings seep into his role as communicator of God's own words. God ordered Moshe to play a specific role in warning Pharaoh of impending plagues but did not expect him to get into a personal battle with Pharaoh. Likewise, Moshe was instructed to extract water from a rock to pacify his people, not let his frustration at their rebelliousness cause him to lash out and err.

Though we aren't nevi'im, many of us have professions and positions where our words and actions are perceived as a proxy for something bigger than ourselves. How we identify these situations and learn to manage them responsibly is, arguably, a time-old tradition.

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*Want to write a Parsha essay?*

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