

The end of the desert trek arrives, thirty-eight years after the events of the spies and Korach. A new generation—one that no adult had seen kiryas Yam Suf or Har Sinai—approaches the Promised Land. The people arrive at Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, and there is no water.

הָמָּה מֵי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר־רָבוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־ה' וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם: ס

“They are the Waters of Strife that Bnei Yisroel made great Hashem, and He became sanctified through them.” (Bamidbar 20:13).

Many commentators translate this pasuk as “Bnei Yisroel quarreled with Hashem” (See Ibid 20:3). The word רָבוּ can be the plural verb of רָבָה – made great, or רִיב – quarrel verbally. If Bnei Yisroel did quarrel with Hashem—they complained there was no water—then the pasuk should use clearer language, because they complained to Moshe. If Bnei Yisroel did make Hashem great, how can Bnei Yisroel make Hashem great? Further, Moshe was punished for hitting the rock instead of talking to it. (Ibid 20:12). That implies that Moshe failed to sanctify Hashem. However, this pasuk says Hashem was sanctified through this incident. How did Moshe err?

Gemara Sanhendrin 101b says, *Pharaoh's astrologers saw that the savior of Bnei Yisroel will be destroyed by water. Therefore, Pharaoh commanded all male infants thrown into the Nile. (Shemos 1:22). However, they were mistaken. It was these waters that destroyed Moshe.*

I would add, *al pi drush*, that Moshe was called “Moshe” because “she drew him from the water.” (Ibid 2:10). The daughter of Pharaoh took Moshe out of the water—saved him from his destined death.

Gemara Sanhedrin 110a says, *anyone who argues with his Rebbi is arguing with Hashem. The Bnei Yisroel brought their complaints to Moshe but the pasuk says “they quarreled with Hashem.” (Bamidbar 20:13).*

Gemara Sotah 12b says, *Moshe said, “The people among who I am, are six hundred thousand ragli.” (Bamidbar 11:21). They are so many because of me (ragli), I saved them from the waters of the Nile, I canceled the decree, and instead perish through other waters.*

Rashi says, *Hashem was sanctified through the waters because of the deaths of Moshe and Aharon. When holy people die it sanctifies Hashem.*

Ibin Ezra also says, *Hashem was sanctified through Moshe and Aharon but similar to the pasuk "Through them (Nadav and Avihu) that came near to me."*

Ramban says, *it cannot be like Rashi and Ibin Ezra. No one knew that Moshe and Aharon were going to die and they did not pass until a while later. It was because Moshe brought the people to the rock, unlike the first time where all the people saw the rock prior to Moshe striking it. Then Moshe and Aharon called the waters The Waters of Strife so that a connection can be made to why they died, when they did pass away.*

Sforno says, *Hashem was sanctified because later Aharon showed them the unnatural water (Bamidbar 21:19) and they still had these pure waters flowing.*

Chizkuni says, *the waters sanctified Hashem because the waters came forth. That is why this place was called Kadesh (lit. Sanctify).*

Ohr Chaim says, *"These are Waters of Strife" explain why Hashem wanted to be sanctified here. Hashem punished Moshe and Aharon for not sanctifying Him here because the Bnei Yisroel complained. Therefore, Hashem wanted to be sanctified here. The pasuk repeats that the Bnei Yisroel quarreled (Bamidbar 20:13) because they were justified in wanting water. Hashem used this event to have Moshe talk to the rock to produce water and create a great sanctification. Moshe hit the rock instead. Thus, Hashem was angry with Moshe and Aharon.*

The structure of this incident is worth noting. It comes in two sections. From "The entire Bnei Yisroel congregation came the wilderness of Zin" (Ibid 20:1) until "out came copious waters and the people and their beasts drank" (Ibid 20:11) are in one section. They are bracketed by a  $\square$  (open break-full) and  $\circ$  (closed break-partial). This section talks about how Miriam died, Bnei Yisroel had no water at Kadesh, Hashem's instruction to speak to the rock, and Moshe hitting the rock and producing water. Then the next section, also bracketed with  $\circ$  is Hashem's disappointment with Moshe and Aharon and their ban from Eretz Yisroel (Ibid 20:12) and the naming of the waters and the ultimate sanctification of Hashem's name (Ibid 20:13).

This latter section of two pesukim are from Hashem's point of view and how Hashem dealt with this incident. Hashem foretells the ultimate demise of Moshe and Aharon. Then, Hashem says, "These are the Waters of Strife." These are the waters where I quarreled with Moshe and Aharon. Hashem is saying, *I set this up for a great sanctification of My name. Not just through Bnei Yisroel, but also through Moshe and Aharon. They also can see that whatever I command happens. I can draw water from a rock by simple command.* Hashem was trying to impart a lesson to Moshe and Aharon, too, who were about to lead this new generation into the Land. However, they failed to "believe." (Ibid 20:12). Hashem is also calling Moshe and Aharon "Waters of Strife." *These – Moshe and Aharon – are Waters of Strife. They are at odds with me because they do not fully believe.*

As for the Bnei Yisroel, the pasuk continues: "that the Bnei Yisroel made Hashem great. And He was sanctified in them." *Them* refers to Bnei Yisroel. Bnei Yisroel made Hashem great, because this was the new generation's opportunity to believe. The new generation did not experience *yetziyas Mitzrayim*, the splitting of the *Yam Suf*, or a world without the Clouds of Glory, manna, and the Mishkan. They grew up with the wonders of having food and water every day, and of having a holy sanctuary to experience Hashem's presence. They now arrive at Kadesh and experience thirst for the first time. The Bnei Yisroel do the correct thing, they bring their concerns to Moshe. Water came forth and now they saw the greatness of Hashem.

"The people quarreled with Moshe." (Ibid 20:3). They wanted to know if they will die in the desert of thirst or in comfort of their own beds. They grew up seeing the older generation die out naturally – so to speak – with the comfort of food, drink, and shelter. Here, they thought they would die of thirst, a harsher death. Moshe and Aharon consult Hashem and they then give the people water. Hashem was sanctified through the waters, because Bnei Yisroel did not know that Moshe was to talk to the rock. All they knew was they needed water, Moshe consulted Hashem, and Hashem gave Moshe the ability to bring forth water.

Moshe and Aharon were punished for lack of Emunah. However, this is the incident that made the new generation believe. This was their "And Yisroel saw the great

hand, which Hashem had used upon the Mitzryim, and the people feared Hashem, and they believed in the Lord and in Moshe, His servant.” (Shemos 14:31). This was their opportunity to believe in Hashem and *Moshe His servant*. However, it was only Hashem that was sanctified. “Bnei Yisroel made Hashem great and He was sanctified in them.”

Further to this, Hashem was sanctified through these waters because Moshe and Aharon brought the Bnei Yisroel to the water. (Bamidbar 20:10). He brought them there and gave them water, through a great demonstration. Hashem was sanctified. However, they themselves were not. There was no longer belief in Moshe and Aharon as leaders. When looking at the remainder of the Torah, when the people complained, it was to Hashem directly. They no longer brought their complaints to Moshe and Aharon. This is what was lost. *The belief in Moshe His servant*. This is the meaning of the Waters of Strife or contention. Quarrels create separation. Moshe and Aharon were now at odds with Hashem.