

SUBTLE BUT SUBLIME

by Rabbi Dovid Green

In this week's parsha Moshe receives a major slap on the wrist. He is punished by not being allowed into the Holy Land of Israel. While the Children of Israel were travelling through the wilderness, they came to Merivah and could not find water. This was just after the prophetess Miriam passed away in whose merit the miraculous wellsprings flowed for the Children of Israel. G-d told Moshe to go to a specific rock, and *“speak”* to the rock and it will give water. Moshe *“hit”* the rock twice, and was punished for doing so rather than speaking to the rock. "Because you failed to foster belief in Me by sanctifying Me before the eyes of the Children of Israel, for that you will not bring this congregation to the land which I am giving them."

The Slonimer Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Noach Brezovsky, of blessed memory, enumerates several of the troubling questions regarding this topic in the parsha.

1. What is the difference between this time when G-d asked Moshe to speak to the rock, and the time almost 40 years earlier when the Children of Israel had just left Egypt and G-d told Moshe to hit the rock?
2. Why is speaking to the rock and bringing out water a higher level than hitting the rock and bring out water from it? Both are supernatural occurrences.
3. What greater fostering of faith in G-d would have resulted from speaking to the rock as opposed to hitting it?
4. Why in reality did Moshe hit the rock as opposed to speaking to it? And why did he hit it twice?
5. How does the punishment of not going into Israel fit the crime?

Briefly, the Slonimer Rebbe prefaces that the level of effort that a person must make to acquire his needs is directly proportionate to his level of faith and trust in G-d. The degree which G-d's hand is apparent to someone relates to his level of knowledge and recognition that G-d's hand is active in his life. He explains that truly righteous people carefully consider just how much effort is required on their part to bring about a desired result. This, being that everything is in G-d's hands and He can bring anything about without anyone's input. The Slonimer writes that mainly through trust in G-d do we merit the Land of Israel.

Accordingly, we can explain what happened with Moshe hitting the rock. Moshe's deep understanding of the Children of Israel led him to view their level of effort required as needing to hit the rock even twice - doing an action - as opposed to just speaking to the rock - putting in a request and sitting back while G-d does His.

Moshe reasoned that if many years back, after leaving Egypt, when the Children of Israel had just experienced the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, and they still needed the rock to be hit to extract the miraculous water, how much more so now. Now that they had the Golden Calf behind them, and the incident with the spies, would they need to put in physical effort - hitting the rock.

Moshe didn't fully understand G-d's intentions. G-d wanted to teach His love and closeness to the Children of Israel by performing this miracle for them. He wished to teach them this lesson that He makes Himself apparent to us according to our working recognition of His involvement in the universe, and of course, in our own personal experiences.

Another difference between years earlier when Moshe had to hit the rock, and now, when it sufficed to speak to the rock, is that now the Children of Israel had already received the Torah. Torah is comprised of words. Now the emphasis is on the life-giving words of Torah, and G-d wanted to convey to the Children of Israel that words of Torah have the greatest capacity to effect change for the good.

Speaking to the rock was designed to raise the nation's level of faith and trust in G-d as a prerequisite to entering Israel. This fostering of faith is not adding something new to our consciousness, but rather getting in touch with the G-dly spark within us, and fanning it and making it more focal and functional in our everyday lives. Since Moshe hit the rock, he held back this important lesson from the Children of Israel, which was necessary for their entrance to Israel. Consequently, he was not allowed to enter.

Faith is the strong foundation of Judaism. Without it the rest of the "building" can not possibly be strong. The Torah teaches us how to live with faith and trust, and what its relevance is on a daily basis. Faith is our ticket to Israel, and living as G-d wants us to live. Let's cultivate our faith in G-d.

Good Shabbos!

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