

**The Shul**  
at the Lubavitch Center  
6701 Old Pimlico Road  
Baltimore, MD 21209  
410-486-2666  
www.chabadshul.org



June 23, 2018

Chukat

10 Tammuz, 5778

## Moses Strikes the Rock: The Full Story

The “Waters of Strife” (Mei Meribah) is among the most famous and enigmatic stories in the Torah. It goes like this: There is a water crisis, and G-d’s commands to Moses to draw water from the rock. Moses fails to sanctify G-d’s name and strikes the rock instead. G-d punishes him by not allowing him to enter the Land of Israel.

The exact chain of events, what Moses wrongdoing was, and a host of other details are unclear, and the story of Moses hitting the rock has baffled many a student for thousands of years. Let us recount the story, analyze the explanations of the classic commentators, and interpret the story with a chassidic spin. First, let’s get some context.

### Background

In the year 2488 from creation, the 40<sup>th</sup> year of the Jews’ sojourn in the desert, Miriam, prophetess and sister of Moses, passed away. With her passing, the rock that supplied the Jews with water dried up. The Jews had this miraculous well in Miriam’s merit, so when she passed on, the well ran dry, and the Jews were left in the desert without water.

This was not the first time the Jews had no water. It is actually the third time the Torah records such a story.

The first time was when the Jews were fresh out of Egypt. They arrived in a place called Marah, where all the water was bitter. G-d told Moses to throw a bitter tree branch into the water, and it miraculously sweetened the water and made it drinkable.

The second time was shortly after the first, when the Jews were in Refidim and also ran out of water. Moses called on G-d for help, and G-d commanded him strike a particular rock with his staff. The rock split open and water gushed forth. This rock came to be known as “Miriam’s Well,” for, as mentioned, the miracle was done in her merit. For 40 years, this rock traveled with the people and served them faithfully, providing water for them and their animals, its tributaries serving as borders between the tribes when they camped.

### The Story

Our story begins close to 40 years later, on the eve of the Jews’ entry to the Promised Land. The Torah records that the Jews camped in Kadesh and that Miriam died:

The congregation had no water; so they assembled against Moses and Aaron. The people quarreled with Moses, and they said, “If only we had died with the death of our brothers before the L-rd. Why have you brought the congregation of the L-rd to this desert so that we and our livestock should die there? Why have you taken us out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place; it is not a place for seeds, or for fig trees, grapevines, or pomegranate trees, and there is no water to drink.”

Moses and Aaron moved away from the assembly to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they fell on their faces. [Then] the glory of the L-rd appeared to them. The L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: “Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and speak to the rock in their presence so that it will give forth its water. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock and give the congregation and their livestock to drink.”

Moses took the staff from before the L-rd as He had commanded him. Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock, and he said to them, “Now listen, you rebels, can we draw water for you from this rock?” Moses raised his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, when an abundance of water gushed forth, and the congregation and their livestock drank.

### The Story Behind the Story

This passage requires a lot of explanation. G-d told Moses to speak to the rock, so why did He also tell him to take the staff? Also, what did Moses mean when he said, “Can we draw water for you from this rock”? The Jews had watched him bring water from a rock for 40 years, and G-d had just commanded him to do precisely that. Why the hesitation? Additionally, why did Moses call the Jews “rebels,” and why did he hit the rock twice?

The classic commentator Rashi fills in some important background information: G-d told Moses to speak to the rock, but the rock had rolled away and rested among other rocks. Moses didn’t know to which rock he should speak, and the one he addressed was the wrong one. Nothing happened, and the Jewish people began to mock Moses, demanding that he draw water from any rock. Moses grew angry and called them rebels for insinuating that he had the power to perform a miracle where G-d had not willed it (i.e., with a rock other than the one G-d had specified).

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When speaking did not produce results, Moses remembered that 40 years previously G-d had commanded him to hit the rock to draw water. And this time, G-d had also instructed him to take the staff with him. He therefore reasoned that he should strike the rock. Meanwhile, the wrong stone rolled away, and the correct one rolled into place. Thus when Moses' staff came down, it was on the right rock. The first time he struck it only droplets appeared, so Moses struck it again, and then water gushed forth.

### The Sin

At this stage in the story, all seems pretty standard. No water, people complain, Moses prays, G-d performs a miracle. Seems like a regular day for the Jews in the desert. The next verse is where the story takes a turn:

The L-rd said to Moses and Aaron, "Since you did not have faith in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the Land which I have given them. These are the waters of dispute [Mei Meribah] where the children of Israel contended with the L-rd, and He was sanctified through them.

In an instant, Moses and Aaron's dreams were crushed. Their life's goal, to bring the Jews to the Promised Land, dissolved to dust. Why? Of what sin were they guilty? And why such a harsh punishment?

In the thousands of years that the Torah has been studied, tens, if not hundreds, of interpretations have been offered on this story.

(by Shlomo Chaim Kesselman from <https://www.chabad.org/>)

<p><b>Mr. Jay and Mrs. Dina Bernstein</b> are sponsoring Kiddush this Shabbat in celebration of the <b>birth of their grandson, Ethan William Bernstein;</b> and the <b>graduations of their son Yehuda, and their son-in-law, Benny.</b></p>	
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<p>This Summer, <b>Join ladies of our community for weekly</b> Shabbat afternoon Torah Learning and Refreshments. Presented by <b>Mrs. Rochel Kaplan</b> at 6509 Deancroft Road (corner of Hanway Rd) <b>from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.</b> RSVP 410-486-1959  <b>לעילוי נשמת חיה יוסא בת חנוך הענוך הכהן ה.ב.צ.ג.ת</b></p>
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<p><b>Yahrzeits This Week:</b></p>
<p>Rabbi Shmuel Kaplan    13 Tamuz - Tues night/Wed    for father    HoRav Moshe Binyomin ben HoRav Aryeh Laib</p>

<p><b>SHUL DIRECTORY</b></p>	
<p><b>Rabbi:</b> Shmuel Kaplan . rabbikaplan@chabadmd.com  <b>Treasurer:</b> Michael Frank . . . shul.chabad@gmail.com  <b>Membership:</b> Jay Bernstein . . . bernstein1@msn.com  <b>Kiddush:</b> Reuven Frank . . . . . rfrank82@gmail.com  <b>Bulletin:</b> Howard Kaplon . . . . . hkaplon@towson.edu  <b>Website:</b> Shoshana Zakar . . . . . sue.zakar@gmail.com</p>	<p><b>Gabbaim:</b>  Yehudah Buchwalter . . . judahbuchwalter@verizon.net  Allan Genut . . . . . agenut@gmail.com  Ephraim Siff  <b>Mikvah Mei Menachem</b> . . . . . 410-415-5113  <b>Aleph Learning Institute</b> . Mrs. Rochel Kaplan, Director  <a href="http://www.alephlearninginstitute.org">www.alephlearninginstitute.org</a> / email: <a href="mailto:alephjli@gmail.com">alephjli@gmail.com</a></p>

<p><b>Davening and Shiurim Schedule</b></p>	
<p><b>Friday, 6/22 — 9 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.</p> <p><b>Shabbat, 6/23 — 10 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.  Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:22 a.m.  Berachot Gemora Shiur — 7:05 p.m.  Minchah &amp; Seudah Shilishit — 8:05 p.m.  Ma'ariv — 9:20 p.m.</p> <p><b>Sunday, 6/24 — 11 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.  Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:20 p.m.</p> <p><b>Monday, 6/25 — 12 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.  Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:20 p.m.</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, 6/26— 13 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:20 p.m.</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 6/27 — 14 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:20 p.m.</p> <p><b>Thursday, 6/28 — 15 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.  Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:20 p.m.</p> <p><b>Friday, 6/29 — 16 Tammuz</b>  Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.  Candles — 8:19 p.m.  Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.</p>