

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־הָעֵדָה מִדְּבַר־צֹן בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן וַיָּשֻׁב הָעָם בַּקֹּדֶשׁ וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקָּבֵר שָׁם:	<i>They came, the Children of Israel, the entire community, [to the] Wilderness of Tzyn, in the first month. The people stayed in Kadesh. Miryam died there, and she was buried there.</i>
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וַיָּבֹאוּ-They came. The verse gives us an image of a large assembly of people moving *en masse*. **כָּל־הָעֵדָה-the entire community.** Recall that after the episode of the spies, the *entire community* was going to die in the desert. According to Rashi, **כָּל־הָעֵדָה** means **עֵדָה הַשְּׁלֵמָה** the *whole complete regenerated* people. These are the people who have been designated for life. Ramban remarks that every time the text refers to *the entire community* the community seems to be complaining. **כָּל־הָעֵדָה** is a hint of what is to come. **מִדְּבַר־צֹן-Wilderness of Tzyn.** Our inclination is to glance at a map and see where this is, but there is no cartography in biblical Israel. The Torah assumes however, that we know where it is what all its associations are. It is the place from which the spies embarked to Canaan. **בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן-in the first month.** Of which year? It doesn't tell us. But, we have already determined that this is a new generation and knowing that they will soon enter the land, we can reasonably conclude that this is the first month of the fortieth year. Most importantly, it is anniversary month of the Exodus. Miracles happen in this month, especially miracles connected to water i.e. the splitting of the sea and the first miracle of drinking water at Mara. (Exod. 15:23-25). **וַיָּשֻׁב הָעָם בַּקֹּדֶשׁ-The people stayed in Kadesh.** Kadesh is located in the *Wilderness of Tzyn*. With the note that *they stayed* there we are assuming that they were able to subsist and that they had what to drink. **וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם- And Miryam died there.** This is of course the explosive detail in the verse. There is no lead-up to it. It comes out of nowhere. Why did she die? How did she die? Unknown. But, a creative eulogist at her funeral would have pointed out that *it was exactly forty years ago, in this very month, perhaps on this very day, that she took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her, with timbrels and with dancing. It was exactly two-score years ago she lead the people in song. That was her greatest hour! and she was buried there.* It doesn't tell us who buried her.

וְלֹא־הָיָה מַיִם לָעֵדָה וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן:	<i>Now there was no water for the community, so they assembled against Moshe and against Aharon;</i>
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וְלֹא־הָיָה מַיִם לָעֵדָה-Now there was no water for the community. The juxtaposition of Miriam's death

with the lack of water prompted the rabbis to conclude - **בְּאֵר מִרְיָם (A miraculous) well (of water, accompanied Israel through the desert) on account of Miriam.** **מָתָה מִרְיָם נִסְתַּלַּק הַבְּאֵרWhen Miriam died, the well**

disappeared. "וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם: "As it is written, "And Miriam died there," "וְלֹא הָיָה מַיִם לָעֵדָה" *and immediately after that it says, "There was no water for the community."* We should recall, in light of the purification passage preceding this pericope, that the absence of water has two important consequences, the obvious one being thirst and death, and the not-so-obvious one being the inability to concoct the purifying solution. Without water you can't mix the purifying agent to remove the impurity of death. Having just incurred the death of Miriam, they people will die of thirst, and those connected to her death will die in a state of impurity. **וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן-so they assembled against Moshe and against Aharon.** Couldn't it have just said *against Moses and Aaron?* Why are they both singled out, why *davka, and against Aharon?* Because they are two different personalities with two different track records and two different *mommy and daddy* temperaments. In the eyes of the people, they are both responsible for this crisis. That the community is ganging up on both of them creates the possibility of tension. It's quite possible that the people's complaint will bring the two of them into conflict with each other.



וַיִּרְבּוּ הָעָם עִם־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאַהֲרֹן וְלוֹ גִּזְעֵנוּ בְּגֹעַ אֶחָיו לִפְנֵי ה':	<i>the people quarreled with Moshe, they said, saying: And would that we had expired as our brothers expired before the presence of God!</i>
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וַיִּרְבּוּ הָעָם עִם־מֹשֶׁה-the people quarreled with Moshe. But they direct their fusillade at Moses. Why? Because in the end, the people understand that it is Moses who is the great intercessor. Moses has interceded in the past and therefore, should intercede now. And while we all know that Aaron is important, Moses is way more important. This is also a deliberate echo of the earlier water complaint at Rephidim where the exact same phrase, **וַיִּרְבּוּ הָעָם עִם־מֹשֶׁה** is used (Exod. 17:1-2). **וְלוֹ גִּזְעֵנוּ- And would that we had expired.** This is the report of what the people said, but it sounds like it's the culmination of a litany of complaints and for the

sake of brevity, the text cut to the punchline. וְלוֹ גָּנַעְנוּ is slightly different from the previous complaint during the spies incident where they said לֹא-לֵדָוּ-לִי-מֵתוּ *would that we had died* twice: לֹא-מָתוּ (Num. 14:2) They both mean basically the same thing: לָגַע is *to expire* and לָמוּת is *to die*. But when we read a little more closely we recall that גוּע is the verb used when the Torah relates the deaths of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Ishmael, following which they are gathered to their kin after a long life. (Gen. 25:5, 17, 35:29, 49:33). The point of the verb גוּע in this instance is sarcasm. *We only wish that we could have expired like our brothers, who lived out a long and natural life instead of us who have to die from thirst!* Considering that the capstone commandment of the Torah is וּבַחַרְתָּ בַחַיִּים *Choose life!* (Deut. 30:19) the desire for death here is all the more efficacious. בְּגוּעוּ *as our brothers expired*. We have just read that Moses' and Aaron's sister has died. And in just a few verses we will read about the death (expiration, אָהָרָן!) of Moses' brother, Aaron (Num. 20:24-29). This stings. Moreover, when Moses is told that he is about to die (not *expire*, btw), the text curiously adds this modifier בְּאִשְׁרֵי-מֵת אָהָרֹן *(you are to die) as your brother Aaron died* (Deut. 32:50). This ignites an imaginative rabbinic excursus that Moses envied Aaron's death. *before the presence of God*. This is the kick in the gut. *At least they 'expired' (sacrasm) while God's presence was with them. But we have to 'expire' in God's absence! And why is He absent? Because you have not done your job to keep His presence with us!*

וְלָמָּה הֵבֵאתֶם אֶת-יְקֻהָל ה' אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לָמוּת שָׁם אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעִירָנוּ:	<i>And why did you bring the assembly of God into this wilderness, to die there, we and our cattle?</i>
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וְלָמָּה הֵבֵאתֶם אֶת-יְקֻהָל ה' אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לָמוּת שָׁם אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעִירָנוּ:

And why did you (plural) bring. Note that the angry mob is now direct-

ing its fire at both Moses and Aaron. *the assembly of God*. They could have just said, *us*, but the fact that they use such flowery language about themselves just tells us how highly they held themselves in esteem. אֶל-הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה *into this wilderness*. As opposed to another wilderness WHERE THERE WAS WATER! *to die there*. Why are they saying *there*? They are right in *this wilderness* right now! It conjures an image that the people are all clumped together in their assembly, but that they are pointing to the wilderness in their backdrop, and that they envisage their own death *out there* where they presumably will have been looking at every square inch for a sign of water. אֲנַחְנוּ וּבְעִירָנוּ *we and our cattle*. This is the midpoint of their angry diatribe, therefore it draws our attention. Curiously, the only other time the word *cattle*-בְּעִיר appears in the Torah is when Pharaoh tells Joseph to tell his brothers *Do this, load your cattle and go, come back to the land of Canaan* (Gen. 45:17) to retrieve their father. What's the implication? *Here, we are all loaded up, ready to go to Canaan, but how do you expect us to go there IF WE HAVE NO WATER FOR*

Shabbat Shalom!

OUR CATTLE OR FOR US? The other thing that comes to mind is that while they are a thirsty *עֵדָה-community* they are behaving like a thirsty *עֹדָר-flock*.

וְלָמָּה הֵעֵלִיתֶנּוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהֵבִיא אֹתָנוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַרָע הַזֶּה לֹא מָקוֹם זֵרַע וְתַאֲנָה וְגִפְסוֹ וְרַמְיוֹן וּמַיִם אֵינֶן לְשָׁתוֹת:	<i>And why did you make us go up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place, not a place of seeds and figs, vines and pomegranates and water, none to drink!</i>
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And why did you make us go up from Egypt. Wow! This just teaches us that when someone has a complaint about something specific, there is always a deeper complaint hovering in the background. After a relocation for work, the adolescent who complains to their father that they have no friends in the new place is really saying, *Why did you have to move me here!* The complaint of course, torpedoes the whole story. The reason why they left Egypt was to free them from slavery and bring them to the land that God promised to their ancestors. But when you are dying of thirst, you don't have the psychological where-withal to place your life in the larger context of history. *We could care less about your stupid plan here! We're dying of thirst!* *to bring us to this evil place*. The Land of Israel is always referred to as *the good land*. This however, is *the evil place*. *not a place of seeds and figs, vines and pomegranates*. More sarcasm. But this anticipates the lush description of the seven species of the land in Deuteronomy 8:8. Here we have generic *seeds*, standing in for *wheat and barley*. And *figs, vines and pomegranates* standing in for *vine, fig, and pomegranate, olive-oil and (date) honey*. *and water, none to drink!* That is, *Wherever we look, we can't find water! It just doesn't exist here! The 'luxurious produce' of the land requires copious amounts of rain, spring water and natural irrigation. We don't even have water to drink here!* To be continued...next year!



This week's Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Bonnie Freidenreich and Family in honor of Sheldon Freidenreich's birthday and his first day as President of the Highland Park Conservative Temple-Congregation Anshe Emeth. Mazel Tov!