

# Drash for Shabbat Pinchas

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Shabbat Shalom!

One of the many happenings in this week's Parsha, Pinchas, concerns the relationship between God and Moses. God reminds Moses that he will not be going into the Promised Land with the Children of Israel because Moses had disobeyed God's instruction when they were crossing into the wilderness. The Children of Israel were clamoring for water. God instructed Moses to speak to a rock and water would come out for the People to drink. However, instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck the rock with his staff. For this offense of defying God's instructions, Moses was told he would not be entering the Land of Israel.

When Moses is reminded of his transgression and the price he will pay for it, Moses asks God to publicly proclaim the reason why he can't proceed with his community and to say that this was his only flaw. Moses was afraid that his failure would be grouped with those who had transgressed against God in the desert, like Dathan and Korach. So, he asked God to emphasize that the only flaw he committed was that of the rock.

It's crazy to think that Moses would be on the same level as the sinners and rebels we have already read about. It's impossible to imagine he would be prevented from entering Israel for an act of treason that led to the end of others. Why is it so important for Moses to remind us that hitting the rock was his only error?

Another of my stories: George Armstrong was appointed to the United States Military Academy in 1857. After his graduation, he established himself as a brilliant and daring leader in battle. He was so proficient that he became a brigadier general at the age of twenty-three, the youngest high-level officer in military history. George's fame was equalled by other famous Georges - George Washington and George S. Patton among them. By the end of the Civil War, George Armstrong was listed as one of the most successful commanders.

George's pursuit of the Confederate Army led to Richmond, Virginia, where he dispatched the lines of defense and captured soldiers, cannon and wagons, until April 9th when, after totally defeating the enemy, it was George who accepted the Confederate flag of defeat. After the Civil War, George Armstrong relocated to Fort Riley, Kansas where, for the next eight years, he led successful engagements against the Cheyenne Indians, including the battle of Washita and an engagement against Black Kettle's band of Indians.

However, we do not remember the successful exploits of General George. What we do retain is his expedition against the Sioux Indians in June of 1876. His regiment of 655 men went against 4,000 armed warriors at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, where George Armstrong and all of his men were killed. We don't think of George Armstrong's successes during the Civil War. We only remember the defeat of the Little Bighorn and the demise of General George Armstrong Custer. Many of you will remember this episode as Custer's last stand.

People often forget the wonderful accomplishments and careers of others and dwell only on the flaw that ended it. Moses was punished for a mistake that is hard for us to comprehend. To his credit - he hit a rock that produced water to quench a thirsty nation. Yet, Moses made a mistake. He was supposed to speak to the rock, not strike it. Because he did not follow God's instructions Moses had a price to pay. We however must realize that this error, as terrible as the results were for Moses, does not diminish his accomplishments. He led us out of Egypt and developed us into the people we are today. In no way can that punishment lower our regard for Moses. When Moses is leaving the Children of Israel, that point is repeated again and again. It is only because of the rock that he didn't enter the Land of Israel.

How often does a man who works hard for years and years but makes an error at his last stand go down in disgrace for an act that ended his career? How many people's last stand become their most notorious, if not their only stand? Perhaps God's repeating Moses' single transgression are a lesson to all of us. There are no first stands...there are no last stands. If we stand for something worthy, then we stand forever!

Good Shabbas!