

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF STRENGTH

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moses, saying: "Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and speak to the rock in their presence so that it will give forth its water. (Bamidbar 20:7-8)

It's not so easy to pinpoint the mistake that caused that Moshe and Aaron should enter the Holy Land. It seems purposely obscured. Was it that Moshe hit the rock rather than speaking to it? Was it that he hit it twice? Was it that he spoken disparagingly about the congregation? Was it a loss of patience? In any case, why was Moshe told to take a stick if he was to speak to the rock? Is that not a mixed signal and a cause for confusion? Is he to speak to the rock or to hit it? What was purpose of telling Moshe to take the stick if the intention was for him to speak?

I once heard the following educational point from a friend of mine: It helps to speak to the rock if you have a stick in your hand! Even if you don't use the stick, having that giant symbol of authority, helps open the ears of the listener. There's no mystery in the matter that a policeman gets a little more respect because of the fire power he carries on his hip. It's like Teddy Roosevelt had famously uttered, "Speak softly and carry a big stick!"

There may be another factor at play. The story is told about a Rabbi who came to the wealthiest man in his congregation just moments before Shabbos and he requested a loan for \$5000.00. The Rabbi thanked him and hurried home. Now just after Havdalah the Rabbi appeared at the wealthy man's home with the money in his hand thanking him for the loan. Curiously the Rabbi repeated his request again the next week receiving the money just before the Holy Shabbos and returning it immediately afterwards.

This behavior repeated itself for a number of consecutive weeks until the rich man worked up the courage to ask the Rabbi the obvious question, "Rabbi, what can you possibly be doing with the money on Shabbos?" The Rabbi responded, "Absolutely nothing?" The wealthy fellow inquired again with great wonderment, "Then why does the Rabbi come to me for such a large loan just before Shabbos!?" "Ahhh!" the Rabbi responded, "When I stand up each week in Schul to address the congregation, I have to admit that it's a little intimidating for me to speak exactly what's on my mind without concern about losing my job! However, when I know I have a large sum of money in a cookie jar at home, I must confess to you, I feel much more self-assured!"

Having the authority associated with the "stick" can give a boost of confidence to the speaker too when he knows he has a powerful default option in his hand.

There may even be another approach worth examining. Moshe somehow lessened HASHEM's lesson plan by hitting rather than speaking to the rock. How so? "If a rock is responsive to Moshe's words, so should we!" Also, when one with might chooses to employ words, it demonstrates **a different type of strength!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).