

# MOSES: GOD'S REPRESENTATIVE, EMPLOYEE, OR MESSENGER? UNDERSTANDING THE VIEWS OF MAIMONIDES, NAHMANIDES, AND JOSEPH ALBO ON MOSES' ROLE AND ULTIMATE FAILURE AT *MEI MERIBAH*

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## Introduction

In his *Shemonah Peraqim*, Maimonides refers to Moses' sin in Numbers 20 as one of the "misgivings of the Torah."<sup>1</sup> In a digression from his discussion of virtues, Maimonides explains that the sin was unrelated to the extraction of water from the rock. Instead, it was the fact that Moses, whose deeds were scrutinized and mimicked by the Israelites, acted

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<sup>1</sup>Maimonides, *Shemonah Peraqim*, chap. 5. There are numerous ancient and medieval Jewish perspectives on how Moses and Aaron erred at *Mei meribah*. For the various interpretations, see Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 448. The wide variety of approaches can be attributed in part to a number of difficulties. These include the fact that it is a sin committed by the greatest of all prophets. Notice, for example how hesitant Shemuel Ben Meir is to describe Moses' sin; making matters more difficult is the fact that Moses was not forgiven for what he did, as Joseph Albo points out, making the sin appear even more severe; also, the text bears some similarity to an incident described in the Bible in Exodus 17:6, which is why Joseph Bekhor Shor suggests that it is the same incident; further, the sin itself seems trivial. It hardly seems less miraculous for water to come from a rock when it is hit, than when it is spoken to, a point made by Nahmanides; finally, Moses pegs the sin on the Israelites in Deuteronomy 1:37. This is difficult to reconcile with the incident in Numbers 20: 1-13, where the blame is placed squarely on him and Aaron. See Shemuel Ben Meir, *Pirush Ha-torah Lerashbam* on Numbers 20:1, ed. D. Rosen (Breslau, 1882), 187-188; Joseph Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim*, 4:22; Joseph Bekhor Shor, *Pirushei Bekhor Shor al Ha-torahon* Numbers 20: 8-12, vol. 2 (London, 1959), 98-99.

For a novel geographical explanation for the sin, see John Beck, "Why Did Moses Strike Out? The Narrative-Geographical Shaping of Moses' Disqualification in Numbers 20:1-13," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 135-141. According to Beck, Moses took the safe approach and broke the mineral cap to release water, hedging his bet, as it were, in case the water does not flow forth upon his instruction. For a psychological explanation, see Nathaniel Helfgot, "And Moses Struck the Rock: Numbers 20 and the Leadership of Moses," *Tradition* 27:3 (1993): 51-58. Helfgot sees the sin as a failure of Moses to adapt to the new generation. A similar answer is also provided in Moshe Lichtenshtein, *Moses: Envoy of God, Envoy of His People: Leadership and Crisis from the Exodus to the Plains of Moab* (Brooklyn: Ktav Publishing House, 2008), 181-194. For the approach of biblical scholars, see William H. Propp, "The Rod of Aaron and the Sin of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107: 1 (1988): 19-26. Propp aims to reconcile the disparate stories and presents the view that the incident in Numbers was written to explain the punishment Moses received. This view is hard to accept, however. Since the sin is so difficult to pinpoint, an easier, more self-explanatory sin would have been more effective (like the spy story, as an example, which was in the "prior" text).

intemperately by speaking angrily at them.<sup>2</sup>But Maimonides also discusses another dimension of the sin. Basing his views on the difference in wording between verses 12 and 24 – a difference that implies there was more than one offense<sup>3</sup> – Maimonides writes that, in addition to Moses' personal failure,<sup>4</sup> the incident resulted in a desecration of God's name. By calling the Israelites rebellious, Moses, whose disposition was assumed to be in harmony with God's,<sup>5</sup> gave the Israelites the impression that God was upset by their (legitimate) request for water. As a result, God was made to appear unreasonable, and that desecrated his name.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper I would like to focus on two of the responses to Maimonides' interpretation, namely, those offered by Nahmanides and Joseph Albo.<sup>7</sup> While their views

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<sup>2</sup> This is in line with the interpretation of the *Sifre*, which lists this occasion as one of the three places where Moses got angry. See *Sifre* (Venice: Bamberg, 1925), 107.

On the similarity between Maimonides' views in *Shemona Peraqim* and Aristotle's views on the characteristics of the soul, see Bezalel Safran, "Maimonides and Aristotle on Ethical Theory", in *Alai Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought*, ed. M. Hallamish (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990), 75-93. Of particular relevance here is that Safran notes that the purpose of mentioning Moses' sin is that Moses' attempt at the perfection of his characteristics is "frustrated by the divine power." Safran believes, in other words, that Maimonides feels that even the search for virtue is dependent on God. If that is the case, however, the discussion of Moses' sin is not a digression. Nevertheless, Maimonides treats it as one.

<sup>3</sup> Note how the text has "believed not in Me," in verse 12, and "rebelled against My word," in verse 24 (according to the JPS translation).

<sup>4</sup> See Daniel Frank, "Anger as a Vice: A Maimonidean Critique of Aristotle's Ethics," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7:3 (1990): 269-281. For Frank, Maimonides is opposed to anger entirely. Aristotle's notion that one can express anger at the proper time - when one feels it inside - does not have a counterpart in Maimonides' view. That said, Maimonides believes that expressing anger outwardly, while staying inwardly unmoved, has pedagogical benefits.

<sup>5</sup> To clarify, when Moses, whose attitude towards any particular matter is commonly believed to reflect God's feelings, gets upset, it is assumed by the Israelites that God feels that way as well. In this case, Moses' behaviour gives the appearance that God is also unhappy with this seemingly innocent request for something to drink.

<sup>6</sup> Maimonides has a very clear definition of what a *hillul Ha-shem*, desecration of God's name, entails: It is either an intentional transgression of any commandment in the Torah, or when a great person deviates in his behaviour from what is expected of him or her, even if that behaviour is not inherently forbidden. Maimonides presumably applies his second definition here, as someone of Moses' stature is expected to represent God accurately. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Hilkhoh Yesodei Ha-torah*, 5:10-11.

<sup>7</sup> While the former typically opposes Maimonides' rationalist views, the latter often adopts many of his them, all of which makes for an interesting case study. Nahmanides is an almost obvious choice. As one who holds an anti-rationalist viewpoint and sees miracles as an intervention in the natural order, his understanding of the part Moses plays in the execution of miracles, a pivotal point in this paper, is likely to be very different from someone like Maimonides. More interesting, potentially, is the response of Albo, who adopts some, but not all, of Maimonides' viewpoints, and is therefore likely to have a more complex perspective of miracles and Moses' relationship to them. For Nahmanides' nuanced response to Maimonides, see Bernard Septimus, "Open Rebuke and Concealed Love: Nahmanides and the Andalusian Tradition," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides: Exploration in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, Isadore Twersky, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 11-34. Although David Berger argues that Nahmanides' believes that, outside of miracles, the world follows the natural order, he admits that all divine

will be shown to bear similarities both to Maimonides' and to each other's interpretations, the differences between them will be highlighted, as those differences lay at the heart of my project.<sup>8</sup> My aim is to explain how those differences are a byproduct of the three thinkers' respective views of miracles in general and Moses' relationship to them in particular. I will demonstrate this in four steps. First, I will define the three thinkers' views on miracles; then I will show how the thinkers perceive Moses' role in relation to miracles; I will then explain why Maimonides, Nahmanides and Albo are opposed to the other thinkers' views; finally, I will demonstrate, how, for each thinker, Moses' sin is antithetical to his mission and why it needs to be understood in relation to it.<sup>9</sup>In the section that follows, I will briefly summarize the two responses to Maimonides' interpretation, which I have already presented.

Albo expresses his views on *mei meribah* in his 15<sup>th</sup> century magnum opus, *Sefer Ha-Iqqarim*.<sup>10</sup>He begins his discussion by rejecting both Maimonides' and Nahmanides' views, which I have yet to discuss, and suggests that there was a lack of assertiveness on Moses' part in his reaction to the Israelites' request for water.<sup>11</sup>Specifically, Moses should

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acts are miraculous, even if they are infrequent. Berger, "Miracles and the Natural Order in Nahmanides," in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides: Exploration in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, 127-128. For the influence of Maimonides on Albo, see Dror Ehrlich, *The Thought of R. Joseph Albo: Esoteric writing in the Late Middle Ages* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> I will discuss the similarities between the thinkers, and the significance of those similarities, later in the paper.

<sup>9</sup> One final introductory note: I will not deal in this paper with the nature of Moses' punishment. Even though it represents an interesting area of study, it is outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> *Sefer Ha-iqqarim* 4:22.

Albo's treatment of Moses' sin is situated within the context of a discussion on prayer. This leads Ehrlich to suggest that the discussion is meant to re-enforce the belief in the power of prayer. See Dror Ehrlich, "R. Joseph Albo's Interpretation of Moses' Sin at *Mey Merivah*," in *Moses the Man – Master of the Prophets: In the Light of Interpretation throughout the Age*, eds. Moshe Hallamish, Hannah Kasher, and Hanokh Ben-Pazi

(Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2010), 115-126.

For an analysis of the sources Albo draws upon for his *Sefer Ha-iqqarim*, see Julius Guttman, *Religion and Knowledge: Essays and Lectures* (Hebrew), eds. S.H. Bergman and N. Rotenstreich (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1955), 169-191. Hanne Trautner Kromann suggests that it was the Tortosa disputation that occasioned the *Sefer Ha-iqqarim*; Sina Rauschenbach disagrees. Trautner Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100-1500* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993), 169; Rauschenbach, *Josef Albo Jüdische Philosophie und Christliche Kontroverstheologie in Der Frühen Neuzeit* on (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 54-61. The Disputation dealt primarily with the issue of the time of Messiah's arrival. On the proceedings of the Tortosa Disputation, see J.D. Eisenstein, *Otzar Vikukhim* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1928), 104-111.

<sup>11</sup> See Ibn Ezra, *PirushIbn Ezra Al Ha'Torah* on Numbers 20:8, in *Miqra'ot Gedolot, Rav Peninim: Bamidbar* (Jerusalem: Friedman-Lewin Epstein, 1973), 313-314. While there is a similarity here to the view of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi, Simon b. Zemach Duran, there is a significant difference between the medieval thinkers' positions: Duran writes that Moses did not think the nation worthy enough for this type of miracle. This implies a calculated decision about the merits of the Israelites. Albo on the other hand is

have known that nature was subject to his will, especially if he would have considered his and the Israelites' level of righteousness at the time. Thus, Moses should have had the wherewithal to provide for his people in a miraculous way. Like Maimonides, then, Albo feels that Moses let his people down, so to speak. The difference is that, for Albo, it was in failing to provide for the people that God's name was desecrated, for it sowed doubt among the nation in the doctrine of punishment and reward.<sup>12</sup> Albo also writes that Moses was given another opportunity to rectify this sin with the commandment to extract water from the rock by speaking to it – that would have been another way to demonstrate his dominion over nature. But Moses and Aaron assumed the instruction to take the rod was an indication to hit the stone, which is what they did, thereby missing that opportunity as well.<sup>13</sup> This position bears a number of similarities to those of Maimonides' and Nahmanides. Like Maimonides, Albo believes Moses' underlying sin was a flaw in one of his characteristics and that his actions resulted in an implicit but categorically false theological statement. And, like Nahmanides, Albo implies that there is a doubt in Moses' own heart about the miracle.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Albo's position is unique in that it focuses on the projection of Moses' abilities and the public's misperception about his limitations. Having presented Albo's position, which I will still discuss in far greater detail in my analysis, I will now move on to Nahmanides' view.

Nahmanides rejects Maimonides' suggestion that Moses was blamed for being angry, because the text implies that he transgressed God's direct command, and it says nothing about anger. Instead, Nahmanides suggests, like Rabbeinu Hananel,<sup>15</sup> that the sin resulted from the way Moses and Aaron phrased their introduction to the great miracle, for their words insinuated that they take partial credit for it,<sup>16</sup> and that implied some form of personal

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speaking about Moses' lack of assertiveness and a diminished faith in the prophet's own abilities. See Simon ben Zemach Duran, *Magen Avot* 2:10.

<sup>12</sup> As Ehrlich *loc. cit.* suggests, at this point in the *Sefer Ha-iqqarim*, proper beliefs play a key part in salvation. In general, the importance of faith for Albo cannot be overstated: Schweid goes as far as to argue that, for Albo, faith is the most important factor in a human-being's attainment of immortality. See Eliezer Schweid, *The Classic Jewish Philosophers: From Saadia Through the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 438. See also Aviezer Ravitsky, "The Anthropological View of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twerski (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 231-272. Ehrlich also notes that there is a tension between a personal lack of belief for Moses and Aaron on the one hand and causing a lack of belief on the other. This bears a similarity to Nahmanides' interpretation, as we will see.

<sup>13</sup> Menahem Ben Sasson points out that Albo has a unique view of history, which is theological and teleological in nature, and that is evident here. His explanation of what happened at *Mei meribah* focuses far more on the theological implications than on the logistics of what Moses did or did not do. J. Ben Sasson, "Temunat Ha-historia Shel R. Yosef Albo," in *Tarbut Ve-Hhevrah Be-toldot Yiśra'el Bi-yeme-Ha-benayim: Kōvets Ma'amarim Le-zikhro Shel Hayim Hilel Ben-Šāson*, eds. Robert Bonfil, Menahem Ben-Sasson, and Joseph Hacker (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yiśra'el, 1989), 493-516.

<sup>14</sup> Albo plainly states that this was a lack of faith on Moses' and Aaron's part; See Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim*, 1:21.

<sup>15</sup> Rabbeinu Hananel, *Pirush Rabbeinu Hananel al Ha-torah*, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1972), 43-44.

<sup>16</sup> See C.J. Henoch, *Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 216-218.



doubt.<sup>17</sup>In addition, Nahmanides also perceives a hidden kabbalistic meaning,<sup>18</sup>which C.J. Henschel defines as causing an “imbalance in the harmonious union” of God's honourable name and great name.<sup>19</sup>

A careful reading shows that there are also similarities in Nahmanides' approach to the interpretations of Maimonides and Albo, besides the ones I have already mentioned. Like Maimonides, Nahmanides believes that the sin stemmed from Moses' choice of words;<sup>20</sup>and like Albo, Nahmanides believes that Moses somehow obstructed the ideological message which was supposed to come from the miracle. Nevertheless, Nahmanides' interpretation stands out, the reason being that he places blame on Moses for taking credit for God's miracle. This view is very different from Maimonides, who posits that Moses acted as if God was insensitive to the Israelite needs, and from Albo, who writes that Moses should have been more assertive.

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Henschel shows that Nahmanides contradicts what he says in Deuteronomy 1:37 regarding the question of whether it was Moses or the Israelites who take the blame for the sin, and Henschel attempts to reconcile the two views. *Ibid.*, 216-218. It is important to note that Albo would also consider it to be a sin for a prophet to take credit for a miracle (see *Sefer Ha-Iqqarim* 1:18), but that is obviously not what he thinks Moses did in this case.

<sup>17</sup> Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* on Numbers 10:1, ed. C. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1975), 210-219. Nahmanides' turn to the literal sense of the verse here is in typical Andalusian fashion. See Septimus, “Open Rebuke and Concealed Love,” 11-34.

To better understand Nahmanides' position, it is useful to create a sketch of the possible outcome of the intended miracle at *mei meribah*. A successful miracle would have relayed an unadulterated message of God's control over the natural world. If God would have wanted that message to be transmitted through the prophet's speech to the rock instead of through his hitting it, Moses' decision to go against God's word would have qualified as a lack of faithfulness. But since, as I will soon discuss, there is no difference to Nahmanides between the two types of miracles – both are open miracles that defy nature – that could not have been what God wanted. It is also worthwhile to note that, for Nahmanides, it would seem unnecessary to use wonders to inspire belief in Moses. The Israelites were already aware of prophecy. Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* on Exodus 19:9, ed. C. Chavel, 277-279. The only thing accomplished at Sinai is that Moses is shown to have achieved the highest level of prophecy, and this was done in a manner that cannot be subsequently challenged.

<sup>18</sup> For Nahmanides' conservative kabbalistic views, see Moshe Idel, “We have no Kabbalistic Tradition on this”, in *Rabbi Moses Nahmanides: Exploration in his Religious and Literary Virtuosity*, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 51-53.

<sup>19</sup> See Henschel, *Ramban*, 214-215. On the Kabbalistic interpretations of Nahmanides and their relationship to the plain meaning, see Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.), 108. Funkenstein says that *pshat*, the plain meaning, and *sod*, the hidden one, belong to two different interpretative dimensions.

On Nahmanides' attitude towards concealing Kabbalah and how the kabbalistic meaning cannot be derived from the biblical text, see Moshe Idel, *Nahmanides: Kabbalah Halakha and Spiritual Leadership in Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*, eds. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 15-94. Haviva Pedaya disagrees with Idel on the limits he places on Nahmanides' tradition and his usage of Kabbalah in his Bible commentary. Pedaya, *Nahmanides: Elevation: Cyclical Time and Sacred Ritual* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2003.)

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, it is Albo who notes Nahmanides' similarity to Maimonides on this issue. Albo, *Sefer Ha-qqarim*, 4:22.

Thus far, I have defined and compared the views of the three thinkers on Moses' sin. In the following section, I will look into Maimonides', Nahmanides' and Albo's perspectives on the nature of miracles as a conceptual springboard into how they perceive Moses' role in relation to them. As I will show, on both a logical and textual basis, each thinker's position on Moses' role flows from their view on miracles. As my analysis develops, it will become clear that Maimonides sees Moses as a representative, Nahmanides sees him as a messenger, and Albo sees him as an employee.

I begin with an analysis of Maimonides' view of miracles. Maimonides' treatment of miracles is a very complex one,<sup>21</sup> but it is safe to say that he downplays their significance.<sup>22</sup> This tendency can be seen in the way Maimonides interprets the supernatural events recorded in the bible as part of a prophetic experience, rather than describing them as a physical event;<sup>23</sup> it is evident in his description of miracles as imbedded in nature at the time of creation,<sup>24</sup> or their limited time span, if they do interrupt the natural order;<sup>25</sup> and it is also present in his greater emphasis on the possibility of miracles than on their actual

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<sup>21</sup> It is also in a state of flux. For a detailed look on Maimonides changing views on prophecy and miracles, see Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of An Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 148-315. Despite the differences, a common thread of Maimonides treatment is that he tries to encourage his readers to see prophecy in less "supernaturalistic" terms. Ibid., 160. The problem of Maimonides' changing views is taken up by a number of scholars. For some of the medieval responses to the issue, see Joseph Heller, "Maimonides Theory of Miracle," in *Between East and West: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of Bela Horovitz*, ed. Alexander Altmann (London: East and West Library, 1958), 115, cited in Dov Schwartz, *Central Problems of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 83. For Reines, miracles are incredibly significant for Maimonides and yet he engages in *subjectivizing, naturalizing, optionalizing, and temporalizing* them. Reines explains that Maimonides does so in order to maintain their important role in the belief in creation, while encouraging the astute reader to "search deeper" and contemplate Maimonides' esoteric view. See Reines, Alvin J. "Maimonides' Concept of Miracles," *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1974): 243-285. Heller proposes a philosophical solution to the problem, relating the issue to mankind's limited understanding. In a view he finds in the writings of Leibniz, miracles are extraordinary operations but are still part of the general order. See Joseph Heller, *idem*, 112-127.

<sup>22</sup> Hannah Kasher makes this point and adds that for Maimonides, God's greatness is manifested through the order of nature. Kasher, "The Meaning of Moses' Sin in Maimonides Doctrine," *PAAJR* 53 (1986): 29-34. See also Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Hilkhoh Yesodei Ha-torah*, 2:2. I will use Maimonides' position as a foil of sorts for the views of Albo and Nahmanides. The difference between the thinkers will become more pronounced as I move on to a discussion of Moses' role in relation to the Israelites.

<sup>23</sup> Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, 2:42.

<sup>24</sup> The ten miracles which were created *bein hashmashot* are said by Maimonides to have been written into nature at the time of creation, making them a part of nature, not an aberration in its natural order. See his commentary to *Pirquei Avot*, 5:6.

<sup>25</sup> Maimonides allows for this position in the *Guide for the Perplexed* and the *Essay on Resurrection*, as noted by Manekin and Langerman, cited in Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides Life and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 128-129. See also Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, 2:29; Maimonides, "Essay on Resurrection" in Maimonides, *Epistles of Maimonides: Crises and Leadership*, eds. Abraham Halkin and David Hartman, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 232.

occurrence.<sup>26</sup>The reason for this tendency, as Moshe Halbertal explains, is that for Maimonides, “the basis of the religious experience is not expressed in a deviation from the natural order, but in the wisdom implicit in the natural order itself.”<sup>27</sup>In fact, Maimonides considers belief based on miracles to be a defective understanding.<sup>28</sup>In other words, even if God does change the order of nature, that in itself cannot serve a pedagogical purpose.

This tendency comes into even sharper focus if we look specifically at Maimonides' treatment of Moses' miracles. According to Maimonides, the purpose of those miracles—public as they may have been<sup>29</sup>— was to provide basic needs, such as splitting the sea to enable the Israelites to escape and extracting water from the rock to provide for them.<sup>30</sup>Further, the ability of Moses to perform these miracles stems from his own prophetic capacity, or what Kreisel calls his “unique level of knowledge,”<sup>31</sup> and is therefore not indicative of God's miraculous intervention in nature. Instead, the miracles are just the result of the prophet's refined state of being. For Maimonides, then, Moses' miracles do not represent a divine message; they can best be compared to the skills of a senior company representative that uses the corporate account as he or she sees fit.

Nahmanides' perspective on Moses' role in the performance of miracles stands in stark contrast to this, and that comes from the Spanish exegete's distinct view of miracles: Nahmanides divides miracles into two categories: hidden miracles,<sup>32</sup> meaning those that are not prophesied, and open miracles,<sup>33</sup> in other words, miracles that are foretold.<sup>34</sup>The purpose of the latter category, according to Nahmanides, is to remind those who witness it of three theological foundations, namely, God's creation of worldly matters, his ability to change worldly events, and, when the miracles are announced by a prophet, the doctrine of

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<sup>26</sup> See Maimonides, *Essay on the Resurrection*, in *Epistles of Maimonides: Crises and Leadership*, 209-245.

<sup>27</sup> Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 128. See also Kasher, “The Meaning of Moses' Sin in Maimonides Doctrine.”

<sup>28</sup> See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 472; Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 54. Halbertal states that Maimonides is weary of a belief which is based on miracles, as so many religious traditions lay claim to them.

<sup>29</sup> Maimonides states that Moses' miracles were greater than the miracles of the other prophets because they were more public. See Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2:35.

<sup>30</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Yesodei Hatorah*, 8:1; Kasher, “The Meaning of Moses' Sin in Maimonides Doctrine.” I will return to this point later.

<sup>31</sup> Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 238. Although Albo is influenced by Avicenna and sees the conjunction with the spirit as the source for miracles, Albo differs from him in some regards, as I will discuss later. See Ravitsky, “The Anthropological View of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” 231-272.

<sup>32</sup> This includes the entire system of punishment and reward, such as excision or death as a consequence of transgressing sins. Nahmanides says, however, that the Torah generally omits any mention of that type of miracles.

<sup>33</sup> Nahmanides associates open miracles, which contradict the laws of nature, with the Tetragrammaton. See *Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis, 17:1, 214-216.

<sup>34</sup> Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* on Genesis 46:15, ed. C. Chavel, 556. On Nahmanides' view of public and secret miracles see David Novak, *The Theology of Nahmanides Systematically Presented* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 61-75.

prophecy.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Nahmanides is clear that the purpose of miracles is to serve as constant affirmations of God's abilities.<sup>36</sup>

Nahmanides is somewhat less explicit about Moses' role in relation to miracles. We can reason, however, that for Nahmanides, miracles cannot be seen as a part of Moses' prophetic repertoire,<sup>37</sup> or corporate account, to use the analogy I used earlier. Given that miracles are reminders of God's power, as I have shown, they need to be perceived as performed by God. This requirement leaves Moses in the only position that allows that type of message to come through, namely, that of a faithful messenger.<sup>38</sup> Evidence for this point comes from Nahmanides' description of Moses' attempt to clarify the nature of his mission:

Thus Moses said: 'They will ask me concerning my mission whether it is with the attribute of *E-il Sha-dai* which stood by the patriarchs, or with the high attribute of mercy with which You will do signs and wonders which will be a new phenomenon in creation.'<sup>39</sup>

To a large extent, then, Moses was just as much of a spectator to the miracle as the Israelites were. Indeed, the only thing Moses knew, Nahmanides tells us, was when the miracles were coming.<sup>40</sup> A similar idea can be seen in Nahmanides' explanation for God's tendency to show Moses the miracles he will perform:

Perhaps even though He informed Moses of the Great Name with which the world was created and everything came into existence, He wishes to show him that with this Name signs and wonders would be done, changing the natural order of things, so that the matter would be firmly established in Moses' heart and that he should in truth know that with the great name he will perform new things in the world.<sup>41</sup>

Moses' passivity here is therefore taken for granted, as God's name appears to do all the

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<sup>35</sup> Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Exodus 8:12, ed. C. Chavel, 172.

<sup>36</sup> Nahmanides discusses how miracles support the doctrine of creation in his sermon, *Torat HaShem Temima*. See Nahmanides, *Torat HaShem Temima* (Vienna: Herzfeld and Baur, 1872).

<sup>37</sup> The greatness of Moses' miracles, for Nahmanides, is their duration. Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, on Deuteronomy 34:11, ed. C. Chavel, 406-409. This point fits neatly into the view of Nahmanides that I am about to present here, which is that Moses is given a passive role in the execution of miracles. In fact, it not is even the execution of the miracle – the only action taken by Moses – that makes them special. The miracles may longer, but that feature can be attributed to God.

<sup>38</sup> Nahmanides uses this term in Leviticus: "for the Almighty made Moses a messenger between him and between all Israel." Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* on Leviticus 26:16, ed. C. Chavel, 467.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, on Exodus 3:13, ed. C. Chavel, 34.

<sup>40</sup> But see Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* on Numbers 11:17, ed. C. Chavel, 110, for the one exception.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, on Exodus 4:4, ed. C. Chavel, 44.



work. It follows that Moses' role is solely to communicate,<sup>42</sup> in an accurate manner, the attribute God puts on display. Having defined the view of Maimonides and Nahmanides, I will now move onto Joseph Albo's perspective.

Miracles are significant for Albo, just as they are for Nahmanides. For Albo, they indicate that one who believes in God and his Torah is not subservient to nature –nature bends to his or her will.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it was on the basis of Moses' great miracles that he was believed.<sup>44</sup> Albo's position differs from Nahmanides, however, in that the former has a slightly more natural understanding of miracles. Specifically, miracles need to occur from pre-existing matter (*yesh me-yesh*). What this means is that miracles may transform nature, but they need to work within it.<sup>45</sup> Albo maintains this position because he sees the natural order as important to God.<sup>46</sup> In another departure from Nahmanides, Albo provides a sound metaphysical explanation for the prophet's execution of miracles; namely, they are executed through his or her conjunction with the spirit.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Nahmanides explicitly calls Moses a messenger in Leviticus: "For the Almighty made Moses a messenger between him and between all Israel". Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah* on Leviticus 26:16, ed. C. Chavel, 467.

<sup>43</sup> Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim* 1:22. Schwartz notes that Albo's position on miracles deals primarily with their connection to the confirmation of prophecy. See Dov Schwartz, *Central Problems of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 97, fn. 53. See also D.J. Lasker, "Joseph Albo's theory of verification" (Hebrew) *Da'at* 5(1980): 9, cited in Schwartz, *idem*.

<sup>44</sup> This is because, even if miracles were an insufficient proof of his prophecy or the fact that the Torah should be given through him, they still proved that Moses was worthy of executing them. Further, the miracles Moses performed were of such a caliber, that it put him beyond the other prophets who preceded him. And anyone who would change the Torah would have to exceed Moses' miracles or be verified in a public manner similar to Mount Sinai.

<sup>45</sup> Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim* 1:12

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:13.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:10. Kreisel connects Albo's view of the mechanics behind a prophet's performance of miracles to Avicenna. See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 521-522. Ehrlich's statement, that Albo links *hashgacha* to *sechel*, is very much in line with this view. See Ehrlich, *The Thought of R. Joseph Albo: Esoteric writing in the Late Middle Ages* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2009), 171. In proposing that it is the soul of the prophet that can have an impact on nature and make miracles, Albo appears to follow Avicenna. Maimonides is also influenced by Avicenna in a number of respects (just as two examples, Kreisel notes that the view of God as a necessary existence and the metaphor Maimonides uses for the attainment of truth, namely, a flash of lightening, are both found in Avicenna's writing. See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 180, 202), but, as Ravitsky suggests, Maimonides ignores the anthropological view of miracles. See Ravitsky, "The Anthropological View of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 231-272. In fact, Maimonides may have been influenced by other thinkers in his views on prophecy. His view on the preparation of the prophet's intellect, for instance, is actually drawn from Alfarabi. See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 170. Be that as it may, in light of Ravitsky's suggestion that Albo embraces an - albeit modified - anthropological view. See Ravitsky, "The Anthropological View of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 266. One way to see the difference between the three thinkers is that Maimonides ignores the anthropological view of miracles; Nahmanides is firmly in the interventionist camp. Albo's view, however, are a complex blend of ideas: he embraces the anthropological view, which is originally based on Avicenna, but is revised in the work of Ibn Khaldun, *Ibid.*, 234, and seen as based on an Aristotelian construct that views the world as existing by necessity. At the same time, Albo's view incorporates that of Averroes, and is given an intellectual element that combines

Still, Albo's conception of miracles cannot be fully explained in natural, or even metaphysical, terms.<sup>48</sup> This point can be seen when he discusses Moses' miracles,<sup>49</sup> where he implies that it is not only Moses' merit that determined the supernatural extent of his miracles but that the merit of the nation itself played a part.<sup>50</sup> Given that miracles are not fully understandable by reference to Moses' capacity alone, the explanation is not an entirely naturalistic or rational one.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the language used by Albo to describe how the rock could have spouted water with Moses and Aaron's words alone, namely, because the Israelites were now worthier than before,<sup>52</sup> simply does not fit Avicenna's anthropological model, which places the capacity to perform miracles firmly in the soul of the prophet.<sup>53</sup>

This complex view makes it somewhat difficult to explain Albo's conception of the role Moses played in relation to miracles, but the following analogy may be useful. Consider an employee at a given company. If an employee's superior chooses to reward him or her, so as to serve as an example to others, he or she will benefit from that choice. In the same way, Moses benefited by being chosen by God to be an exemplar of righteousness. Further, by virtue of the contribution of other employees – those other employees' hard work for example – the chosen employee will benefit even more. Moses' role is fully comparable to this example. Because of the righteousness of the Israelites, nature was even more subservient to Moses than it otherwise would have been. Moses therefore became the model of righteousness and its benefits.

Having explained the position of all three thinkers, I will now move on to the third step in my analysis, in which I explain why the three thinkers are opposed to – or why their views preclude – each other's interpretations. Ostensibly, the starting point is the same for

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the view that one can affect nature based on one's capacity to understand the cosmos and their causes with the notion that the laws of nature conform to the laws of the Torah.

<sup>48</sup> Kreisel states that there are naturalistic and non-naturalistic elements in Albo's treatment of miracles. See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 522-523. Schwartz states, quite plainly, that Albo did not base the acceptance of miracles on philosophical grounds. See Dov Schwartz, *Central Problems of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, 111.

<sup>49</sup> It is possible, in fact, that Albo has a more supernatural interpretation when it comes to Moses and his miracles than he would with other prophets. This is because his master, Hasdai Crescas, sees Moses' prophecy as supernatural and its purpose as impressing upon the Israelites the Torah's complete and eternal nature. Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim* 3:1. See also Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 2.4.2. According to Albo, Moses' level of *panim be-panim* can only have been attained with God's grace. In other words, for Albo, even Moses' prophetic ability is God-given. Further, as Kreisel points out, Albo does not see prophecy itself as a natural phenomenon. It is granted "by God to whom God wills." See Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 500. Shavid suggests that, in the matters of the fundamentals of faith, Albo is caught between Maimonides and Crescas' positions. See Shavid, "the doctrine of prophecy in the philosophic System of R. Joseph Albo", (Hebrew) *Tarbiz* 35:1 (1965), 48-60; "Joseph Albo's system of dogma as distinct from that of Maimonides," *Tarbiz* 33:1 (1963), 74-84.

<sup>50</sup> The reasoning behind this is that they had received the Torah by that point. Unlike Maimonides, Albo sees miracles as an affirmation of righteousness, rather than predictable by-product of the prophet's powers. Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim* 4:22.

<sup>51</sup> Kreisel, 500.

<sup>52</sup> Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim* 4:22

<sup>53</sup> See Ravitsky, "The Anthropological view of Miracles in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," 231-272.

all three thinkers<sup>54</sup>. The Israelites asked for water, and Moses appeared startled by their request. God instructed him to take his staff and speak to the rock. Moses prefaced the performance of the miracle with harsh words and then asked if it would be possible to draw water from this stone. Moses then hit the rock and water gushed forth, but God admonished both Moses and Aaron shortly thereafter. Sifting through these details for the apparent sin, Maimonides, as we have seen, puts an emphasis on Moses' anger. Albo, meanwhile, highlights Moses' lack of assertiveness and the missed opportunity viz. the greater miracle, while Nahmanides underlines Moses' implication that he played a role in the miracle. This raises the following question: For each of these thinkers, why are the other interpretations insufficient? In light of my analysis, I would suggest the following:

Maimonides rejects Nahmanides' view because it was Moses who performed the miracle. Let us return to what Maimonides writes about this issue.

Rather, all the signs that Moses performed in the desert, *he* did them based on the need, not to bring proof of prophecy. He needed to sink the Egyptians, *he* split the water and saved them inside it; they needed sustenance, *he* brought down the manna; they were thirsty, *he* split the rock for them; the community of Korach denied him, the land swallowed them.<sup>55</sup>

The obvious implication, of course, is that these were Moses' miracles. Therefore, for Maimonides, the suggestion that his sin was in taking credit for the miracle would be unintelligible – Moses did perform the miracles! At the same time, Maimonides also precludes the possibility that Moses' sin was that he obstructed a message that would have emerged had he performed the miracle differently. There was no need to perform it any differently than he had. Instead, Maimonides proposes that the sin was that he lost his temper. That is to say the reason Maimonides rejects the former explanation is that he sees no inherent message in those miracles. The miracles were performed for practical purposes, when the situation required them. In this case, for example, once the water emerged from the rock, the needs of the Israelites were met. As a result, there would be no reason to fret about how else this could have been accomplished. Thus, the sin must have been unrelated to the execution of the miracle.

With his explanation, however, Maimonides moves far afield of the interpretations of Nahmanides and Albo. Nahmanides, as I showed earlier, sees miracles as reminders of God's omnipotence. As a result, in addition to precluding the notion that it was Moses who performed the miracles, as I have discussed, Nahmanides opposes the idea that miracles are a supernatural way of addressing needs. If that were in fact the case, their significance would be deflated, as their purpose would no longer be to inspire belief but to respond to a pressing need. Indeed, it is the connection between miracles and faith that forms the basis for Nahmanides' rejection of both Ibn Ezra's and Maimonides' interpretations of the sin.

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<sup>54</sup> Numbers 20:2-13.

<sup>55</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-torah 8:1. My translation and emphases.

Based on the word “believed,”<sup>56</sup> which God mentions in his rebuke, Nahmanides argues against the former’s explanation, namely, that there was a lack of concentration on Moses’ part.<sup>57</sup> Since God refers to a lack of faith, the sin must have been related to a deficiency of belief. For the same reason, Nahmanides rejects Maimonides’ explanation, since the sin could not have been related to Moses’ behaviour; God’s statement seems to rule out that interpretation.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Nahmanides cannot possibly accept Maimonides’ explanation for the sin. At the same time, Nahmanides precludes Albo’s claim that Moses missed the opportunity to perform a greater miracle. I believe this position is in part a result of Nahmanides’ classification of hidden and open miracles. Since this was an open miracle, it makes no difference to Nahmanides how it came about.<sup>59</sup> But Nahmanides’ view also comes from an understanding that it was God, and not Moses, who performed the miracle. To say that Moses could have performed the miracle differently would place too much power in Moses’ hand, and that would be inconsistent with Nahmanides’ position.

Albo, on the other hand, takes no issue with the notion that it was Moses who performed the miracle, which explains why he agrees with Maimonides in precluding the view that the sin was that Moses took credit for it. But Albo cannot possibly accept Maimonides’ view that the sin was related to Moses’ anger. That type of sin would be inconsequential compared to the significance of the potential miracle Moses failed to perform. This comparison can be seen most clearly from the context of Albo’s discussion of the sin. Albo begins this discussion by asking what made Moses’ sin unforgivable, why he could not atone for it. From this question it is evident that Albo weighs the possible explanations of Moses’ sin and rejects the trivial ones, even if they represent legitimate mistakes. In fact, the only relevant sin, for Albo, is one that is commensurate with God’s response, namely, preventing an unparalleled display of nature’s subservience to those who are righteous. That missed opportunity was the only sin great enough to be unforgivable and it overshadowed any other possible transgression.

In implicitly rejecting the view that miracles were performed on an *ad hoc* basis, Albo’s view bears a similarity to Nahmanides, as we have seen. They both find an inherent message in miracles; and that explains why they both agree that the sin stemmed from an obstruction of the miracle’s intended message. Where they differ, however, is on the nature of that message. For Nahmanides, as I have discussed, miracles are performed by God, through Moses, and the message of those miracles is solely about God. For Albo, on the other hand, the prophet executes the miracles, since it is he or she who bends the rules of nature to suit their will. And by extension, the message of those miracles is more about the benefits of the prophet’s righteousness, than it is about God’s power.

With an understanding of the dynamics behind the three views, I will now move on to the final step in my analysis, namely, showing the severity of the sin from each thinker’s perspective. In order to guard against matching each thinker’s description of Moses’

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<sup>56</sup> Numbers 20:12.

<sup>57</sup> See Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, 20:1, ed. C. Chavel, 211-212.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> See *supra*, footnotes 33, 34.

mission to their respective view of the sin, thereby falling prey to circular reasoning, I will begin by asking what Maimonides, Albo, and Nahmanides would describe as a failure given the particular role they respectively assign. I will then analyze if that construct resembles the sin as each thinker sees it. In addition, to support my overall argument, I will also provide proof that each thinker sees Moses' sin in relation to, and not independent of, his mission.

I begin with Maimonides, for whom the mission of Moses is to be a true imitator of God.<sup>60</sup> As Kreisel suggests, Maimonides seems to accept the role of the hero in Plato's cave,<sup>61</sup> to the extent that the hero returns to the cave to teach the others. As a result, the moment Moses would misrepresent God's attitude, making it impossible for the Israelites to imitate God properly, Moses would no longer fulfill this purpose. Or, to put it in Plato's terms, Moses message would be just as false as the shadows on the wall. A close look at what Maimonides' view yields exactly this description:

[He] desecrated God's name, because from his actions and words everyone learns and they were hoping to attain through them the success of this world and the next world...<sup>62</sup>

Maimonides' view of the sin appears to parallel the construct I developed of what a potential failure in Moses' role would look like. Further, it is also evident from here that Maimonides sees the sin in the context of Moses' mission – being the one from whom everyone learns –which suggests that this was a failure *vis a vis* Moses' role, not simply with respect to his behaviour.

When this conceptual exercise is replicated for Nahmanides' view, a similar result emerges. For Nahmanides, who sees Moses as a messenger, the most obvious failure would be to refrain from transmitting his message. The less obvious, but more profound, failure would be to transmit a contradictory message. It stands to reason that this would be a greater offense because the messenger would thereby sabotage his mission, rather than simply fail to carry it out. Applied to Moses, the latter scenario would take the form of challenging God's capacity, as Moses is meant to transmit a message of God's power. Another look at Nahmanides' description of the sin shows that his explanation follows the lines I've drawn:

They should [not have said "are we," but] "shall the eternal bring you forth water?" just as they had said 'when the eternal shall give you in the evening flesh to eat' etc. [Exodus 16:8] and similarly in [the case of all the miracles] they [Moses and Aaron]

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<sup>60</sup> Abraham Melamed writes that, despite the similarities of Moses to the philosopher king, Maimonides sees him as *sui generis*, and does not view him as a king (except in one instance) see Abraham Melamed, *The Philosopher King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 47. Melamed also writes that the Prophet Philosopher, as he puts it, must 'imitate the divine way' and the masses must copy the leadership of the prophet philosopher. *Idem*, 37.

<sup>61</sup> Kreisel, *Prophecy*, 253.

<sup>62</sup> Maimonides, *Shemona Peraqim*, chap. 4.



informed them that the Eternal would do wonders for them. And [since they did not say so here], perhaps the people thought that Moses and Aaron brought forth the water for them out of the rock through their own wisdom.<sup>63</sup>

Nahmanides' explanation is therefore consistent with the greater failure in Moses' mission as a messenger, as I have described it. In other words, by taking some of the credit for a part of the miracle, as well as by doubting God's power, he sent the wrong message and therefore fell far short of his mission. Moreover, Nahmanides appears to meet the criteria I set earlier, by seeing the sin against the backdrop of what is expected of Moses. It is for this reason, I believe, that he stresses the fact that Moses and Aaron were supposed to notify the nation of God's wonders in all miracles. This further confirms that Nahmanides' description of the sin needs to be understood in relation to his conception of Moses' and Aaron's mission.

Finally, when Albo's description of the sin is compared to his description of Moses' role and a projection of what a failure in that regard would look like, a similar result emerges. For Albo, as I have explained, Moses' mission was to help the Israelites attain completion [*shlemut*]. To accomplish that, he was to transmit laws and embody the righteous person and the benefits that he or she receives. By extension, a failure in that regard would only come about if Moses were to stop exemplifying that message. A final look at Albo's description of the sin shows that this is exactly how he describes it.

And how much more so when they see the prophet himself, whom the Torah was given through, that is not depending on this belief to make a pronouncement and to speak a word against nature to change it from its behaviour or to innovate a sign or wonder, with that prophet being he who is worthy that those miracles should be done through him more than the other and this without a doubt causes a desecration of God's name and to instil a doubt in the faith.<sup>64</sup>

Albo's description of the sin thus also matches the failure I projected based on his understanding of Moses' task. By falling short of that and not performing the greater miracle, and by implying his own doubt in his dominance over nature, Moses failed categorically.<sup>65</sup> In addition, it almost goes without saying that Albo sees the sin in the context of Moses' mission. Moses sinned because of what was expected of him.

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<sup>63</sup> Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Numbers 20:1, ed. C. Chavel, 216.

<sup>64</sup> Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim*, 4:22.

<sup>65</sup> It should also be noted that Rashi accepts this definition as well (see Rashi to Numbers 20:12.) But there is a significant difference between the two of them. Rashi is concerned with a specific message that could have been taught, namely, that even the stone listens when it is spoken to, and the Israelites should have done so as well. Albo, however, sees in this a descriptive message of nature's subservience to the righteous, not a normative message about the subservience that is expected of the Israelites.

## Conclusion

To conclude this paper, it may be worthwhile to apply this last statement, said in relation to Albo, that Moses sinned because of what was expected of him, more broadly. Although the thinkers certainly have different perspectives on Moses' relation to miracles, perspectives that lead to divergent views of Moses' sin – Maimonides is of the opinion that he improperly represented God, Albo believes that he was not assertive enough and did not demonstrate what a righteous person is capable of, and Nahmanides subscribes to the view that Moses improperly took credit for God's miracle – their views coincide in one regard: Every thinker sees the sin in relation to Moses' mission and views it as an absolute negation of that mission.

Perhaps this small piece of common ground, that all three thinkers explain Moses' sin in relation to the role that was expected of him, stems from the fact that Moses is accused of desecration. Classically, this means that one does not perform in a way that is expected of him or her.<sup>66</sup> For Maimonides, Albo, and Nahmanides that is precisely how they see the sin. For Maimonides, making a false statement about God is a failure, since it was expected of Moses to represent God properly. For Albo, not exemplifying what a righteous person is capable of is a failure, since it was expected of a devoted employee to reflect positively on the merits of being an outstanding achiever. Lastly, for Nahmanides, the fact that Moses took credit for the miracle was not just a dereliction of his duty but a betrayal of his mission, which was to transmit God's message faithfully.

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<sup>66</sup> The classical definition of a desecration of God's name, namely when one acts in a manner that is not befitting what is expected of him or her (with the opposite behaviour seen as a sanctification of His name), appears in b.Yuma 86a. Each of the three thinkers makes a direct reference to sanctification or desecration in their commentary on Moses' sin. After he explains what the sin was, Nahmanides indicates that that is what is meant by "ye sanctified Me not." See Nahmanides, *Commentary on the Torah*, Numbers 20:1, ed. C. Chavel, 216. Similarly, in his interpretation of the sin, Albo explains why Moses' sin was a desecration of God's name. See Albo, *Sefer Ha-iqqarim*, 4:22. (Maimonides also sides with the interpretation of the Talmud. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Yesodei Hatorah*, 5:11 and *Sefer Ha-mitzvot Le-Harambam Im Hasagot Ha-ramban*, positive commandment, no. 9, negative commandment, no. 63, ed. C. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1981), 159-160, 281-282 (it should be noted that Nahmanides does not comment on those commandments, implying that he agrees with those definitions, *ex silentio*.)

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