



# GROWTH

## At The SHABBAT TABLE

### PARSHAT CHUKAT

#### Capitalizing the Moment

*"Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon: 'Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given them.'"* (Bamidbar 20:12)

In this week's Parsha, we read the infamous incident of the "Waters of Strife," wherein Moshe and Aharon were instructed to speak to a rock and thereby miraculously bring forth water, but instead, Moshe ended up striking the rock to produce the water. This error turned out to be a fatal one, and would cause Moshe and Aharon to have to die in the Wilderness before ever entering the Promised Land with the people. Rashi explains: *For had you [Moshe] spoken to the rock and it would have brought forth [water], I [Hashem] would have been sanctified before the eyes of the assembly and they would have said, "Now, if this rock, which neither speaks nor hears, and does not need sustenance, fulfills the word of G-d, how much more so should we [fulfill His word]."*

This enigmatic episode raises many questions. Firstly, what difference did it make whether the rock was spoken to or hit; they both seem to be equally miraculous in their supernatural water-producing abilities! Naturally, speaking to or striking a rock would not bring forth water and an open miracle would be performed regardless, so the "*kiddush Hashem*" as Rashi explained should have been achieved in any event! Moreover, shouldn't the claim against Moshe Rabbenu striking the rock have been that he disobeyed a direct order from Hashem, Who had told him to speak to it? It seems a bit perplexing that in admonishing the mistake, the Torah doesn't even mention any aspect of noncompliance with the command, which would appear to carry more weight, but rather focuses on pointing out that he neglected to capitalize on the grand moment in which he could have accomplished an incredible *kiddush Hashem*. How are we to understand all this?

R' Aharon Leib Shteinman sheds light to this with a fascinating insight. There is a common misconception, he explains, that when Moshe was commanded to speak to the rock, he was to tell it: "Produce water," or something along those lines. However, Chazal understand (see Yalkut Shimoni) that Hashem actually commanded Moshe to "recite a chapter over it;" i.e. learn some Torah, such as a chapter of *mishnayot* or a passage of *gemara*, beside the rock, and allow that to cause hydrating relief to spring forth.

Now, it is imperative to bear in mind that Moshe Rabbenu, the ultimate prophet who brought the Torah down from Heaven, undoubtedly never allowed Torah to escape his lips (see Tosafot, Sotah

21a). If that was the case, there was no need for Hashem to directly command Moshe to speak to (or learn in the vicinity of) the rock; a simple instruction of merely walking to the rock would suffice, as he would automatically utter words of Torah there! We must conclude, then, that Hashem didn't actually give Moshe a direct order to learn Torah near the rock; rather, G-d simply informed him that if he wanted water to come forth, it would come through the Torah he would learn there. Therefore, since it wasn't an explicit directive, Moshe didn't actually transgress or defy Hashem's word – which would explain why the Torah doesn't allude to it. Rather, the allegation that Hashem had on Moshe was that he didn't utilize the moment to sanctify His Name. The *kiddush Hashem* wouldn't have been to showcase G-d's astonishing abilities; if that were the case, hitting the rock would have been just as good. The *kiddush Hashem* was meant to display the remarkable power of Torah, that through learning even one chapter, the natural order of the world is affected and supernatural blessings pour down into the world. The *kiddush Hashem* would have shown that it didn't take mystical *segulot* or *kavanot* per se to make miracles; simply absorbing even a small amount of G-d's Letter and blueprint for creation has marvelous potential that we cannot begin to fathom.

*There are many lessons to extricate. One is the inherent importance of sanctifying G-d's Name, something that everyone can accomplish in their own unique way. Another is what so many of us often take for granted. People tend to ignore the small things, deeming them insignificant. When it comes to personal ambitions in Torah study, we must reinforce within ourselves that the little voice whispering messages of despondency in our heads, like "If you can't learn for 'x' amount of time, what's any of it worth?" or "It's not like you'll ever complete the book; why even try?", is lying to us. When we stop over-obsessing on the big picture for just a bit and start noticing small windows of opportunity and capitalizing on them, life becomes so much richer. Many people can't find time in the day for extra Torah, tefillah, or mitzvot, but they might be able to squeeze in 30 seconds here and 5 minutes there to perhaps read a chapter of Tehillim or Mishnayot. It may not seem like much, but its greatness is actually so much more than we can comprehend. The merit of learning one small chapter was enough to quench the thirst of millions of people in a scorching desert; who knows what blessings and salvations your "small" contributions can bring to yourself, your family, and the world at large...*

*"You can't be bitter and  
expect life to be sweet."*

#### Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:

Ariel Ben Frida   Miriam Bat Bakol   Chana Bat Malka   Heleni Orna Bat Chen Chana   Rahamim Ben Shifra   Yitzchak Ben Naama  
Frida Bat Yaffa   Shmuel Ben Chaya   Roi Ben Louise   Ron Ben Avishag   Elkana Yitzchak Ben Ronit   Noah Yisrael Ben Victoria Yaffa