



The Israelites got the water they were desperate for but not exactly the way they wanted it: “Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock; and he said to them, ‘Listen, *you rebels*, shall we get water for you out of this rock?’” (Num. 20:10). Moses, perhaps stabbed with a grief unacknowledged and lacking patience for more grumbling, did not merely speak to the rock. He did not only hit the rock with his rod. He called the people – his people – rebels (*hamorim*).

Rashi explains the word as “foolish people.” Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra similarly writes that their request was farfetched, prompting Moses and Aaron to reply: “Do we have the power to bring forth water out of this rock for you?” Nahmanides elaborates on ibn Ezra’s position: “He [Moses] thus stressed their rebellion, telling them they were wanting in faith, and that the reason for their quarrelling with him was because they thought that God would not act wondrously for them.” It is as if, after all of the signs and wonders that the Israelites relished, they still doubted God’s salvific powers. This, Moses could not tolerate.

But Moses did not get the last word in the chapter. God was angry with Moses and Aaron and forbade them from entering the land: “Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them” (Num. 20:12). Rashi here is unequivocal: “For had you spoken to the rock, and it had brought forth water, I would have been sanctified before the whole congregation, for they would have said: This rock, which cannot speak and cannot hear and needs no maintenance, fulfils the bidding of the Omnipresent God. How much more should we do so?” If a rock can bring forth water, then we, too, have the capacity to follow the will of our Maker.

Moses, out of anger, hit the rock, but God ultimately punished him because he lost faith in the people he was leading. Once you stop believing in your people, you lose the privilege of leading them. “If you want to be a leader,” writes Bruce Kananoff in “Leadership in One W