



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

MOSHE'S SIN

At a time of drought, a rock in the desert had the capacity to provide water. God therefore told Moshe (and Aharon) to speak to the rock.

Instead Moshe - under pressure from a difficult people - lost his temper and hit the rock, and God punished him severely.

Yet at an earlier juncture, Moshe had been told to hit the rock. So what was the sin he now committed?

The Yalkut Shim'oni compares Moshe to a teacher. If a pupil needs a rebuke, it all depends, says the Yalkut, on his age and stage of development.

With a young pupil who doesn't yet know how to reason things out, the teacher is entitled to smack him; but with an older pupil, hitting is unlikely to get anywhere and the teacher should speak to him.

Moshe was not punished because the rock had done anything wrong, but because as a leader he was dealing with the people in an inappropriate way.

By this stage, they had matured sufficiently for a verbal rebuke.

A Lesson in Public Relations

Why is this sidra called CHUKAT, "a statute"?

Tradition divides the mitzvot into those which reason can and cannot elucidate. The latter are called statutes (CHUKIM).

Rashi says the nations of the world ask Israel why they keep commandments such as the rule of the Red Heifer. In response, the Israelites say, "It is a Divine decree, a statute!"

In other words, instead of seeking explanations for certain laws, we simply say it is the word of God.

This echoes the modern problem of public relations. We have to be smart enough we know which approach to take when outsiders question us - whether to try painstaking explanations, or to choose to say, "This is a mark of Jewish identity!" -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH