

Chukas 5776

July 15, 2016

# A Taste of Torah Strike Out

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

The colloquial terminology for ineffective communication is “talking to the wall.” Obviously, delivering a monologue to a wall, or any inanimate object for that matter, is a waste of time and effort. In this week’s parsha, Moshe is commanded to speak to the rock, which would miraculously facilitate the reemergence of the Well of Miriam, a spring of water that flowed from a stone. In an astonishing turn of events, Moshe seems to directly flout Hashem’s order and, instead of talking to the stone as G-d commanded, Moshe struck the stone. According to many commentaries, Moshe was punished for this sin and could no longer enter the Land of Israel with the Jewish Nation.

This passage is difficult and begs clarification on quite a few points. To name but a few: Why would Moshe, the truest servant of Hashem, directly disobey this command? Furthermore, what was the great significance of this disobedience? In the world of nature, both striking a rock and talking to it are equally ineffective if one’s purpose is to get a drink. Clearly, either action would be perceived as astonishing and miraculous. And finally, it is notable that this was not the first time water was brought forth from a stone. Initially, when the Jewish People first got water from Miriam’s Well, Moshe was in fact instructed to strike the rock! Why would the appropriate action on the first occasion be considered a grievous sin on the second?

Rabbi Aryeh Yehudah of Brod, in his work *Lev Aryeh* (Chullin 7b), addresses these questions. He explains that, generally, miracles are performed specifically in a manner that most resembles nature. The well initially existed in the merit of Moshe’s sister Miriam, and Hashem originally commanded Moshe to strike the rock to bring forth the water, for speaking to the rock would have been a greater miracle.

When Miriam passed from the world, this source of water ceased. Now, the well is about to reemerge, but the merit that would bring it back was attributed directly to Moshe – whose spiritual level was greater than Miriam’s. Hashem therefore commanded Moshe to talk to the rock, due to his higher spiritual status. Moshe’s merit can bring about the miraculous in an even more overt and obvious fashion!

So why didn’t he do as he was told? The *Lev Aryeh* explains that we are told that Moshe was the humblest of men. It occurred to him that when he would manage to bring forth water with speech alone, the Jewish People would deduce that he was much greater than his deceased sister Miriam. Rather than publicly display his own greatness and thereby minimize, to some degree, his sister’s piety, he chose to simply mimic the first instance and strike the rock here, as well. This act was considered to be a sin, because had he but spoken to the rock, the more overt miraculous display would have brought a greater measure of glory to Hashem’s Name.

It seems to me that there are two powerful messages to be garnered here. On one hand, this brings out the humility, as well as the incredible sensitivity and caring, that Moshe embodied. On the other hand, it highlights the importance of recognizing each and every individual’s unique strengths. We each have the capability to use our innate personalities and unique characteristics to accomplish amazing things and bring glory to Hashem’s Name. When we are summoned to step up to the plate, rather than slink back and play down our own capacities, we must step forward and embrace the challenge. If and when we do so, we will merit to sanctify and bring a more complete glory to Hashem’s Name.

## Stories For The Soul

### The Difficult Truth

*Based on a story in The Legacy of Maran Rav Aharon Kotler by Rabbi Yitzchok Dershowitz*

Rabbi Aharon Kotler was the founder of Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood, and is largely responsible for the rise of Torah study as an ends unto itself in America. Arriving in America in 1941, Rabbi Kotler worked tirelessly to make his vision for Torah in America a reality. But many did not see things as he did, and he was often subjected to rejection, ridicule, and derision while engaged in fundraising efforts.

Mr. Irving Bunim (1901-1980) and his son, Amos, were two Jews who did “get it,” and they assisted Rabbi Kotler greatly in his struggles to build Torah on American shores. (Amos wrote a biography of his father’s life and activities entitled *A Fire in His Soul*.)

It once happened that Rabbi Kotler and Amos came to a wealthy Jew in the hopes of obtaining a donation. After sitting in the waiting room for 45 minutes, Amos exclaimed to Rabbi Kotler, “It is the greatest honor to wait with the Rosh Yeshiva, but I don’t understand why the Rosh Yeshiva must suffer this humiliation!”

Rabbi Kotler replied, “I want to tell you something, and I want you to remember it for the rest of your life. Since the time when Moshe broke the first set of *Luchos* (Tablets), it was decreed that true Torah is only achieved through difficulty and suffering. If the Torah does not come through struggle, one must question whether it is true Torah! In fact, I am happy that that I encounter such challenges, for now I know I am working toward true Torah.”

Our Sages teach us, based on a verse in this week’s parsha, that Torah is acquired only by one who gives his life for it. The simple understanding refers to dedicating one’s life to its study, but Rabbi Kotler understood that building and spreading Torah require the same perseverance.

## Kollel Happenings

### SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention boys entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade and older! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday, mincha 7:45 pm, followed by learning. Ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the schedule. For info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org).

### RABBANIT MIZRACHI ON JULY 31<sup>ST</sup>

The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kollel and Aish Denver present a video for women, *Leading up to Tisha B'Av*. Sunday, July 31<sup>st</sup> at 8 pm at Aish Denver. Rabbanit Yemima is one of the most in-demand speakers today, attracting hundreds of women to her lectures, where she presents deep messages with a sense of humor. Sponsorship available. No charge, suggested donation of \$5 to help cover costs of future video presentations.

### THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** Can you think of a similar case, where one friend is required to say the proper blessing on the item while the other isn't required to say any blessing at all?

**A:** 1) When one drinks water, the proper *bracha* is *shehakol*, provided its consumption is to quench one's thirst. Thus, if one of the friends wasn't thirsty, no *bracha* would be required. 2) One who eats a forbidden item doesn't make a *bracha* on it. If one friend needed to eat the forbidden item, such as where it was necessary for preservation of life, he would make a *bracha*. 3) In a similar vein, if one person was permitted to eat the item, only he would make a *bracha* on

the item. For example, the friends were in different time zones and it was no longer Yom Kippur in the location further east, or one was eating *chametz* on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of Nisan in Eretz Yisroel, where there is no 8<sup>th</sup> day of Pesach for those who live there, while in the Diaspora it is still Pesach and *chametz* is forbidden. (Sources: Orach Chaim 204:7 and 196:1)

**This week's question:** How many of our *brachos* (blessings) are not recited on Shabbos, (besides the middle *brachos* of the weekday *amida* which are replaced by the one special Shabbos *bracha*)?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email [ryz@denverkollel.org](mailto:ryz@denverkollel.org).

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### The Rambam - Part IX

*Moreh Nevuchim* became hugely controversial due to the nature of the philosophical issues the Rambam discussed and the positions he took. While embraced in some communities, other Torah authorities criticized it, and some even regarded it as heretical. During the Rambam's lifetime, the controversy was kept under control. This was due to the great respect people had for the Rambam, as well as the calm and moderation encouraged by the Rambam himself to his students and others who defended him and his opinions.

Some of the more notable personalities who criticized the Rambam were Rabbi Meir HaLevi Abulafia (1180-1244) and Rabbi Avraham ben Dovid (1120-1197), more commonly known by the acronym of his name, the Ra'avad. These great Torah authorities respected the Rambam greatly, even though they criticized, sometimes sharply, certain opinions and ideas espoused by him. Great people can disagree, even strongly and vehemently, on ideas while maintaining mutual respect and admiration on a personal level; this is the way of Torah study.

Rabbi Abulafia's opposition to some of the Rambam's views are included in his work *Yad Ramah* on Tractate Sanhedrin.

The Ra'avad, meanwhile, wrote a critique on the entirety of the Rambam's Mishnah Torah, disagreeing with the Rambam in numerous places throughout the work. Virtually every modern-day printed edition of Mishnah Torah contains the Ra'avad's glosses next to the Rambam's words, and their disagreements have been studied, analyzed and dissected in yeshivos and Torah study halls throughout the world for centuries, a testament to the statement of our Sages (Pirkei Avos 5:17) that "any dispute [carried out] for the sake of Heaven is destined to last."

In Provence, there existed a small but learned Jewish community that produced many great Torah scholars. Many of these Torah scholars supported the Rambam, but there were those who opposed him, as well. The Rambam corresponded with the "Chachmei Provence" (Wise Men of Provence), as they were known, and much insight into the Rambam's opinions can be gleaned from these letters.