



From Rock to Compote

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

It must have been about sixty years ago, and I was a young student in Bobov. The centre of the chasidous was then in Crown Heights and all the mosdos we concentrated in a two-block area. The main Bais Medrash was a converted multi car garage and the Rav's home was a mere one hundred feet away. Usually the Friday night Shabbos 'tish' would be held in the first-floor reception area of the Rav's home, and it was on special occasions that the 'tish' was moved into the large Bais Medrash. One such special occasion would be Shabbos Chanukah and my memory casts back to then. The shul was filled with the entire olam and swelled even more because there was a 'zocher' for a new born child being celebrated at the same time.

The Rav Zt"l sat at the front table flanked by close family and special guests. One of the guests was a well renowned Rosh Yeshivah of a Litvisha Yeshivah who was gracing the Rebbe's Shabbos table because a relative was the celebrant of the zochor. The Rav asked the Rosh Yeshivah to sit next to him and with his radiant smile and holy manner made the guest feel part and parcel of the occasion. The tish took on its usual holy cadence, with fish, Torah being spoken, soup and then main dish of chicken and kugel. All this was interspersed with Shabbos zemiros and various nigunim. The Rebbe had a special tune for each part of the holy Shabbos meal, and these tunes, sung softly throughout the meal made one feel as if the table that was in Crown Heights had been transferred to the very heights of Shomayim. Towards the end of the seudah, compote was served. This was a sweet apple stew with large pieces of fruit floating in the cold sweet sauce. As I watched, (I was blessed to often stand directly behind the Rav) I saw the Rav do something completely different than what was his custom. He dropped a piece of challah into the spoonful of compote and ate it with his usual elegance. Now the



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custom in Bobov was that one made a brocha on compote of fruit, and the Rav always made such blessings with his special enthusiastic gusto. Yet, this time, there was no brocha, and no resounding amen from the many attendees. I quickly understood what was happening, the Rav, ever vigilant about the feelings of others and his zealousness in protecting the honour of all Yieden, didn't want to put the esteemed Rosh Yeshivah into difficult situation. The Rav understood that according to the custom of his guest, no brocha need to be made and if anything, adding a bit of challah would obviate any need for an extra brocha.

Nothing was said, and I doubt the Rosh Yeshivah even noticed. The Rav turned and whispered to me, 'I am not changing our custom, just this time I don't want to put the Rosh Yeshivah in a difficult position so I just added the challah.' I share this not to go into any halachic discussion with my readers, I just want to show how a true Tzadik is always aware of others feelings and quietly does what is necessary to make those around him feel comfortable and not awkward. I witnessed such holy thoughtfulness many times in Bobov, both by Harav Shlomo Zt"l and his son Harav Naftulah Zt"l. They created a sense of spiritual warmth that was calming yet exhilarating, and it was all done with the little things that make such a difference in life.

In Parshas Chukas we learn about the death of Miriam and the resulting lack of water. The people demonstrated against Moshe and Aaron blaming them for their difficult situation. Hashem tells Moshe,

"Take the staff and you and Aaron assemble the community. Speak to the rock in their presence, and it will give forth its water.... Moshe took the staff as instructed. Moshe and Aaron then assembled the congregation before the rock, 'Listen now you rebels!' shouted Moshe. 'Shall we produce water for you from this rock?' With that Moshe raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff. A huge amount of water gushed out, and the community and their animals were able to drink."

Of course, we all know what happened afterwards, Moshe and Aaron were told they would never lead the people into the holy land.

The Rebbe Rav Yitzchok of Vorka Zt"l explained this episode in a unique way. The Rebbe explained that the reason Moshe Rabbeinu struck the rock instead of speaking to it as Hashem had instructed was because he didn't want to shame the Yieden. If he spoke to the rock and the water flowed, then in Shomayim the forces that seek to speak ill of the Bnei Yisroel would exclaim that here a simple inanimate rock heard and followed the wish of Hashem, whilst the Yieden are often prone to revolt or disobey. Therefore, Moshe acted as he did to protect the honour of his brethren.

He hit the rock so that there would not be any charge against the Yieden.

True leadership of Klall Yisroel worries about the honour of each Yied. We all have to be sensitised for each other's needs and weaknesses. The flowing waters of Torah and chesed are born in the acts of care we share.