

This week's Dvar Torah is designated in memory of my mother-in-law, Chava Rachel bat Sinai, Evelyn Lewko, א"ח Whose Yahrzeit is this Shabbat, the 10th of Tammuz. *Tehei Nafshah Tzrura Bitzror HaChayim*, May her memory be a blessing to all.

In this week's parasha (20:7) Moshe Rabbeinu is informed that he will not enter Eretz K'naan, the Land of Israel. The reason given is because he **hit** the rock instead of **speaking** to it. The question many commentators ask is: what was the problem with hitting the *rock*, considering the fact that it had been done previously (Shemot 17:6), and particularly, since HaShem had instructed him there to *strike* the rock. Of course, the simple and correct, yet incomplete answer is that in the earlier instance, HaShem had instructed him to hit the rock, while here in our present instant HaShem had said to *speak* to the rock. The reason the answer is incomplete is that we should inquire as to why HaShem was no longer interested in hitting the rock.

In parashat Shemot, the Torah describes the *mateh* (staff) with which Moshe would later hit the rock as follows, "This staff you shall take in your hand, and with it you shall do the Ottot (signs)" [Shemot 4:17]. Let us look at various places where the word Ott is used. There are several Mitzvot that are known as Ottot. One of them is Brit Milah, which is a sign between HaShem and the offspring of Avraham Avinu (Bereishit 17:11). HaShem said to Moshe after showing him the burning bush: "I will be with you, and this will be for you the Ott" [Shemot 3:12]. Tefillin are also called an Ott on one's arm, as well as a remembrance on one's head [Shemot 13:9]. We find regarding Shabbat: You shall observe my Shabbat, for it is an Ott between Me and you for your generations to know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you" [Shemot 31:13].-This pasuk appears after the giving of the Torah, but the Mitzvah was already given at Marah and likely, at some level in Mitzrayim (Egypt). Finally, we note that the blood that was placed on the houses of the Jews to keep the Mash'chit [destroyer] away when the firstborn Egyptians were being killed was also referred to as Ott [Shemot 12:13].

The common denominator which the entire list shares, is that they all relate to the time that precedes the giving of the Torah. Chazal (Sages) classify this period as "*Lifnei HaDibbur*" *before the Dibbur [commandments]* (Chagigah 6a). This is referring to the hearing of HaShem speaking to the people at the revelation at Sinai.

We can now see a difference in change of policy towards hitting the rock. The first time, in parashat Beshalach, was before Matan Torah- in the period of Ottot, when physical signs were needed to convey a message to the rock. However, after Matan Torah, a higher level of communication was established as the proper way of communicating to the rock to give out its water. Moshe was not supposed to use the staff in that way. Only speech was now appropriate for the miracle at hand. The lesson all parents can learn is that there is a time when a mild "patch" spank is in place when child is too young to reason with but after that stage speaking, reasoning and communication is the proper path

Shabbat Shalom from Brooklyn, N.Y.

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

(Some of these thoughts heard from Rabbi Yosef Carmel)