

# TORAH WEEKLY



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Parshas Chukas | July 12, 2024 | Volume 25 | Issue 37

## Strike Out

By: Rabbi Akiva Stern (Originally Published 2016)

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 re-emergence 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.

## Alumni Focus

Rabbi Akiva Stern

PAST



Rabbi Stern, teaching in Kollel, 2014

## 2012-2017

Years as a Denver  
Kollel Scholar

PRESENT



Rabbi Stern, teaching in 2023

## Nursing Home Administrator

Rabbi, Aish Kodesh

Denver, CO

## Kollel Happenings



Rabbi Reuven Luechter from Jerusalem leads a special Vaad at the Kollel