

# Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

## CHUKAT

*G-d said to Moshe: "Take the stick, assemble the congregation... and speak to the rock... You will bring water out from the rock and supply the people and their cattle" (20:7-8).*

But Moshe hit the rock instead of speaking to it. Higher Authority then informed him that he would not bring the Israelites into the Promised Land.

The M'forashim offer many explanations of Moshe's error and G-d's response, which broadly divide into two groups. The first category focuses on Moshe's actually striking the rock instead of speaking to it. The second category considers issues in the general background of Moshe's relationship with Israel, which his striking the rock brought to a head.

The Kitvei Ramad Vali (R. Moshe David Vali, student of the Ramchal) explores an additional dimension to the story. Like Rashi, he links the shortage of water to Miriam's death, which had only just taken place. Rashi brings the tradition that it was in Miriam's merit that they had a constant and miraculous water supply in the previous 40 years, wherever they were. Yet, explains the Alshich, the people did not mourn her when she died, as they were later to

do for Aharon and Moshe. Life carried on whether she was alive or not. As a consequence, the water stopped, as people had been taking her merits for granted. The people became highly provocative: Moshe and Aharon had no recourse, but to go consult with G-d at once in the Ohel Mo'ed, the part of the Mishkan where the Shechina was most intense, and ask for emergency guidance. The Ohr HaChayim observes that G-d shows understanding to those with genuine concerns even if they express themselves without dignity and decorum.

Thus, G-d then told Moshe and Aharon to speak to the Rock. The Ramad's approach links remembering Miriam's merits with G-d commanding Moshe and Aharon to speak to the rock. As Rashi explains elsewhere (Sh'mot 19:3), communicating a particular directive to women involves a degree of delicacy, getting it across with a minimum of effort and in a way that will arouse their sympathetic response. In contrast, men are more likely to get the same point when it is made firmly, emphatically, and explicitly.

For this reason, G-d did not direct Moshe and Aharon to strike the rock as Moshe had previously (Sh'mot 17:5), but instead to speak to the rock. That register was uncharacteristically feminine. It was also designed to arouse the more feminine spiritual stream: Chesed, kindness. It would

thus illustrate to the assembled Israelites that it was in the merit of the quickly-forgotten Miriam that the Chesed of a regular supply of water would now continue. It was that lack of recognition that caused the supply to cease, and Moshe's demonstrating the feminine side would enable Miriam's merits to be recognized, and the water would be duly restored.

But, explains the Ramad (similarly to the Rambam in Sh'moneh P'rakim), Moshe's annoyance: "Listen now, you rebels!" meant that the lesson would not be learnt. Out of anger, he struck the rock rather than spoke to the rock as he was told.

It was a missed educational opportunity to teach the much-needed lesson of not taking people and things for granted...  