

Dear Chavraya,

As it is today, during the Biblical period water was a precious commodity in the Middle East. According to oral tradition, our people had water during the long desert journey due to the merit of Miriam. Would that we had one of such merit today, giving to drink those who thirst for peace. In this week's Torah portion, Parashat Chukkat, Miriam dies, and there is no longer water for the people. Once again, the people rise up in anger and fear against Moshe. God tells Moshe to take his staff and gather the people, "and speak to the rock, that it may give forth its water." In that moment, with all anxiously assembled, Moshe lashes out at the people with a flow of anger, "Hear now, you rebels! Shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" At that, Moshe struck the rock with his staff, rather than speak to it. Water came forth, but the moment for healing had been lost. The people were grieving for Miriam. Rather than speaking words of comfort and acting in a way to convey to them God's care and succor, Moshe berated them. In calling the people *morim*, rebels, Moshe sears the people with the barb of irony, reminding them of the source of their pain and sorrow. The word *morim* is formed of the very same letters, re-vocalized, but in the same order, as *Miriam*. That he disobeyed God, striking rather than hitting the rock, is generally seen as the sin for which Moshe is not allowed to enter the Land. Never able to understand such punishment for one incident in his long life of service, I have come to see Moses' insensitivity to the people as the more serious sin. Rising in moments both great and small when called to comfort, may we each transcend the challenges of our own lives and speak soothing words to parched souls.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor