

"Listen now, O rebels, shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" (20:10)

Miriam *HaNeviah* passed away. The water that had sustained *Klal Yisrael* for forty years was in her merit. Following her death, the water stopped flowing. When people have no water to drink, they react. They complained to Moshe *Rabbeinu* that they were thirsty. Moshe struck the rock, and it provided the necessary water. Hashem told Moshe, "Since you have not trusted in Me to sanctify Me before the People... you will not lead them in the Land." Imagine, the quintessential leader of *Klal Yisrael* made one wrong decision, which is beyond our ability to comprehend, and he received a most harsh punishment. His dream of entering *Eretz Yisrael* was shattered. Had he led the people to the Land, we would never have lost the *Bais HaMikdash*, no exile – nothing – but an idyllic life in *Eretz Yisrael*. One error, and everything was forever changed. The commentators struggle to find a suitable reason for such an onerous punishment. The reasons that they give obviously only touch the surface, because Moshe's "sin" is such only on the most elevated spiritual level that he had achieved, and on this level every action is studied under the scrutiny of a powerful spiritual microscope.

Rashi asserts that it was because he struck the rock, rather than speak to it – as Hashem had instructed him. *Rambam* contends that it was because he became angry and spoke harshly to the people. *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* writes that Moshe referred to the people as *ha'morim*, fools/rebels, which denigrates the descendants of the Patriarchs. *Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchev, zl*, observes that, on the surface, these explanations do not concur. If one delves deeper into the matter, however, the two infractions are one and the same, since one catalyzed the other. He explained that two forms of rebuke exist: gentle; and not so gentle. When one reproaches gently, he shows the sinner the great privilege of being a member of *Klal Yisrael* and the ensuing special relationship that he has with Hashem. He is told that his soul is a spark of the Divine, hewn from the *Kisei HaKavod*, Throne of Glory. He is given to understand the immense satisfaction that Hashem derives whenever the simplest Jew scrupulously performs a *mitzvah*. He is told of the great joy that permeates all of Creation when a Jew fulfills his destiny in this world. When someone hears such "rebuke," he is only too happy to return to Hashem's embrace with all his heart. A person who rebukes in this manner truly deserves to be a leader of the Jewish people.

The other form of rebuke is sharp and harsh. Its purpose is to shame the sinner into submission, to break his arrogance, to get him to fulfill his obligations. This type of rebuke is not based on coddling, but on telling it like it is and having the sinner experience the full wrath of what his actions have spawned. A person who rebukes in this manner does not bring the people to the fulfillment of their destined roles; rather, this rebuke is based upon browbeating and arm twisting, when, in fact, the sinner's heart is not in it. Such a person does not meet the requirements demanded of a Jewish leader.

When Moshe spoke with anger at the Jewish People, he was not inspiring them to return to

Hashem. They had erred. Their behavior left much to be desired. When a people acts recalcitrantly, however, they will not be convinced to change with brow beating and stern rebuke. The rock was not willing to give up its water willingly. When Moshe spoke harshly to the people, the rock picked up on his tone. As a result, it refused to give up its water willfully. Consequently, Moshe had to strike the rock to give up its water. Had he spoken kindly to the people, it would have left an impression on the rock. When he spoke in anger, it likewise left an impression on the rock – a negative impression. In this manner, the various explanations coincide.

A student of the revered *Bobover Rebbe*, *zl*, *Horav Shlomo Halberstam*, related the following story (quoted in “Stories that Warm the Heart”). At ten years of age, this student studied in the *Bobover Yeshivah* under the guidance of the *Rebbe*. Urban *yeshivos* were situated in urban areas which were populated by various cultures and establishments that catered to these diverse cultures. What is entirely acceptable to the non-Jewish liberal world is frequently an anathema to the Orthodox Jewish world. Thus, areas that were frequented by non-Jewish young men and women who were expressing their right to be non-Jewish liberals, unrestricted by the moral code and compass which exemplifies our young men and women, are understandably prohibited to our children. Nonetheless, as young boys will do, a small group of boys from the *Bobover Yeshivah* spent a half hour in a park that was on their yeshivah’s restricted list. They had a grand time and returned to the *yeshivah* laughing – thinking that they had broken one of the *yeshivah*’s rules and gotten away with it. How shocked they were to be greeted by the *Rebbe* himself. The young boy who (now as an adult) related the story was the defacto leader. The *Rebbe* sternly beckoned him to his office. As the leader, he would be the sacrifice for the group. Trembling, he entered the *Rebbe*’s office.

The *Rebbe* sighed, “I am sorry, Avraham, but I will have to give you a *potch*, slap, for disobeying the rules. Avraham swallowed deeply, closed his eyes and waited for the slap (I must interject at this point. The boy did not fear the pain of the slap nearly as much as the accompanied shame of being slapped by the *Bobover Rebbe*.)

Avraham stood there and waited for the slap to come, squeezed his eyes tightly shut (as if that would relieve the pain). Suddenly, he felt the *Rebbe*’s soft hand caress his face. He opened his eyes and looked at the *Rebbe*, who was looking at him with the love and compassion of a father to a son (which he was to all of his *chassidim*).

“This is your *potch*. Now go back to class and learn well!”

This was a “slap” that Avrohom remembered his entire life. It was this form of rebuke, couched in fatherly love, that personified the *Bobover Rebbe*.