

life

LESSONS

## SACRED WORDS

After years of negotiations, a lucrative business deal was about to close. One of the major investors was Mr. Gershon Kamin, who stood to earn a fortune. During the closing, Gershon was disturbed by one of the attorneys' vulgar language. He politely asked him to refrain from profanity, but the man could not. Finally, Gershon said, "One more and the deal is off!" It was not long before the lawyer did it again. Gershon left the room, scuttling the entire deal.

Larry Fisher was another frum Jew who was present. He was aware of the years of work that had gone into the deal. Where had Gershon derived the strength?

Years later, Larry heard a lecture that gave him the answer. The speaker told a story about a boy who had learned in Telz decades earlier. He demonstrated great promise, but his parents wanted him to obtain a secular degree. On his last day, he was summoned to the *rosh yeshivah*, Rav Chaim Mordechai Katz. "Gershon," Rav Katz said, "you are about to leave the yeshivah for the outside world, where every step will be a test. You must always have one concern above all else: remember that everything you do will be either a *kiddush Hashem* or a *chillul Hashem*. Choose accordingly!" The boy took the words to heart.

After the lecture, Larry asked, "Was the boy in your story Gershon Kamin?"

"How did you know that?" the rav exclaimed.

The rosh yeshivah's words had infused Gershon with a sense of mission. He lived to serve Hashem and to sanctify His Name, with no other considerations.

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gem

OF THE WEEK

## THE WORD AND THE STAFF

*By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow*

Until now, Bnei Yisrael had Be'er Miriam, but after her death, the spring dried up. The *eida*, which for the first time regarded itself as the community of the future, lacked the most basic requirement for survival: water.

*Vayashev ha'am b'Kadesh.* They reached Kadesh, happy to be on inhabitable land, and then suddenly experienced a lack of water. They felt that Moshe and Aharon had betrayed them—and therefore, *vayarev ha'am im Moshe.*

This is not G-d's will, they protested. You made this happen. Hashem wants to keep us alive and bring us to the Promised Land, but you brought us all into a desert to kill us. The decree of our wandering has ended. We should already be entering our land. Here, there is not even water to drink! It could not have been G-d's Will that brought them here.

"Take the staff," Hashem says to Moshe, "and show them you are My messenger." Since the victory over Amalek, the staff had been left "before G-d," in the Mishkan. That staff identified Moshe as G-d's messenger. When he used it, it meant that the action was the result of direct intervention by

*continued on reverse side*

powerful  
PRAYER

BRACHOS:  
STANDING BEFORE G-D



There are three main kinds of *brachos*. Some are a thank you to the Creator for the pleasures of the world, such as food and drink. These are called *birchos hanehenin*. A second category, the *birchos hamitzvos*, are said before we do a mitzvah, in gratitude to Hashem for making us holy. A third type of *bracha* is a praise to Hashem for all He does for us, and a request for things we need. When we say the words Baruch Ata, we are reminded that we stand before Hashem, speaking to Him directly and saying "You." The only *brachos* which the Torah itself commands are *Birchas Hatorah* and *Birkas Hamazon*. All the rest are *miderabbanan*.

*Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom*

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## HASHEM'S JUSTICE

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

Moshe Rabbeinu was forbidden to enter Eretz Yisrael, but it is not clear what his sin was. According to the Torah: "Moshe and Aharon gathered the people before the rock. He said, 'Listen, you rebellious people. Will we bring forth water from this rock for you?' Moshe lifted his hand and hit the rock with his staff two times. Water came forth, and the people and their animals drank. Hashem said, 'Because you didn't believe in Me to sanctify Me before the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, you will not bring them to the land I have given to them.'"

What did Moshe do wrong? It is not clear. There are many explanations: Rashi says he should have spoken to the rock instead of hitting it. The Rambam says he lost his temper in public. The Ramban says that he should have said "Will Hashem bring forth water?" There are other explanations as well.

Regardless, we know that Moshe Rabbeinu would not have had any evil intentions. Perhaps he did indeed make one of those mistakes. Couldn't he have protested? "Ribbono Shel Olam, is this my reward for being a devoted leader of the Jewish people for 40 years? You know, Ribbono Shel Olam, how much I put up with! How difficult they made my life, how they spoke and complained against me. Sometimes I thought they were going to stone me! I fasted forty days and forty nights to receive the Torah for them. I have been the *raya mehemna*, the faithful shepherd, of Your people for forty years. Everything I did was for them! And You know, Ribbono Shel Olam, that I have only one dream in life: to enter Eretz Yisrael and fulfill its *mitzvos*."

Moshe certainly could have said all this. After all, he only made one mistake. And yet Hakadosh Baruch Hu said no. He committed this sin at Meriva, whatever it was, and he would not enter Eretz Yisrael. To us, this seems unfair. The rest of the generation, who had committed more and worse sins, were allowed into the land, but not Moshe—all for one minute sin which we struggle to identify! Moshe, however, did not register the slightest complaint. On the very last day of his life, he makes an astounding declaration: "Whatever the Almighty does is perfect, for all His ways are just. He is the faithful, trustworthy G-d, with no unfairness. He is righteous and straight."

We think that Moshe Rabbeinu was cheated, and he should be dying with complaints on his lips. Yet he himself tells the world of Hashem's true justice in everything He does.

To this day, we use Moshe's declaration at the most tragic time in our lives. This *pasuk* became known as the *tzidduk hadin*, and is recited by mourners when they bury a relative, declaring that they accept Hashem's judgment.

Adapted from *Tranquility and Travail* by Rabbi Sapirman.

Hashem. Assemble the *eida* with staff in hand, Hashem said, *v'dibartem el haselah l'eineihem*: speak to the rock in their presence. Order it to yield its water.

If Moshe were to hit the rock, it would give the impression that water had come as a result of Divine intervention due to their complaints. But that was not what Hashem wanted. The people had to understand that their agitation was unnecessary—it was not Moshe and Aharon who brought them there. It was G-d, and He had already provided water. A word from Moshe would suffice for the rock to yield it.

Accordingly, *v'hotzeisa v'hishkisa*: their need will be met simply by a word from you. This would have convinced them how wrong they were. But if the water only gushes out after a blow, they could still wonder if Moshe had brought them to Midbar Tzin of his own initiative, if they had been justified in revolting, if only the revolt and their distress had caused G-d to have mercy and perform a miracle.

Had the miracle come about as G-d instructed, the people would have learned that under His guidance they did not have to worry; they would be helped—even without Moshe's staff.

According to Chacham Yitzchak Bernays, this miracle was meant to be a transition to a new mode of guidance. They had just reached the border of Eretz Yisrael, where a new era awaited. The visible miracles of *midbar* would be replaced by the invisible hand of G-d. This miracle was meant to teach that the staff of Moshe in the wilderness would be replaced by the word of Moshe, forever.

Based on the commentary of Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.



## wonder WORLD

### ON THE FLY



Where are house flies' taste buds?

House flies are found almost everywhere humans live, except for Antarctica and a few remote islands. They are known to spread over 100 different pathogens, including bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Under optimal conditions, a house fly can complete its life cycle in just 6 days.

Their wings can beat up to 1,000 times per minute, allowing them to fly at speeds of about 4.5 miles per hour. Despite their rapid wing movement, house flies typically don't travel far, usually staying within a few miles of their birthplace. House flies have specialized pads on their feet that allow them to walk upside down on ceilings and vertical surfaces. They also taste with their feet!

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