

“CAN WE BRING FORTH WATER FROM THIS ROCK?”
(BAMIDBAR 20:10)

**He mistook another rock
for the one he was seeking**

THIS WEEK'S PARASHA TELLS OF Moshe's tragic error of hitting the rock. Rashi, as interpreted by the Taz, explains the scenario that occurred at this pivotal event in Jewish history: During Miriam's lifetime, a rock followed B'nei Yisroel throughout their years in the desert, miraculously providing them with water in this harsh environment. After Miriam's passing, this unique stone "left" and sat among the regular rocks nearby. Moshe and Aharon went to search for the rock. B'nei Yisroel mockingly questioned them, "What difference does it make which rock you use?" Moshe responded, "You insolent ones! Do you think we can bring forth water from a rock regarding which we were not commanded?" At that moment, an ever so slight degree of annoyance entered Moshe's being and caused him to make two errors: Firstly, he mistook another rock for the one he was seeking. Naturally, when Moshe spoke to this wrong rock, no water came out. This error, however, was not his most serious mistake.

Faced with the prospect of a public debacle, Moshe assumed that Hashem's command must have been to first speak "peacefully," and if that failed, he was to use physical force and hit the rock. Moshe hit a rock (this time the correct one) twice and it produced water. This decision to hit the rock, without having been commanded to do so, was the second, more serious mistake. The Taz tells us that Moshe should either have realized that he was speaking to the wrong stone, or at least waited for further instructions from Hashem.

**What other choice
do you have?**

Put yourself in Moshe's position: A thirsty B'nei Yisroel grow increasingly restless as you search for the rock that has disappeared. They question you. The pressure and criticism provoke you to reply with an infinitesimal trace of anger. It is not your personal honor at stake here; you represent Hashem. Every second of delay is more *chilul* Hashem, a seeming lack of ability to deliver on the Divine promise of water. You finally select the rock you think is correct and speak to it, to no avail. The pressure now is almost unbearable; the people demand action, results. Can you be blamed for thinking that the command meant to include hitting the rock? What other choice do you have?

There is another, more correct choice: Do nothing. Wait. Hashem will provide you with some sort of indication how to proceed. His command was to speak to, and not to hit the rock. No matter how much stress you feel, you are never forced to violate Hashem's word. Despite all the complaints, all the criticism and all the eyes focused on you in that uncomfortable glare of the public spotlight, you have the ability to stand tall and resist the pressure. Hashem can take care of the *chilul* Hashem – it isn't your responsibility to the extent that you must transgress His instructions.

**Sometimes, our challenge
is quite the opposite**

In most cases, our challenge is to take action that is necessary. Laziness and a host of other negative traits tend to prevent us from acting with zeal. But sometimes, our challenge is quite the opposite. Under pressure, we sometimes cross the fine line of impropriety because we feel we must do something. We have, however, the capacity to resist this pressure. By fortifying ourselves with the knowledge that we are merely the soldiers of Hashem, and our job is only to follow the orders of our Commander in Chief, we will be strong and unwavering in our loyalty, and bring only honor and glory to Hashem's Name.