

And he struck the rock with his staff twice; abundant water came forth, and the assembly and their animals drank. (20:11)

Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to speak to the rock. He also told him to fetch his staff – which he had earlier used to strike the rock that had previously provided the nation with water. Who knows? Clearly, whatever infraction was involved in Moshe's striking the rock is beyond us. The mere fact that so many early commentators weigh in concerning the sin is a clear indication that the sin was esoteric and of the minutest form of misconduct. In other words, when one must search, dispute and delve into the action that represents the sin, it demonstrates that it is on a level which is beyond our comprehension. Nonetheless, we may derive powerful lessons from this incident. Indeed, *Horav Moshe Tikuchinsky, zl*, observes that the one who was baffled most by the Heavenly reaction to the incident is none other than Moshe *Rabbeinu*. He certainly would not have deviated from Hashem's instructions had he felt that doing so would be a violation. What should we say?

Horav Reuven Dov Dessler, zl, takes a *Kelmer* approach (which focuses on perfection and how something imperfect is deficient) towards the sin and its effects. Hashem instructed Moshe to speak to the rock. Rather than speak, he struck the rock. When we think about it, striking a rock or speaking to the rock which then produces enough water to quench the thirst of five million men, women and children is a miracle by any standard. Does it really make a difference if one speaks to the rock or strikes it? Does the magnitude of the miracle make the difference irrelevant? *Rashi* explains that had the rock been spoken to rather than struck, the nation would have drawn the intended lesson, "If a rock which does not speak or hear and that does not require sustenance, carries out the word of G-d, so should we."

Rashi's statement is baffling. Imagine if the people would not have derived this lesson, would they have had license not to serve Hashem? Certainly not! Furthermore, the people of that generation were so spiritually elevated that the simplest woman was on a higher level of prophesy than Yechezkel *HaNavi*, who described the workings of the Heavenly Sphere. Was the nation's obligation to Hashem for saving and sustaining them until that moment not sufficient reason for them to serve Him? Would a simple lesson make that much of a difference in the obligation to the Almighty? The answer is, explains *Rav Dessler*, it could have been better – manifesting greater *shleimus*, perfection. Perhaps one Jew out of the entire five million might have been increasingly inspired. This is what did not transpire as a result of striking the rock: perfection. It could have – and should have – been perfect.

We can accept that perfection is a requisite that must not be ignored, but does this warrant that Moshe received such a harsh punishment? He carried forty years of leadership, often under the most difficult and trying conditions, with challenges to his authority, constant complaining and bickering, a lack of appreciation and even less gratitude – and, to boot, he was not allowed to enter

Eretz Yisrael. Does the punishment correspond to the sin? A relationship should exist between crime and punishment, whereby the disciplinary action one receives in some way, on some level, coincides with the infraction. On the surface, this criterion appears to elude us.

Moshe *Rabbeinu's* dream was to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He offered his prayers to Hashem that the decree against him be rescinded, thus permitting him to enter the Land. Let us imagine the following dialogue that hypothetically ensued between Moshe and Hashem. Hashem asked, "What is it that you lack in the *Midbar*, wilderness? You are sustained by the *manna*, drink water from Miriam's well, study Torah every waking moment, are the quintessential *Rebbe* who teaches Torah all the time to *Klal Yisrael*. You have achieved the highest level of prophesy, crowned as the king of the Jewish nation. You are the most praised and fortunate Jew. What else could you have? What do you lack?"

"It is all true... but in *Eretz Yisrael* it will all have greater *shleimus*, perfection."

"If so – if it is all about perfection, if this is your concern, can you say emphatically that your action of striking the rock, rather than speaking to it, was an act of *shleimus*?"

We can have no counter response to this question. In situations in which one seeks perfection, he must put in the effort towards achieving that perfection.

Ostensibly, the above is not presented *chas v'shalom* as a critique of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, but of ourselves. When we think about it, what really is the primary focus of our supplication of Hashem? We ask that what we already have be better, more perfect. We want to be healthier, have greater sustenance, greater peace, lasting relationships. We ask for *shleimus*. Can we say that our prayers and spiritual activities represent *shleimus*? Does our *tefillah* have perfect *kavanah*, intention/devotion, without talking? Is our learning that perfect? In other words, to ask for and hope for and expect perfection, it must at least be tit for tat. One cannot expect something in return for that which he did not give.