

Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael. (20:12)

Due to the nature of the sin of *mei merivah*, waters of strife, its ramifications for Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*, and, by extension, *Klal Yisrael*, it is understandable that multiple commentators weigh in on the subject. We will focus on *Rashi's* commentary, which is the most basic, and, thus, one to which we can all relate from a practical point of view. *Rashi* (both here and in *Sefer Devarim* 32:51) explains that they sinned by striking the rock, when Hashem had instructed them to speak to it. Had they spoken to the rock and water emerged from it, Hashem's Name would have been sanctified in the eyes of the assembly. The people would have derived a *kal v'chomer* (literally lenient and strict – a fortiori argument), whereby one derives one law from another by virtue of the following logic. If a case that is generally strict has a particular leniency, a case that is generally lenient will surely have that leniency. Thus, in the case of *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, sanctification of Hashem's Name, through the lesson of the rock, Hashem's Name would have been elevated even more. The people would have said, "Now, if this rock, which neither speaks nor hears, fulfills the word of Hashem, all the more so must we fulfill His word." Unquestionably, this is a powerful lesson, but is it that compelling that – as a result – Moshe and Aharon were refused entry into *Eretz Yisrael*, thereby altering the destiny of *Klal Yisrael* for generations? (Had Moshe entered the Land the *churban*, destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*, would not have occurred.)

It is called "going the extra mile," which is an idiom for describing one who is willing to do more than he is required to do, to expend greater effort than has been expected of him. It goes without saying that, in the area of *avodas hakodesh*, service to the Almighty, going the extra mile bespeaks one's love and awe of Hashem. Being *frum*, observant, but with strict parameters not to "override" it, demonstrates the limitations of one's observance, both in action and desire.

An incredible story made the rounds a number of years ago. A *frum* man living in Bnei Brak had a successful business. He owned a factory that ran three shifts a day, producing items which were profitable for the owner. One day, a fire broke out in the factory, and, while the workers immediately summoned the fire department, they arrived two minutes too late – everything was destroyed. They tried everything to extinguish the flames, to save the machines, but it was too late. Had they arrived two minutes earlier, they would have been able to save most of the machines and merchandise. In the span of an hour, the man went from riches to rags, as he lost everything that he had spent years building up. He no longer had a source of income. What does a *frum* Jew do when he is up against a wall? *Tehillim*, *Tehillim* and more *Tehillim* – and visiting a *tzaddik* to petition his blessing. He went to *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, to ask why Hashem had tested him so; to determine what he should do to repair the spiritual damage that resulted in this conflagration; and to request a *brachah* from the *Sar HaTorah*.

As he stood before *Rav* Chaim, he realized that perhaps he had acted inappropriately in one area.

“I have a practice of arriving at *shul* exactly two minutes after the established time. [He would arrive 7:32 for a 7:30 *minyan*.] I was thinking that Hashem has conveyed a message to me. Two minutes late indicates a lack of love and excitement for *davening*. Hashem waits for us to join the *minyan* in a timely fashion, so that, when the designated time arrives, we are prepared with our *Tallis* and *Tefillin* on, ready to *daven* to Hashem. I would always say, ‘What is two minutes? What difference do those two minutes make? I will be caught up by the time the *tzibbur*, congregation, reaches *Barchu*.’ Hashem taught us how critical two minutes can be. If the firemen had arrived two minutes earlier, I would not be in such dire straits today.”

Rav Chaim listened intently, shook his head as a sign of agreement, “Accept upon yourself, from today on, to arrive in the *shul* in a timely manner” (to show *Hashem Yisborach* what *davening* to Him means to you).

Chesed, along with Torah and *avodah*, is one of the three pillars that hold up the world. One can perform an act of kindness, be commended for it and move on to the next project. He saw a need; he acted. What about the subject of his kindness? Was his act of kindness carried out in an impersonal, dispassionate manner – or did he use his mind and act thoughtfully? Did he smile and make the beneficiary feel like more of a human being and less of a beneficiary? Did he come across as performing this act of kindness because he must – not because he wants to? That added smile or follow-up call makes a world of difference to the beneficiary and elevates the act of kindness, making it truly worthy of being a pillar for the world.

During that first *Pesach*, when the pandemic broke out and everyone was remanded home, it was the kindness of some which saved the day for the less than fortunate. Being alone is a scourge among older people, and it fares not much better with the younger generation. Some people have difficulty making and keeping friends, while others, by virtue of life’s circumstances, are left alone to deal with life. An old proverb focuses on the consequences of being alone, “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” People need each other and are far more productive when they can share their lives with others – who care. One needs only to walk into a nursing home and look at faces – especially the eyes – of many patients to determine which of them have visitors and which of them do not.

Getting back to *Pesach* and the pandemic. It is one thing to be alone with one’s spouse. It was the first time in our marriage that we were alone for *Pesach*. Imagine the single men and women, victims of life’s circumstances, each of whom has his or her own story. *Pesach* is one time that one does not want – nor should one be compelled – to celebrate alone. An elderly widow who had recently lost her husband was struggling with the grief and sudden loneliness of her new state of being. When the pandemic quarantine went into effect, she was devastated at the notion that she would not be able to spend *Pesach* with her children. A neighbor found out about her predicament and suggested moving their dining room table next to her open window, allowing her to hear and participate in their *Seder*.

After the first days, she called her children and excitedly related that she had had wonderful experience. In fact, the kind family had the same traditions and songs to which she was used to for years. Now, for the other side of the story. This woman was unaware what had transpired prior to *Pesach*. The kind couple did not just move their table; they called up the widow's children to find out what songs and customs their mother was used to, so that they could somehow relieve the tension and emotional pain associated with being alone for the first time – especially during a *Yom Tov* that is so family-oriented. The couple thought of everything because they cared. That extra little effort demonstrated that extra bit of love which transformed their act of kindness.