

# PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA

From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman zt"l

## PARSHAT CHUKAT

### The Gezeirah Prohibiting Moshe Rabbeinu from Entering Eretz Yisrael

יֵעַן לֹא הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל  
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם

*Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of B'nei Yisrael,  
therefore you will not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given them  
(Bamidbar 20:12)*

There are many different ways to understand what exactly went wrong at Mei Merivah. Numerous explanations are presented by *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* trying to clarify what Moshe Rabbeinu's *chet* was. However, whatever the exact nature of his mistake was, the consequences of that act are clearly spelled out in our *pasuk*: as a result of Mei Merivah, Moshe was barred from entering Eretz Yisrael.

The problem is that even this aspect of that episode is not entirely clear, for there are numerous sources which seem to indicate that the idea that Moshe would not be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael was already known **prior to Mei Merivah**.

#### At the Burning Bush

In *Parshat Shemot*, Hashem appears to Moshe in the Burning Bush and instructs him to go and take B'nei Yisrael out from Mitzrayim. Over the course of many *pesukim*, Moshe

expresses his reservations about doing so. At a certain point Moshe says (4:13):

כִּי ה' שְׁלַח נָא בְיַד תְּשַׁלַּח

*Please Hashem, send through whomever You will send.*

Commenting on these words, Rashi (s.v. *beyad*, in his second explanation — “*davar acher*”) writes:

ביד אחר שתרצה לשלוח, שאין סופי להכניסם לארץ ולהיות גואלם לעתיד.

*Through the hand of another whom You will wish to send, for in the end I will not bring them into the Land, or redeem them in the future.*

According to Rashi, Moshe is already aware at this early stage that he will not be bringing B'nei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael. This, of course, is most difficult, as the cause of Moshe not being allowed to enter the Land was his *chet* in the episode of Mei Merivah, which happened forty years later. We know that every person has free will. How then can it be that Moshe already knows that he will sin at Mei Merivah?

### After Moshe's First Meeting with Pharaoh

A similar problem arises from Rashi's words later on in the final *pasuk* of this parsha. After Moshe complains that since the time he went to Pharaoh, things only seemed to have gotten worse for B'nei Yisrael. The *pasuk* (*Shemos* 6:1) says:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עַתָּה תֵּרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לְפָרְעֹה

*Hashem said to Moshe, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh.”*

Rashi explains:

הרהרת על מדותי ... לפיכך עתה תראה, העשוי לפרעה תראה, ולא העשוי למלכי שבע אומות כשאביאם לארץ

*You doubted My ways ... therefore, “now you will see”: That which will be done to Pharaoh you will see, but not that which will be done to the kings of the Seven Nations when I bring them to the Land.*

This comment of Rashi presents us with a greater difficulty than his earlier comment. Here, Rashi is indicating that not only did Moshe already **know** at a much earlier stage that he would not be entering the Land, but **the reason itself** for that decree was also based on the earlier event of Moshe complaining and doubting Hashem's ways. This is, of course, very problematic, as the *pasuk* explicitly states that the reason Moshe was unable to enter the Land was due to his actions at Mei Merivah forty years later!

Perhaps we might suggest that the second source is not exactly the same as the first. It is possible that the message of “*now* you will see — and not later on” is an inference that we hear and infer from the text of Hashem’s words to Moshe, an inference that Moshe himself did not hear. For this is the way of the midrash, to reveal to us a layer of meaning that was not known to those who were involved at the time.

## Shirat HaYam

This idea is something we find discussed relating to a third source that refers to Moshe not entering the Land forty years before Mei Merivah. In the end of Shirat HaYam the pasuk says (Shemot 15:17): “תְּבִיאֵמוּ וְתִטְעֵמוּ בְּהַר נַחֲלֵתְדָךְ — *You will bring them and establish them on the Mountain of Your Heritage.*” The Gemara (*Bava Batra* 119b) notes: It does not say “תְּבִיאֵנוּ וְתִטְעֵנוּ — *You will bring us and establish us,*” but rather, “תְּבִיאֵמוּ וְתִטְעֵמוּ — *You will bring them and establish them,*” “מִלְמַד שֶׁמִּתְנַבְּאִין וְאִינָן יוֹדְעִין מֵהַמִּתְנַבְּאִין” — *this teaches us that they prophesied and did not know what they were prophesying.* The Rashbam (*Bava Batra* *ibid.*, s.v. *kayotzei*) explains that they were prophesying that they themselves would not enter the Land, even though the *gezeirah* that they could not enter was decreed as a result of the *Chet* of the *Meraglim*, and that *Chet* had not yet occurred.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Rabbeinu Gershom (*ibid.*) explains: “They prophesied regarding themselves that they would not enter the Land, only their children, but they did not do so intentionally.”

We see in this case as well that the midrash reveals to us a level of meaning within the words of the generation that left Mitzrayim that they themselves were unaware of, concerning the *Chet* of the *Meraglim* and its consequences. Similarly, the *Torah Temimah* comments: “*Although they did not see, their mazal saw.*”<sup>2</sup>

## Nevuah Concerning a Future Gezeirah

Set against the *derashot* we have mentioned which indicate that Moshe knew from early on that he would not be entering the Land, we find the following comment of Rashi on Moshe’s words to Yitro (*Bamidbar* 10:29) “נִסְעִים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה' אֵתָּן לָכֶם — *We are travelling to the place of which Hashem has said 'I will give it to you.'*”

שתף משה עצמו עמהם, שעדיין לא נגזרה גזירה עליו וכסבור שהוא נכנס

*Moshe included himself with them, for the decree had not yet been issued concerning him, and he thought that he would be entering (the Land).*

These words present us with a difficulty. How can Moshe think he is going to enter Eretz Yisrael when he has already expressed awareness of the fact that he will not?

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1 Similarly, the Gemara there explains in this vein the fact that Eretz Yisrael is referred to as a “מורשה — *morashah* (heirloom)” and not a “ירושה — *yerushah* (inheritance),” indicating that they would be bequeathing it to others but not inheriting it themselves.

2 An expression found in numerous places in the Gemara, see e.g. *Megillah* 3a.

The *Maharal* explains Rashi's words by referring to two basic distinctions that should be noted when dealing with the words of a *Navi*:

1. There is a difference between that which was said to a *Navi* as part of a *nevuah*, and the words of a *Navi* outside the context of *nevuah*.
2. Even within *nevuah*, there is a difference between a "normal" *gezeirah*, i.e. a *gezeirah* by itself, and a *gezeirah* that is accompanied by a *shevuah*.

These are his words (*Gur Aryeh* to *Bamidbar* 20:12, s.v. *lachen*):

*There are three levels:*

1. *Prior to a gezeirah.*
  2. *A gezeirah without a shevuah, and*
  3. *A gezeirah with a shevuah.*
1. "Prior to a *gezeirah*" means before Hashem has decreed that this will be, but it is something that He **wants** to happen, and this is called "עלה במחשבה — the thought arose," and at this stage it does not require so much *tefillah* or great merit in order to be annulled.
  2. However, once there has been an explicit *gezeirah*, this is something that cannot be nullified except through *tefillah*, crying out, and through great merit.
  3. Once the *gezeirah* is accompanied by a *shevuah*, neither *tefillah* nor crying out will help.<sup>3</sup> These distinctions are simple and straightforward.

Having established these distinct categories, the *Maharal* proceeds to apply them to our seemingly contradictory *pesukim*:

*You should not have a difficulty with (the words) "שְׁלַח נָא בְיַד תְּשֻׁלַח"<sup>4</sup> and "תְּבֹאֲמוּ וְיִתְטַעְמוּ"<sup>5</sup> and (yet conversely) in Parshat Beha'alotecha, Rashi explained the words "וְנִסְעִים אֲנִיחָנוּ" to mean "Moshe included himself with them, for the decree had not yet been issued concerning him, and he thought that he would enter (the Land)." These *pesukim* should not present a difficulty for you. For as long as Moshe Rabbeinu, *alav hashalom*, was talking **as part of a nevuah**, then he was prophesying that he would not enter the Land, for this is something he saw in his *nevuah*, even though he had not yet sinned, nonetheless he saw through *nevuah* that which would be in the future. Therefore, he prophesied that he would not bring them to the Land, for he saw the *gezeirah* from On High that he would not bring them to the Land. Nevertheless, he thought that the *gezeirah* could be nullified through *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, and through*

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3 Rashi to *Bamidbar* *ibid.* comments that the word "לכך," with which Hashem introduced the *gezeirah* at Mei Merivah, is an expression of *shevuah*.

4 Where Rashi told us that Moshe already knew that he would not enter Eretz Yisrael.

5 Where the Gemara explained similarly that B'nei Yisrael knew they would not be entering Eretz Yisrael.

*crying out to Hashem. Therefore, in Parshat Beha'alotecha, when he was **talking only to Yitro**,<sup>6</sup> he included himself with the others, for he thought that he would enter the Land and the gezeirah could be nullified.<sup>7</sup>*

The Maharal distinguishes between words said as part of a *nevuah* and words said in conversation with someone else. We should note that, according to the *Maharal*, Moshe's words to Hashem "שָׁלַח נָא בְּיַד תְּשִׁלַּח" are in the same category as his words of *nevuah* when he said "תְּבַאֲמוּ וְתִטְעֶמוּ."

## Between a Gezeirah that is Implied and One that is Explicitly Stated

With reference to the contradiction as to the reason for the *gezeirah* that Moshe Rabbeinu could not enter Eretz Yisrael,<sup>8</sup> *Maharal* writes:

*That which Hashem said to Moshe "עֵתָה תִּרְאֶה — Now you will see," implying, "now you shall see, but not that which will be done to the kings of the seven nations," this was only communicated through **an inference**, but was never said explicitly ... for anything that Hashem does not say **explicitly** is not a gezeirah.*

In other words, the difference between a *gezeirah* that is explicitly stated and one that is implied reflects the difference between a *gezeirah* that has been finalized and one that is merely being considered ("עלה במחשבה"). The *gezeirah* that Moshe would not enter the Land only became finalized as a result of Mei Merivah — and therefore it was at this point that it was explicitly stated in the *pasuk*.

Here we see very clearly the parallel that exists between the level at which something is explicit in *pshuto shel mikra*, and the degree to which it is concretized in reality.

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6 I.e. as one person to another, and not as part of a *nevuah*.

7 I.e. through "tefillah and great merit."

8 I.e. the *Chet* at Mei Merivah or speaking inappropriately to Hashem at the end of *Parshat Shemot*.