

A PERFECT LEADER

Text:

The Jews accept the Spies' demoralizing report, and tearfully refuse to enter the Holy Land. The Jews' lack of faith is a grievous sin, and they are threatened with annihilation. Moses prays for forgiveness.

[One lesson of this story is that] the perfect leader should have the strength to tolerate those under his leadership, and bear their transgressions, to lead in the direction of their benefit – as we see that Moses not only did not get angry at [the people]... but pleaded exceedingly for God to bear their sin, until God accepted his plea...

[Ralbag]

Question:

Would Moses have failed to pray for his people if he had been a less patient leader? Moses surely understood that the people's distress did not reflect on him personally. He was "the humblest of all men" –certainly not preoccupied with his ego! Moreover, Moses was willing to risk his very life for his beloved nation. Would his irritation at their behavior make him turn up his nose and witness their annihilation?

Answer:

Moses would never *consciously* allow Israel's destruction; but a drop of irritation – felt only in his subconscious –might have cooled the intensity of Moses' love, and led him to pray with a bit less fervor. Convinced that he had done enough, he might have failed to offer the intense, heartfelt pleas that ultimately saved the day.

Message:

Sometimes our limitations are real; other times they are a matter of perception. Have we done all we can – or could we do more if we only cared more? If we purify ourselves, eliminating selfishness and deepening our love and sensitivity, we can maximize our potential and fulfill our mission in life.