

# *Parshat Chukat*

## **When Words can Hit as a Rod**

**June 14th, 2013**

Generally when one imparts an order, one has to be clear and concise because an ambiguity can create misunderstandings. Words can be the mean through which we can clarify a situation, but unfortunately sometimes the opposite, as it happens in our Parsha.

God's command to Moses is certainly enigmatic. "Take the rod and gather the people, and speak unto the rock before their eyes".

And here we have many questions. Some of them:

- 1) Why to take the rod if the commandment is not to hit but to speak to the rock? We don't use a rod to speak, so the logic would indicate that if he was asked to take it, he would use it to hit the rock.
- 2) Why "to speak unto the rock before their eyes"? If it is about words, God should not have spoken about eyes. We hear words rather than seeing them.
- 3) Why a so hard punishment because of so small mistake? We know about much severe mistakes in the Torah with lenient punishments. Not letting Moses to enter the Promise Land just because hitting the rock seems to be a disproportioned punishment.

Maimonides explains that the sin of Moses and Aaron was not related with hitting the rock but with what they said when they did it. They spoke to the People of Israel saying: "Listen now you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?". The fact that they spoke so badly to them, their People, was the real cause of the hard punishment.

A friend of mine, Fabian Werbin, who is a Rabbi in Roanoke, Virginia, connects Maimonides interpretation with the first and second question we have mentioned in order to understand the real implications of Moses and Aaron's mistake.

Moses was commanded to take the rod but not to hit with it: The same happens with our words and the way we use them. We are commanded to use them in a proper way, sharing love and care to other human beings, and not to harm anyone. At the same time, the implications of the way we use our words will have a concrete repercussion in the life of the people who are close to us: What we say it is not just "heard" but also "seen".

Moses failed when he forgot the power of his own words. With this new generation, who were not the old well-known complainers of the past, there was no reason to treat them so harshly. Moses lost his patience, used the stone to hit and his words to unfairly punish the people.

May we learn from this story the importance of using our words to create and not to destroy, to build relationships and getting close to other human being.

Shabbat Shalom!

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