

# A 'WELL' LEARNED LESSON

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

In this week's parsha we read that the Children of Israel ran short of water at a point during their sojourn in the wilderness. They then demanded water from Moshe. Moshe prayed to HaShem whose answer was that Moshe should speak to a particular rock from which water would then flow. The water did flow from the rock but only after Moshe resorted to striking it. HaShem then tells Moshe that his act did not manifest faith in or sanctify HaShem in front of all who were there (as it was meant to). For this, he was told he would not enter the Holy Land. It appears that Moshe incurred grave consequences for a seemingly innocuous act. What was the subtle mistake of Moshe and how do we understand it? What is the Torah teaching all subsequent generations in this recanting of Moshe's shortcomings?

Rashi explains that the difference between hitting the rock as opposed to speaking to it diminished the impact of what had been the potentially far reaching lesson of the moment. Had he shown them that a \_rock\_ can obey a word, they would have learned that a human heart, so much softer than stone, can be made to "hear". When Moshe hit the rock, even though the desired result of the water flowing was achieved, the cost of the lesson lost was tremendous.

When a parent does a homework assignment for a child, the work is complete but a lesson of greater value is left undone. When a parent purchases an immediate replacement for a child's lost item, they may have the restored item but the reinforced negative habits will not be so easily replaced. When a parent makes a bed for a child because it's easier to "do it myself than to get them to do it" although the bed looks neat, the child inside, is not. The long/short best methods for a parent or teacher to use is those which leaves a lasting impression as opposed to those which simply produce immediate results. Not to teach what to think, but \_how\_ to think!

I heard a powerful story of a father who made a far reaching impression on his child. The family was from the German Jewish community. The custom among Jews of German descent is that even unmarried young men wear a tallis gadol (prayer shawl) during morning prayers. The son, worked for his father's business. It happened one time that it was required of him to go on a business trip of five hours by train. His father spotted his son's tallis in his room, inadvertently left behind. The father then proceeded to take the same five hour train ride to where his son had settled into his hotel room. He knocked on the door and was greeted by his very surprised son. The father handed the tallis over to his son, wished him well and took the five hour journey to return home.

On the surface it looks as if the father misappropriated a whole day of his life for a mere custom. As

the young man grew older, however, he never let go of that custom and was careful to pass it on to his children and grandchildren who all maintain a firm grasp on their family's customs and holy practices. It seemed as if the father had wasted a day. The father had actually invested a day in a lesson that had far-reaching consequences for generations and generations.

We are not here to judge the actions of Moshe but to understand the value of delivering the correct message. The difference between "hitting" for an immediate result and "talking" for the long term benefit made the difference between being allowed and being denied entrance to the Promised Land. A "WELL" learned lesson!

---

Text Copyright &copy 1999 [Rabbi Label Lam](#) and **[Project Genesis, Inc.](#)**

---