

## Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me, in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you will not bring the Congregation to the Land that I have given them. (20:12)

The error of *mei merivah*, waters of strife, cost Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen* the opportunity to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. The various commentators are troubled with coming to grips with this definitive error. How did Moshe make such a mistake? Hashem instructed him to speak to the rock – not hit it. *Rashi* explains that had Moshe spoken to the stone, he would have magnified the miracle of water flowing from a stone. While this may be true, it does not explain what Moshe, Hashem's *eved neeman*, true servant – who would never do anything on his own – did. Second, if Hashem had wanted Moshe to speak to the stone, why did He instruct Moshe to “take the staff” in his hand? Third, in *Sefer Devarim* 3:25, Moshe actually blames the nation for his inability to enter the Land, saying that “Hashem became angry with me because of you.” Is this true? The *pasuk* in *Parashas Chukas* clearly lays the blame at Moshe's doorstep.

Let us first analyze *Rashi's* understanding of the episode. In an attempt to explain *Rashi*, **Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita**, asks how the entire debacle transpired in the sequence that is implied by *Rashi's* explanation of the circumstances. First, why did Moshe hit the rock? Second, why did he hit the rock twice? Third, why is the rock referred to as *hasela*, “the” rock, as if it were a specific rock? Fourth, why did Moshe refer to the people as *morim*, rebellious? Were they demanding so much? After all, asking for water is not what one would consider to be overly demanding. Last, why did Moshe ask the people, “Shall I bring forth water from this rock?” Was there another rock in the picture? Hashem commanded him to speak with this rock.

Based upon the above questions, *Rav Friedman* presents his understanding of *Rashi* in the following manner: It all started with Hashem instructing Moshe to speak to the rock. The reason *hasela*, referring to a specific stone, is used is that Hashem wanted Moshe to speak to the original stone which had served as *Be'eirah shel Miriam*, the Well of Miriam. When Miriam died, the Well reverted back to its original function as a stone. Therefore, Moshe and Aharon had difficulty locating that stone.

When Moshe and Aharon attempted to speak to the stone, the people asked, “Why bother with that specific stone? Speak to any stone.” Moshe looked at them incredulously and said, “*Morim* – do you not realize that it is not any stone to which we can speak?” During this dialogue Moshe and Aharon saw a stone which resembled the one for which they had been searching. They spoke to it, but, since it was the wrong stone, it produced no water. Then, Moshe figured that, as he had once hit a stone, he would make a similar attempt now. He hit the stone, and it worked, and out came a few drops of water. Then Moshe hit the stone again. This time, the water came flowing out.

According to *Rashi's pshat*, explanation, Moshe and Aharon should not be responsible for what happened. It was all an accident, because they had been unaware that they were dealing with the

wrong stone. The **Mizrachi** senses this question and replies, *echad shogeg v'echad meizid b'chillul Hashem*, "when it involves a desecration of Hashem's Name, there is no difference if one does so on purpose or inadvertently." At the end of the day, a *chillul Hashem* was committed. This cannot be ignored.

Rav Friedman cites a novel exposition from the **Megaleh Amukos** that illuminates the *mei merivah* incident in a new light. Moshe desired to enter *Eretz Yisrael* so that he could build the *Bais Hamikdash*. Hashem did not acquiesce to Moshe's request. The reason is based on a statement made by *Chazal* in the *Talmud Sotah* 9a, that what was constructed by both Moshe and David *Hamelech* was never destroyed by our nation's enemies. When the enemies destroyed the first *Bais Hamikdash*, the original *Mishkan* was concealed.

Accordingly, had Moshe entered *Eretz Yisrael* and built the *Bais Hamikdash*, Hashem, Who had taken out His wrath on the wood and mortar of the *Bais Hamikdash* structure, would have to *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, do so to the Jewish People. The **Ohr Hachaim HaKadosh** asks, indeed, how could Moshe have been allowed to succeed in speaking to the rock? Had he been successful, it would have meant an end to the Jewish People, because then someone had to feel Hashem's wrath, and it would not have been the physical structure of the Temple. He explains that had Moshe spoken to the stone, he would have engendered such a powerful *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name, that *Klal Yisrael* would have achieved spiritual perfection, thus allowing for Moshe to enter the Land and build the Temple edifice. There would no longer ever be a need to punish the people. Thus, because they did not speak to the stone, they did not enter the Land, because it would have been detrimental to the nation.

Moshe and Aharon were worthy of the miracle. Most of the nation was also worthy. There were, however, the *morim* who insisted on Moshe hitting the stone, that, by their very words, indicated a spiritual deficiency on the highest levels. We now understand why Hashem had Moshe take the stick, when, in fact, He wanted him to speak to the stone. That was the plan: speak to the stone; create an incredible *Kiddush Hashem*; go into *Eretz Yisrael* and build the *Bais Hamikdash*. The people are worthy of maintaining themselves. The *morim* got involved. They could not wait for Moshe to speak to the rock. As a result, he applied the stick. Hashem wanted Moshe to be prepared for both contingencies: if the people were all worthy, he could speak; if they were not, he would have to hit the stone, so that he could not end up building the *Bais Hamikdash*. Thus, by hitting the stone, Moshe *Rabbeinu* actually saved *Klal Yisrael*.

We now address the reason that Moshe hit the rock twice. Rav Friedman quotes the well-known commentaries of *Ramban* and *Sforno* who maintain that Hashem follows through with a miracle after His servant has first set the tone with a physical action. This act is similar to Moshe throwing the staff to the ground before it became a serpent, raising up the stick before hitting the rock. Hashem wants mortal participation. Having established that Moshe's hitting the rock spared the destruction of the Jewish People during the *churban Bais Hamikdash*, destruction of the Temple, we must also take into consideration that there were two Temples. This required two actions on the

part of Moshe. Thus, we now understand why he hit the rock twice.