

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT CHUKAT

12-13 JULY | 7 TAMMUZ

The Power of Words



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Many years ago, in a school assembly, our teacher asked us, "What is the strongest and most powerful muscle in the body?" Some of the older boys started flexing and people shouted out the obvious choices, "biceps", "triceps" and "quads". But what does power actually mean? How does one measure it? By strength? Maybe. By force? Possibly. Or perhaps, by its impact? The teacher's rather unexpected answer to this question was - our tongue. Why? Because the tongue forms words and words are amongst the most powerful things we have. A rousing speech can inspire a nation. A hurtful

comment can reduce somebody to tears. I am not implying that a punch to the head is not going to hurt, but your words have the power to stop the aggressor and make them lower their fists.

Our teacher then asked for two volunteers. She gave the first student a banana and asked him to remove it from its peel. She gave the second student a tube of toothpaste and asked her to squeeze all the paste out. Both students did their tasks quickly, but she then asked the students to put the banana back in its peel and the toothpaste back into its tube. My peers stared in bewilderment at her; was this a trick question? "We can't", they admitted and of course they were right.

The same is true with words; once words have been said, we cannot take them back. Positively or negatively, words will have an

impact, and once said, and more importantly, once heard, we cannot un-hear them. We can apologise, yes, but the impact remains, often a very powerful impact.

In this week's Torah portion, Chukat, God instructed Moshe (Moses) to speak to a rock, to use the power of his words to bring forth water. But instead, Moshe struck the rock, leading to his exclusion from entering the Promised Land. In fact, Moshe even used his speech negatively: "Listen here rebels, shall we bring forth water for you from this rock!" (Bemidbar 20:10). Moshe missed the opportunity to use the power of speech positively to miraculously provide water for the people, and in doing so, to create a *Kiddush Hashem*, a sanctification of God's Name. Let's learn from Moshe, and from the banana and the toothpaste, to be thoughtful and careful not to cause harm with our words and to take every opportunity to use their great power for the good.

Chukat Wordsearch

Find the words in the puzzle.

Words can go in any direction.

Words can share letters as they cross over each other.

Generous

Humble

Chukat

Kindness

Empathy

Laws

Happiness

Peace

Helping

Rock

Honesty

Shabbat

H	C	R	S	O	T	S	S	S	K
Z	A	W	O	A	Y	U	H	S	G
E	A	P	K	C	F	O	A	E	H
L	L	U	P	U	K	R	B	N	E
E	H	B	Y	I	Q	E	B	D	L
C	F	Y	M	Q	N	N	A	N	P
K	Q	G	J	U	S	E	T	I	I
P	E	A	C	E	H	G	S	K	N
E	M	P	A	T	H	Y	H	S	G
R	K	Y	T	S	E	N	O	H	S