



When God appeared to Moshe at the burning bush on Mount Chorev and assigned him the task of demanding the release of the Hebrew slaves, Moshe persistently refused the assignment. The Torah elaborates on the exchange between the Almighty and the new prophet, which culminated with the arousal of God's anger against Moshe: "*Vayichar af Hashem be-Moshe...*" (4:14).

Oddly enough, the Torah does not appear to inform us of any practical consequences yielded by this divine anger. Normally, when the Torah describes God as growing angry, it then proceeds to tell of the punishment visited upon the given individual or nation as a result. Here, God merely says to Moshe, "Look, I know that your brother, Aharon the Levite, will surely speak; he is also going out to greet you." What were the consequences of God's anger against Moshe for persistently refusing to accept the mission assigned to him? (See Rashi, who explains that God punished Moshe by appointing his brother Aharon as the *kohen*, whereas until that point the priestly tribe was to have descended from Moshe.)

Maimonides, as cited by his son, Rabbi Avraham, explained that Moshe's punishment was the speech impediment of which he would otherwise have been cured. Moshe had earlier pointed to this condition as a reason for his inability to serve as Israel's spokesman before the Egyptian monarch. According to Maimonides, God would have cured Moshe's impediment to enable him to effectively represent the people, had it not been for Moshe's refusal. God became angry with Moshe and decreed that he would continue to suffer from this disability and Aharon would join him when he comes before Pharaoh.

Maimonides' understanding of this narrative may be applied to many different areas in everyday life. People often shirk responsibility due to what they perceive as an insurmountable obstacle standing between them and the proper execution of the given task. In many instances, however, sincere devotion and effort have a way of making those obstacles surmountable. In our *parasha*, God tells Moshe that had he accepted the challenge, he would have succeeded in overcoming his impediment and serving as a gifted spokesman. It was only due to his ambivalence and lack of confidence that the impediment remained. One must therefore carefully consider the reasons he gives for excusing himself from certain tasks, and determine whether the obstacles he sees lying ahead could in fact be overcome with a bit more effort and devotion to the given challenge.

