

You're So Annoying!

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Right before Moses strikes the rock, the sin which will prevent his entering the land of Israel, he yells at the people: "listen now, rebels (*hamorim*)" (Numbers 20:10). But here is a case where the subtle indications carried by a word teach an invaluable lesson.

For that same word, *morim*, can mean teachers. Our antagonists can, at the same time, be our teachers. Surely generations of students have learned from the incident in which Moses strikes the rock. Moses himself, despite its painful consequences, learned from the incident. His adversaries were also his teachers.

The Rabbis have long taught what psychologists advise us of as well. When someone irritates you, annoys you, infuriates you, there is a lesson in that experience. We are often resistant to the lesson because it is hard to admit that such a person, or such an event, contains within it something valuable. But sometimes the level of our resistance is a measure of the worth of the lesson.

In *Pirke Avoth* Ben Zoma counsels: "Who is wise? One who learns from everyone." We can learn even from those we do not like. Sometimes their lessons, indeed, are the most lasting.