

Parsha Ponders

Chukas | July 11, 2024 | 6 Tammuz 5784

*Rebellious fools*¹

ויקהלו משה ואהרן את-הקהל אל-פני הסלע ויאמר להם שמעו-נא המרים המן-הסלע הזה נוציא לכם מים
Moshe and Aharon gathered the congregation in front of the rock, and he said to them: “Listen now, you rebels! Will we really draw forth water from this rock?”²

The infamous episode of *Mei Merivah*, the waters of strife, is fraught with questions. One of which centers on a comment of Rashi³. When Moshe called the people “rebels” for requesting miraculous water in the wilderness, Rashi says his intent was “fools”. Now, the Jewish people are known as a “wise and understanding nation”⁴. Why then would Moshe call them fools?

According to the *Midrash*⁵, when he called them “fools”, he was referring to their disrespect towards Miriam. She had just died, and the Jewish people didn’t eulogize her. Instead, they complained about a lack of water. Now, her dying and the lack of water were not a coincidence. Our Sages tell us⁶ that for forty years they had miraculous water in her merit. Once she died, the water stopped.

But still, even the Egyptians eulogized Yaakov for seventy days when he died⁷. Why wouldn’t the Jews? However, we could get out of that question and say that the Egyptians only mourned Yaakov because when he died, the massive famine in Egypt returned⁸.

Actually, the behavior of the Jews is difficult. Why would they complain about a lack of water? They should have prayed to Hashem. Just like they received water previously, directly from His hand, why would now be any different? What inclined them to complain?

It must be that they thought that now that Miriam died, there was no hope for water. They must have thought that prayer wouldn’t have helped. Since the whole water was in her merit, and she was the holiest woman in the nation, now that she was gone, there was nothing left to do but complain.

However, according to this, our question comes back in full force. Why didn’t the Jews eulogize Miriam? Just like the Egyptians mourned Yaakov, as his death led to the famine returning, the Jews should have mourned Miriam, as her death led to the water stopping!

It comes out then that the Jews were contradicting themselves. They felt that Miriam was so holy that there was no hope in anyone else being worthy of bringing them water. Yet, they didn’t find her holy enough to eulogize or mourn. We are told⁹ that someone who is self-contradictory in their practices is called a fool, wandering in the dark¹⁰. Therefore, it makes sense why Moshe would call them fools. Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Chasam Sofer al HaTorah](#) to [Numbers](#) 20:10

² [Numbers](#) *loc. cit.*

³ *Ad. loc.*

⁴ [Deuteronomy](#) 4:6

⁵ The [Chasam Sofer](#) cites this from [Yalkut Shimoni](#) but I couldn’t find it. It could be he intended to [Yalkut Shimoni Chukas](#) § 763, which implies that they didn’t eulogize her

⁶ [Tosefta Sotah](#) 11:4, brought in [Ta’anis](#) 9a

⁷ [Genesis](#) 50:3 says the Egyptians mourned him for seventy days

⁸ [Tosefta Sotah](#) 10:3, brought by [Ramban](#) to [Genesis](#) 47:18

⁹ [Eruvin](#) 6b

¹⁰ [Ecclesiastes](#) 2:14