



An Illuminating Explanation from the Chasam Sofer He Enlightens Us as to Moshe Rabeinu's Rationale for Striking the Rock

This week's parsha is parshas Chukas. It behooves us to focus on the perplexing episode of "מי מריבה"—**the waters of strife**. It prompted HKB"H to issue a momentous, pivotal decree against Moshe and Aharon. These two illustrious brothers took Yisrael out of Mitzrayim while performing miraculous feats. They led and guided Yisrael during their forty-year sojourn and trying journeys in the midbar. Yet, HKB"H decreed that they would not continue on and bring Yisrael into the land promised to their holy Avos.

Furthermore, this entire sequence of events began with the passing of Miriam. Here is the pertinent text (Bamidbar 20, 1): **"ויבואו בני ישראל כל העדה מדבר צין: בחודש הראשון וישב העם בקדש ותמת שם מרים ותקבר שם, ולא היה מים לעדה."** **The entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael arrived at the Wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly, and they gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon.** Rashi comments: **We see from here that throughout the forty years (in the midbar), they had the well in the merit of Miriam.**

Rashi's comment is based on the following Gemara (Ta'anis 9a): **«שלשה פרנסים טובים עמדו לישראל, אלו הן: משה ואהרן ומרים. ושלוש מתנות טובות ניתנו על ידם, ואלו הן באר וענן ומן, באר בזכות מרים, עמוד ענן בזכות אהרן, מן בזכות משה.»** **Three preeminent leaders arose for Yisrael. They are Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. And three outstanding gifts were bestowed on their account. They are the well, the cloud and the "mahn."** The well was provided in the

merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud in the merit of Aharon; the "mahn" in the merit of Moshe.

The Gemara explains: **מתה מרים נסתלק הבאר, שנאמר ותמת שם מרים—when Miriam died, the well disappeared, as it states afterwards: "There was no water for the assembly."** Rashi explains that the "Well of Miriam" was actually a rock from which water flowed. It rolled around the midbar accompanying Yisrael. It is this rock that Moshe struck after Miriam's death, because he did not want its water to emerge on his account.

"And you shall speak to the rock in front of them, and it shall give its waters"

Due to the lack of water, the assembly began arguing with Moshe Rabeinu (ibid. 3): **«ויירב העם עם משה: ויאמרו לאמר ולו גוענו בגוע אחינו לפני ה', ולמה הבאתם את קהל ה' אל המדבר הזה למות שם אנחנו ובעירנו, ולמה העליתנו ממצרים להביא אותנו אל המקום הרע הזה, לא מקום זרע ותאנה וגפן ורמון ומים אין לשתות, ויבוא משה ואהרן מפני ה' אל פתח אהל מועד ויפלעו על פניהם וירא כבוד ה' אליהם.»** **The people quarreled with Moshe and spoke up saying, "If only we had perished as our brethren perished before Hashem. Why have you brought the congregation of Hashem to this wilderness to die there, we and our animals? And why did you bring us from Mitzrayim to bring us to this evil place?—not a place of seed, or fig, or grape, or pomegranate; and there is not water to drink." Moshe and Aharon went from the presence of the congregation to the entrance of Ohel Mo'ed and fell on their faces. The glory of Hashem appeared to them.**

At that juncture, HKB"H instructed Moshe how to fulfill Miriam's role and produce water once again from that very same rock (ibid. 7): **וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, קח את המטה: והקהל את העדה אתה ואהרן אחיך, ודברתם אל הסלע לעיניהם ונתן מימיו, והוצאת להם מים מן הסלע, והשקית את העדה ואת בעירם. ויקח משה את המטה מלפני ה' כאשר צוהו. Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, "Take the staff and gather together the assembly, you and Aharon your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes that it shall give its waters. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock and provide drink for the assembly and their animals." Moshe took the staff from before Hashem, as He had commanded him.**

"ויקהלו משה ואהרן את הקהל אל פני הסלע, ויאמר להם שמעו נא המורים, המן הסלע הזה נוציא לכם מים, וירם משה את ידו ויך את הסלע במטהו פעמיים, ויצאו מים רבים ותשת העדה ובעירם. ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן, יען לא האמנתם בי להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל, לכן לא תביאו את הקהל הזה אל הארץ אשר נתתי להם."

Moshe and Aharon gathered the congregation before the rock. He said to them, "Listen now, O rebels! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" Then Moshe raised his arm and struck the rock with his staff twice; abundant water came forth, and the assembly and their animals drank. Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon, "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisrael, therefore, you will not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them."

Rashi provides the following clarification: **Had you spoken to the rock and it had produced, I would have been sanctified before the assembly, and they would have said: "Now, if this rock which neither speaks nor hears nor requires sustenance obeys the word of the Omnipresent, how much more so should we obey His word!"**

At this point, we must focus on several perplexing issues: a) HKB"H, Himself, already attested to Moshe's trustworthiness (ibid. 12, 7): **«בכל ביתי נאמן הוא»—in My entire house, he is the most trusted.** Hence, it seems unfathomable that Moshe did not fulfill HKB"H's command precisely to the letter. b) If, indeed, HKB"H did not intend for Moshe to strike the rock, but to only speak to it, then why did He instruct Moshe to take the

staff in the first place: **«קח את המטה והקהל את העדה אתה ואהרן אחיך, ודברתם אל הסלע לעיניהם ונתן מימיו»** What purpose did the staff serve? Seemingly, it would have been preferable had Moshe not been commanded to take the staff; then it would have been impossible for him to err by striking the rock.

The Incredible Insight of the Chasam Sofer

We will begin to shed some light on the subject of "mei merivah" by introducing the illuminating explanation of our master the Chasam Sofer, zy"a. In his own, sacred, inimitable way, he analyzes and dissects the language of the pesukim, and constructs a magnificent structure. Regarding our subject matter, he bases his explanation on the wording of the instructions HKB"H gives Moshe: **"Speak to the rock before their eyes that it shall give its waters. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock."**

To begin with, we must explain why HKB"H repeats his command to Moshe Rabeinu. Initially, He instructs Moshe: **"Speak to the rock before their eyes that it shall give its waters."** In no uncertain terms, He instructs Moshe to talk to the rock to produce water for Yisrael. So, why does HKB"H then repeat Himself by saying: **"And you shall bring forth water for them from the rock"?**

Additionally, we should note the change in language between the former and latter statements. In the former, HKB"H tells Moshe to command the rock to give Yisrael water: **"That it shall give its waters."** Whereas in the latter: **"And you shall bring forth water for them from the rock"**—HKB"H commands Moshe to bring forth water from the rock himself—**"you shall bring forth"**—as opposed to the rock itself giving forth its waters.

The Chasam Sofer presents a fascinating, novel approach concerning what HKB"H commanded Moshe Rabeinu to do. He asserts that Moshe was commanded to extract two distinct types of water from the rock. The first type being the natural waters concealed within the rock, akin to a natural spring. These natural waters were meant exclusively for the animals and not for the human beings.

After bringing forth all of the natural waters for the animals to drink, Moshe was supposed to perform a miracle—to extract holy, pure water from the rock that did not exist beforehand. This water was meant to refine and sanctify Yisrael rapidly prior to entering the land—in a similar fashion to the “mahn” that HKB”H showered on the midbar from the heavens to cleanse Yisrael of the tumah of Mitzrayim prior to entering Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the people and their animals would not be drinking from the same trough, so to speak. He compares this to the situation le’asid la’vo when a stream will spring forth from the Kodosh HaKodashim. Here are the beautiful words of the Chasam Sofer:

”יש לומר חפץ הקב”ה למען שיוציא ב’ מיני מים, ויתחלקו נחלים נחלים אלו לעצמם ואלו לעצמם, אחד הוא מים של סלע עצמו, כגון יסוד מים אשר בו [בטבע], או גם על דרך ניסוי, אמנם יש בו קצת על דרך הטבע, כמו כל המעיינות היוצאים מביני שיני הסלעים, וזה יהיה להבהמות לשתות.

ואחר שהוציא כל זה מהסלע, ולא נשאר בו גשמי מאומה, יוציא עוד מים של מעלה שאינם מתוארים מי סלע, כי הם כולם בקודש, ויהיו לעדת ה’, ולא ישתו הם וחמוריהם מאבוס אחד, ואז יהיו שתייתם כמו ציד מאכלם מן לחם אבירים, ואז בלי ספק יתקדשו ביתר שאת, כמו לעתיד לבוא אשר יצא נחל מקודש קדשים.

In this manner, the Chasam Sofer justifies the repeated instructions given to Moshe Rabeinu. He was first instructed to bring forth all of the natural water belonging to the rock. Next, he was instructed to bring forth from the rock water that was not natural spring water; all the natural spring water had already been removed from the rock. Thus, a clear-cut separation was established between the people and their animals.

Moshe Rabeinu Sacrificed His Life on Behalf of Yisrael

Further on, the Chasam Sofer—**Rabeinu Moshe**—explains the profound rationale of Moshe Rabeinu for striking the rock with his staff rather than speaking to it. He also explains why he struck the rock twice and did not suffice with a single blow. For, he perceived via his “ruach hakodesh” that even if he brought forth pure water from the rock, Yisrael were still destined to sin. Then, they would not be afforded a path of tikun, chas v’shalom, by means of teshuvah.

Therefore, he sacrificed his life on their behalf by not speaking to the rock two separate times—once to

separate the natural waters designated for the animals, and once to extract pure, refined waters designed to purify the people of Yisrael. Instead, he struck the rock two times without interruption to bring forth two types of water mixed together—both for the animals and for the human beings. Thus, Yisrael would have a legitimate excuse for their future sins. They could attribute their sins to the fact that they were not privileged to drink pure, refined water. Thus, they would be able to achieve tikun via teshuvah. Hence, he called them rebels, because he knew that they would sin no matter which waters he gave them—mixed or separate from the animals’ water.

Moshe Rabeinu Perceived that This Was the Will of Hashem since He Was Instructed to Take His Staff with Him

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to embellish his intriguing insight as to why Moshe Rabeinu saw fit to deviate from what HKB”H commanded him to do—to speak to the rock. He intuited via his “ruach hakodesh” that HKB”H wanted him to sacrifice his soul for the benefit of Yisrael by striking the rock, so that they could achieve tikun by means of teshuvah. After all, HKB”H instructed him to **“take the staff”**; yet, instructed him to speak to the rock.

The commentaries are perplexed by this. Why did HKB”H command Moshe to **“take the staff,”** if He did not want him to use it? Seemingly, it would have been preferable for him not to take the staff at all. Notwithstanding, we can explain these difficulties based on the insight of the Chasam Sofer. HKB”H was hinting to Moshe that although He was commanding him to speak to the rock, this was not His true intent. HKB”H instructed Moshe to **“take the staff,”** so that he would understand intuitively that He actually wanted Moshe to sacrifice his life by defying the command for the benefit of Yisrael.

It appears that this is evident—that HKB”H wanted Moshe to fail, so that he would not be permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael—from what is written after Moshe struck the rock: **“Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon, ‘Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisrael, therefore, you**

will not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them.” Our blessed sages expounded on this passuk in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19, 13): **HKB”H said to Moshe: On what grounds do you wish to enter the land? It is analogous to a shepherd, who went out to watch the king’s sheep, and the sheep were stolen. The shepherd requested entry to the king’s palace. The king said to him, “If you enter now, what will people say? That you stole the sheep.” Here, too, HKB”H said to Moshe, “Your praise is that you took 600,000 out, you buried them in the midbar and you brought another generation in. Now, they will say that the generation of the midbar does not have a portion in Olam HaBa. Instead, stay near them and come in with them,”** as it says (Devarim 33, 21): **“And he came at the heads of the people; he carried out the righteousness of Hashem.”** Therefore, it is written: **“You will not bring this congregation”; rather, it will go out (leave) with you.**

Thus, we have explicit proof that it was HKB”H’s plan for Moshe Rabeinu not to enter Eretz Yisrael. The divine plan is for him to bring the generation of the midbar that perished in the midbar with him into Eretz Yisrael at the time of the future geulah with “Tehiyas HaMeisim.” From this perspective, it is not far-fetched to suggest that this is why HKB”H instructed Moshe to take the staff with him. He was hinting to Moshe to commit an aveirah l’shma by striking the rock, so that he would remain in the midbar until le’asid la’vo. Then, he will bring the generation of the midbar into the promised land with him.

Incredibly, we can find an allusion to this in the directive: **“קח את המטה והקהל את העדה אתה ואהרן אחיך”**—based on what they expounded in the Yalkut Shimoni (Chukas 764): **“Therefore, you will not bring this congregation . . .”** This congregation you will not bring in, but all of Yisrael you will bring in le’asid la’vo, as it says (Hoshea 2, 17): **“There she shall respond as in the days of her youth.”** This refers to Moshe and Aharon. We can now suggest that this is what HKB”H was hinting to Moshe: **“Take the staff”** to commit an aveirah l’shma. Then HKB”H explains the reason for this: **“והקהל את העדה אתה ואהרן אחיך”**—so that you

and Aharon will gather in le’asid la’vo the assembly that perished in the midbar.

A Fascinating Insight from the Chasam Sofer concerning Rainwater

It is with great pleasure that we will now connect the illuminating insight of the Chasam Sofer, zy”a, concerning the two types of water brought forth from the rock—its natural waters and pure, miraculous waters aimed at refining Yisrael—with his fascinating insight in Derashos Chasam Sofer related to the passuk (Devarim 11, 16): **“השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחיתם להם, וחרה אף ה’ בכם ועצר את השמים ולא יהיה מטר והאדמה ייבש. Beware, lest your heart be seduced and you turn away and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the wrath of Hashem will flare up against you; He will restrain the heavens and there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its produce.** Here are his sacred words:

“ידוע שהגשמים מתהווים בטבע, מאידיים העולים מהארץ והבל פה אנשי העולם, ואם כי זה הוא רק הכנה קטנה בטבעי העולם, ועיקר הוא כמאמר חז”ל סוף פרק קמא דתענית (דף ט:), שהעבים שואבים ממי אוקינוס, ומתמתקים בעבים על ידי מים העליונים מאת ה’ מן השמים, מכל מקום גם זה אמת כי הווית העבים הוא מהאידיים העולים מן הארץ.

והיות כן, החוש והשכל יעיד, כי אם בני אדם וההבל והאידיים העולים מהם, הוא מהבל פה דובר נבלה ולשון הרע ורכילות, הגשמים המהווים מזה המה מלוכלכים מזהמת קליפת עוונות ופשעים ההמה, והמאכלים המהווים מזה מטמאים אוכליהם ביתר שאת, באופן שיהיה הבל פיהם של שנה הבאה רע יותר משל אשתקד, ועל ידי זה גשמי שנה הבאה ותבואתה רע, וגורם טומאה ומרי יותר, ומגדל אנשים רעים וחסאים יותר.

ושבו יגדלו האנשים את הגשמים רע יותר בשנה השלישית מבשנית, וכן לעולם חוזר חלילה, עד שחש וחלילה כל כך מושרשים בחטא וטומאה, עד כי אין תרופה למכתם חלילה. ומטובו של אלקי ישראל יתברך שמו לעצור השמים ולא יהיה מטר רע ולא יולידו פירות רעים, עד שיכנע לבכם הערל וישובו אל ה’, ויטהרו האויר ויהנו מזיו ה’ ותפארתו.”

We know that rains occur in nature from the vapors that rise from the earth and the vapors from the mouths of the people inhabiting the world. In reality, this is only part of their natural occurrence. As Chazal teach us in the first chapter of Ta’anis (9b), the clouds draw from the waters of the oceans, and they are sweetened in the clouds by heavenly waters from Hashem.

Nevertheless, the original statement is also true, since the clouds are formed from the vapor rising from the earth.

Thus, it stands to reason that if the people and the vapors they generate are from improper speech, lashon hara, and gossip, the rains they generate are contaminated and dirtied by the pollution of their iniquities and wrongdoing. Hence, the foods that come from them contaminate those who consume them significantly. Consequently, their oral vapors the following year will be even worse than of the previous year. This will make the rains of the coming year and its grain (produce) evil; they will generate more tumah and bitterness, and produce people that are more wicked and sinful.

Once again, the people will generate rains that are even worse in the third year than in the second; this pattern will continue forever, chalilah, until they are so rooted in sin and tumah that there is no remedy for the stain, chalilah. Due to the graciousness of the G-d of Yisrael, blessed is His name, the heavens will be obstructed, so that there will not be negative rainfall, and they will not produce bad fruit—until their impervious hearts will be subdued, and they return to Hashem, and the atmosphere will be cleansed, and they will enjoy the radiance of Hashem and His magnificence.

It appears that we can find a source for the assertion of the Chasam Sofer in the Gemara (Ta'anis 7b): **אמר רבי שמעון בן פזי, אין הגשמים נעצרים אלא בשביל מספרי לשון הרע—Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said: Rains are only withheld on account of those who speak lashon hara.** Thus, it states explicitly that rains are stopped on account of the sin of lashon hara. According to what we have learned from the Chasam Sofer, the explanation is as follows: The vapors of the speech of lashon hara rise and form clouds. The rains that falls from those clouds contaminates the vegetation, and ultimately corrupts the creatures that consume them. Therefore, the rains are withheld, so that they will not corrupt human beings.

We can posit that this is also the explanation of the statement (ibid.): **אמר רב קטינא, אין הגשמים נעצרים אלא בשביל ביטול**

—Rav Katina said: Rains are only withheld on account of the neglect of Torah study. For, if people study Torah, the vapors from the Torah-study coming out of their mouths ascends upwards and generates clouds that shower the world with rains of berachah. Then, the vegetation that results from them influences those who consume them to study Torah and draw closer to Hashem. Furthermore, as we are taught in the Gemara (Arachin 15b), engaging in Torah-study provides a tikun for the sin of lashon hara: **אמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מזה תקנתו של מספרי לשון הרע, אם תלמיד חכם הוא יעסוק בתורה—Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said: What is the remedy for those who speak lashon hara? If he is a Torah scholar, he should engage in Torah-study, as it says (Mishlei 15, 4): “The cure of a tongue (lashon) is the Tree of Life (the Torah).”**

So, if a person studies Torah, he atones for lashon hara; he also merits having his holy utterances emit vapors that rise and generate rains of berachah; they impart kedushah to the vegetation that influences people to serve Hashem. Conversely, when one neglects the study of Torah, he lacks utterances of kedushah. Thus, he has no atonement for the lashon hara whose vapors generate clouds that pollute the vegetation. Consequently, the rains are withheld, so as not to corrupt the people.

Accordingly, we can interpret the opening words of parshas Bechukosai beautifully (Vayikra 26, 3): **אם בחוקותי תלכו—Rashi comments that this means that Jews should devote themselves to Torah-study. ואת מצותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם—Rashi says that this means that we should study Torah for the sake of observing and performing. If we do this, the vapors of our words of Torah will form clouds that contain holy rains that will exert a positive influence on the vegetation. As a result: “ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם”—because they will be rains of berachah, they will fall on the nights of Shabbas.**

Polluted Waters Were Formed in the Rock from the Complaints of Bnei Yisrael

We now have cause to rejoice! This illuminates for us the intriguing explanation of the Chasam Sofer concerning the “mei merivah.” When HKB”H initially

instructs Moshe: "ודברתם אל הסלע לעיניהם ונתן מימיו"—Moshe was instructed to take all of the natural waters out of the rock. Afterwards, when he was instructed: "והוצאת" להם מים מן הסלע—he was being instructed to bring forth miraculous, holy, pure waters that would purify the people of Yisrael. He was compelled to do so, because Miriam had passed away, and her well no longer provided them with water. Instead of having faith in Moshe Rabeinu, who had already performed many miracles and feats on their behalf—during "yetzias Mitzrayim" and the falling of the "mahn"—they began to vehemently express their dissatisfaction with him: **"The people quarreled with Moshe and spoke up saying, 'If only we had perished as our brethren perished before Hashem. Why have you brought the congregation of Hashem to this wilderness to die there, we and our animals? And why did you bring us from Mitzrayim to bring us to this evil place?—not a place of seed, or fig, or grape, or pomegranate; and there is not water to drink.'"**

These harsh words generated new waters in the rock. Understandably, these waters were polluted, since they emanated from the people's improper and inappropriate grievances against Moshe Rabeinu.

Therefore, HKB"H first told Moshe Rabeinu to bring forth and remove all the polluted, natural waters from the rock. Afterwards, he was told to bring forth pure, holy, miraculous waters.

Let us suggest an explanation based on a Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Chukas 763): **"And you shall speak to the rock": He taught one portion over it, and he extracted water from the rock.** Let us explain. By studying Torah in front of the rock, Moshe revealed new, clean, pure waters within the rock that had been generated by the pure, holy vapors coming out of his mouth. These unpolluted waters would have cleansed and purified Yisrael. Since, however, the time for the complete tikun had not yet arrived, it was orchestrated from above for Moshe to strike the rock with his staff. Nevertheless, the navi has promised (Zechariah 14, 8): **"וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִצְאוּ מַיִם חַיִּים מִירוּשָׁלַם חֲצִיָם אֶל הַיָּם הַקְּדוֹמוֹנִי וְחֲצִיָם אֶל הַיָּם הַמִּזְרָחִי וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִיָה ה' אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ הָאֶחָד וְכִסְיֵהוּ יִבְחָרְהוּ יְהִיָה, וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִיָה ה' אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ הָאֶחָד."** **It shall be on that day, spring water will flow out of Yerushalayim—half of it to the Eastern Sea and half of it to the Western Sea. This will be in summer and in winter. Hashem will be King over all the land; on that day, Hashem will be One and His name will be One.** This should transpire swiftly, in our times! Amen.

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