

Rashi quotes the Midrash that the story of the spies is juxtaposed to the story of Miriam's leprosy to teach us that the spies should have learned a lesson regarding the hazards of slander from Miriam. Torah tells us to remember, not to forget, what happened to Miriam on our journey from Egypt. This is one of the 6 זכירות that we recite daily. According to Rashi, the underlying reason of this command is to remember the Miriam episode so you will not engage in slander as Miriam did against Moses. Why did the Torah single out slander in this way? How does it differ from other interpersonal obligations, מצוות בין אדם לחברו? Why did the Torah deem it necessary to include the Miriam incident among the greatest incidents of Jewish History that we are obligated to always remember? Prima facie it was an insignificant episode, not comparable with the events at Sinai or the Exodus itself or the creation of the world and the Sabbath. We must examine what Miriam and Aaron did.

[Usually we have great latitude in interpreting the Torah. However we don't enjoy that freedom with certain Parshios. For example, an eye for an eye according to Chazal refers to monetary compensation. I have no right to interpret it literally, in a way that differs from the קבלה. Similarly, if someone would interpret פרי עץ הדר as any beautiful fruit other than an Esrog, according to Rambam he would commit heresy. וקצותה את כפה does not mean we cut off her hand; rather it refers to monetary compensation for shaming the protagonist. Rambam in his introduction to סדר זרעים has a section entitled interpretations of Torah transmitted by Moses. He says that we must interpret the text in the way the קבלה tells us. The Rav said he heard from his father in the name of his grandfather Rav Chaim Brisker that the Parsha of Miriam should be included in this group that may only be interpreted according to the קבלה. We must interpret carefully the entire story of how Aaron and Miriam spoke about the אשה כושית that Moses married.]

The word כושית refers to Tziphora's uniqueness, her singular beauty and character. While כושית can mean black, it is also used by the prophet who refers to the Jewish People as הלא כבני כושיים אתם לי, you are a unique, singular people unto Me. Our Rabbis say that Moses divorced his wife after receiving the עשרת הדברות at Sinai, when he was commanded to send the people back to their tents. Gd commanded Moses to remain with Him. Moses, could not return to his regular life, which included his marriage.

Aaron and Miriam thought Moses should have continued the marriage, that the separation from Tziphora was unfair and uncalled for. They questioned the possibility that Gd ordered Moses to separate from his wife, saying they were

prophets as well, that Gd spoke with them too, and they were not commanded to separate from their respective spouses. Why should Moses be different?

Gd confronted Aaron and Moses telling them He speaks to Moses face to face and that he is His trusted servant. How did this answer their question? They failed to recognize that besides his unique saintliness and kindness, Moses was completely different. They argued that Gd spoke to them as well. Based on their own experience, they thought Gd does not approve of a life of abstinence and separation. In failing to recognize Moses' personal uniqueness, they were unaware of the associated uniqueness of Moses' prophecy relative to all other prophets, including themselves.

They were told not to compare themselves to Moses. What is applicable to Miriam and Aaron is incongruous in relation to Moses. Rambam says that Moses' prophecy was unique from all other prophets in several ways. Moses received his prophecy while fully awake. Other prophets experienced prophecy in a dream-like state. Moses received prophecy face to face. Other prophets received their vision through an angel, parable or allegory. Moses was full of vigor after receiving a prophecy. Other prophets became weak after their prophetic encounter. Moses attained prophecy whenever he wanted. Other prophets had to prepare themselves prior to their prophetic encounter.

Moses' uniqueness as a prophet and as a human being was expressed in the words *לֹא כֵן עַבְדִּי מֹשֶׁה*. Gd told Aaron and Miriam you cannot compare yourselves or your revelation to Moses. Their sin was overlooking or ignoring the uniqueness of Moses the person and the uniqueness of his prophecy. Maimonides codified this uniqueness in his 13 fundamental principles of faith, that we believe Moses' prophecy is true and that he was the greatest of prophets that came before or after him. We remember Miriam's sin because her slander negated Moses' uniqueness.

Moses was the greatest yet loneliest person. He had no peer that he could communicate with or confide in. This selection and loneliness expresses the concept of *בְּחִירָה*, selection. It applies to the Jewish People as well; we are the chosen people. We are alone, without a peer in a world that cannot and will not understand us. Denying *בְּחִירָה* is tantamount to denying Judaism. Jacob loved all his children; however his love for Joseph and subsequently Benjamin precipitated metaphysical or ontological oneness. Jacob united with them in a single state, an I-awareness that included these 2 sons while excluding the rest. The rest of the brothers recognized this unique bond between Jacob and the children of Rachel. Judah proclaims that Jacob's life force is bound up with that of Joseph and

Benjamin, not with the any of the other brothers. The same uniqueness applied to Moses. Miriam and Aaron overlooked it. That is why the Torah warns us not to compare Moses with other prophets.

Why did the Torah add **בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצִאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם** to the command to remember the Miriam incident? After all, we knew where this happened. Had Moses not been unique among men, the Exodus would not have taken place. No other prophet could bring about those miracles. Moses alone had the aspect of **סְגוּלָה**, not Aaron or Miriam. The Jews were taken out of Egypt because they also had a uniqueness, a **סְגוּלָה** element. The **סְגוּלָה** element in Moses facilitated representing Gd as His messenger, to redeem the people. They were **בְּדֶרֶךְ**, on their departure from Egypt. Miriam failed to recognize that the reason they were on that very journey at all, and not still mired in slavery in Egypt, was Moses's uniqueness. That is why there is a separate article of faith regarding Moses' prophecy.

We now understand the juxtaposition to the story of the spies and the slander they spoke against the land of Israel. Slandering anything considered by Gd a **סְגוּלָה**, be it an individual, people or object, is a terrible sin. Like Moses and the Jewish People, the land of Israel has the characteristic of **סְגוּלָה**, it was selected by Gd above all others. The spies failed to grasp the uniqueness of the land. Just as with the Miriam's sin, anytime a **סְגוּלָה** is ignored or denigrated, its uniqueness is called into question, and the resulting loss of prestige can be catastrophic. Miriam's slander against Moses set the stage for others to challenge him as well, like the spies and Korach. The chain of events set into motion by Miriam's slander led to the people spending 38 years in the desert and Moses denied entry to the Promised Land, resulting in the exile we find ourselves in to this very day. The juxtaposition of the stories is warranted because the spies neglected to learn the lesson that slandering something Gd considers a **סְגוּלָה** can have terrible negative repercussions.

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