



## 1. Numbers 12

(א) וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמִשְׁהוֹ אֵלֶּיךָ עַל־אֵשֶׁת לִקְחָהּ כִּי־אִשְׁתּוֹ הָיְתָה כְּשִׁית לִקְחָהּ: (ב) וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֲרֵק אֶדְבַּרְמֶשֶׁה דְּבַר ה' הֲלֹא גַם־בָּנוּ דָּבַר וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' (ג) וְהָאִישׁ מִשֵּׁה עֲנוּ [עֲנִינוּ] מֵאֵד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: (ד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' פִּתְּאֵם אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־מִרְיָם צֹאן שְׁלֹשֶׁתְכֶם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּצְאוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁתֶם: (ה) וַיֵּרָד ה' בַּעֲמֹד עָנָן וַיַּעֲמֵד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּקְרָא אֶהָרֹן וּמִרְיָם וַיִּצְאוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמַעְרָנָא דְּבַרֵי אִסְיָהָה נְבִיאֲכֶם ה' בְּמִרְאָה אֵלָיו אֲתוּדַע בְּחֹלֹם אֶדְבַּרְבוּ: (ז) לֹא־כֵן עֲבַדִּי מִשֵּׁה בְּכִלְבֵּיתִי נֶאֱמַן הוּא: (ח) פֶּה אֶלְפָּה אֶדְבַּרְבוּ וּמִרְאָה וְלֹא בְּחִילִת וּתְמִנַת ה' יִבִּיט וּמְדוּעַ לֹא יִרְאֶתֶם לְדַבֵּר בְּעַבְדֵי בְּמִשְׁהוֹ: (ט) וַיַּחַר אֵף ה' בָּם וַיִּלְךְ: (י) וְהֵעִנָן סָר מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְהִנֵּה מִרְיָם מִצְרַעַת כְּשִׁלְג וַיִּפֹּן אֶהָרֹן אֶל־מִרְיָם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַעַת: (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶהָרֹן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בִּי אֲדוּשֶׁם אֶל־נָא תִשֶׁת עֲלֵינוּ חֲטָאת אֲשֶׁר נוֹאֲלָנוּ וְאֲשֶׁר חֲטָאנוּ: (יב) אֶל־נָא תְהִי כְּמַת אֲשֶׁר בְּצִאתוֹ מִרְחֹם אִמּוֹ וַיֵּאָכֵל חֲצִי בְּשָׂרוֹ: (יג) וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' לֵאמֹר אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ: (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַבְיָה יִרְק יִרְק בְּפָנֶיהָ הֲלֹא תִכְלֹם שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תִּסָּגֵר שְׁבַעַת יָמִים מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְאַחַר תִּתְּסָף: (טו) וַתִּסָּגֵר מִרְיָם מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה שְׁבַעַת יָמִים וְהָעָם לֹא נָסַע עַד־הָאֶסָף מִרְיָם: (טז) וְאַחַר נָסְעוּ הָעָם מִחֲצֵרוֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַר פָּאֲרוֹן: (יז)

(1) Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married: "He married a Cushite woman!" (2) They said, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" The LORD heard it. (3) Now Moses was a very humble man, more so than any other man on earth. (4) Suddenly the LORD called to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the Tent of Meeting." So the three of them went out. (5) The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, stopped at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, "Aaron and Miriam!" The two of them came forward; (6) and He said, "Hear these My words: When a prophet of the LORD arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. (7) Not so with My servant Moses; he is trusted throughout My household. (8) With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the LORD. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses?" (9) Still incensed with them, the LORD departed. (10) As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales. (11) And Aaron said to Moses, "O my lord, account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly. (12) Let her not be as one dead, who emerges from his mother's womb with half his flesh eaten away." (13) So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "O G-d, pray heal her!" (14) But the LORD said to Moses, "If her father spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted." (15) So Miriam was shut out of camp seven days; and the people did not march on until Miriam was readmitted. (16) After that the people set out from Hazeroth and encamped in the wilderness of Paran.

## 2. Rashi on Numbers 12:1-3

היא פתחה בדבור תחלה לפיכך הקדימה הכתוב תחלה ומנין היתה יודעת מרים שפירש משה מן האשה רבי נתן אומר מרים היתה בצד צפורה בשעה שנאמר למשה אלדד ומידד מתנבאים במחנה כיון ששמעה צפורה אמרה אוי לנשותיהן של אלו אם הם נזקקים לנבואה שיהיו פורשין מנשותיהן כדרך שפירש בעלי ממני ומשם ידעה מרים והגידה לאהרן ומה מרים שלא נתכוונה לגנותו כך נענשה ק"ו למספר בגנותו של חבירו (ספרי שם): (ג) האשה הכשית. מגיד שהכל מודים ביפיה כשם שהכל מודים בשחרותו של כושי (שם):

She opened the conversation, therefore Scripture mentions her first. And whence did Miriam know that Moses had separated himself from his wife (for this was the statement she made; cf. Rashi below)? R. Nathan answered: "Miriam was beside Zipporah When it was told to Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp' (Numbers 11:17). When Zipporah heard this, she exclaimed, Woe to the wives of these if they have anything to do with prophecy, for they will separate from their wives just as my husband has separated from me!" It was from this that Miriam knew about it, and she told it to Aaron. Now what was the case with Miriam who had no intention to disparage him? She was punished thus severely! How much the more will this be so in the case of one who intentionally speaks in disparagement of this fellow"! (Sifrei Bamidbar 99). (3) THE CUSHITE WOMAN — This tells us that all agreed as to her beauty just as all agree as to the blackness of an Aethopian

## 3. Ibn Ezra on Numbers 12:1

היא צפורה כי היא מדינית ומדינים הם ישמעאליים והם דרים באהלים... וצפורה היתה שחורה ודומה לכושית  
... This is Tzippora, who was Midianite, who are from Ishmael, and they live in tents... and Tzippora was black like a Kushite.

## 4. Alhatorah:

**Meaning of "לקח"** – ... Thus, most of these commentators<sup>21</sup> read the verse as if it is abbreviated, with an understood ending: "the Cushite woman whom he married [and then separated from]".<sup>22</sup>

**Relationship between the complaints** – According to this approach, the statements of Miryam and Aharon in verses 1-2 are integrally connected. The siblings assert their prophetic status to prove that such a role does not require abstinence,<sup>23</sup> and thus, that Moshe's prophesying cannot justify his treatment of his wife.

## 5. Rashbam on Numbers 12:1:2[ There are more elaborate versions of this]

(ב) כי אשה כשית לקח - כדכתיב בדברי הימים, דמשה רבינו מלך היה בארץ כוש ארבעים שנה ולקח מלכה אחת ולא שכב עמה כמ"ש שם. והם לא ידעו כשדברו בו שלא נזקק לה, זה עיקר פשוטו.

(2) **כי אשה כושית לקח** (2) as reported in the biography of Moses (compare Yalkut Shimoni, edition by Heiman-Shiloni on Exodus page 34, glossary 18) According to that version, Moses ruled for 40 years as king over the land of Cush, took himself a woman as his queen but never slept with her, as reported there. Miriam and Aaron were never aware of the fact that Moses had not consummated that union. This is the plain meaning of our verse.

#### 6. Shadal on Numbers 12:1:1

אולי חשבו לגאווה מה שלא לקח אשה מבנות ישראל, ועל צפורה לא היה אפשר לגנות אותו, כי במדין לא היה מוצא בת ישראל, אבל במדבר (אולי כי צפורה מתה) אין ספק שהוא מוצא בת ישראל שתנשא לו, אע"פ שהיה זקן, ואולי גם אהרן ומרים היו מבקשים לתת לו מבנותם, והוא לקח לו אשה כושית מאותם שהתחברו לישראל בעלותם ממצרים, וידוע כי מצרים קרובה לכוש, ויתכן שהיו מאנשי כוש מתגוררים במצרים, וראו את אשר עשה ה' בעבור ישראל, ונתחברו עמהם.

They thought it arrogant that he didn't marry a Jew. They could not criticize him for Tziphora, for in Midian he couldn't find a Jew, but in the desert (perhaps Tziphora had died), there is no doubt that he could have found a Jew to marry, even though he was old. Perhaps Aharon and Miriam wanted him to marry one of their daughters, and he married a Kushite who had joined the Jews when they left Egypt, which is near Kush. Perhaps Kushites lived in Egypt and saw what G-d had done for the Jews and joined them.

7. **Ibn Kaspi** thinks that this is a second wife, and they were upset that he engaged in polygamy. They thought they could challenge him because they were prophets. It was justified because the greater the person, the greater his yetzer hara (hence David had 18 wives, Avraham had 2 or 3, etc.) He notes that he is making this argument to combat Christian thinkers.

#### 8. Why now?

- Ibn Kaspi - it happened now.
- Rashi - they found out now.
- Ran (Derashot 8)- they thought he had an excuse to separate from his wife when he was too busy leading the people, but now he had helpers.

#### 9. R. Amnon Bazak

Note Chiasm:

1. Miriam spoke, and Aharon, against Moshe, concerning the Cushite woman whom he had taken...

2. They said, "Did G-d then speak only with Moshe?"

3. Did He not speak also with us?" And G-d heard it...

4. He said: "Hear now My words:

3a. If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream.

2a. Not so My servant, Moshe: in all My house he is trusted. I speak with him mouth to mouth, and clearly, not in riddles, and he sees the likeness of G-d;

1a. Why, then, were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moshe?"

The outermost branches (1-1a) address the first grievance raised by Miriam and Aharon, in which they "speak against Moshe." The next-to-outermost branches (2-2a) deal with G-d's speech to Moshe, and the inner branches (3-3a) address G-d's speech to Aharon and Miriam. At the center is G-d's introductory phrase, "Hear, now, My words" – listen to Me and see the matter as it really is. In this way, G-d connects the two complaints of Miriam and Aharon. They had maintained that they were on the same level as Moshe, and could therefore permit themselves to "speak against him." Had they understood that there was an essential difference between his level and their own, and that G-d "spoke with him" in a completely different manner, they would have feared to "speak against him."

Indeed, careful examination of the verses shows that G-d says nothing at all on the subject of the Cushite wife, indicating that the complaint in this regard is not worthy of any response at all. As to the issue itself, it appears that the Torah sees nothing wrong with the fact that Moshe had married a Cushite wife.

#### 10. Alhatorah

**Why now?** This approach views this story as an outgrowth of the preceding incident in which the seventy elders receive a share of Moshe's prophecy and leadership. Moshe's need for assistance and the sharing of prophecy paved the way to challenge both his capacity for leadership and the uniqueness of his prophetic status.

**The context** – According to this position, Miryam and Aharon's challenge of Moshe's authority is related not only to the the story which immediately preceded it,<sup>41</sup> but also to the narratives which follow it (the Spies and the rebellion of Korach) as they all share the common theme of rebellion against Moshe's leadership

11. **Rabbi Yaakov Medan** argues they were worried now about succession.

12. **Humility** - it may show that he didn't care about the challenge to his honor, and that is why G-d needs to stand up for him.

On the other hand, it may be a partial critique, as he doesn't stand up for himself by Eldad and Medad, nor in this story, and that creates some issues (Michal Sperber).

### 13. Alhatorah

"וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עָנָו מְאֹד" – These exegetes offer several explanations as to why the Torah chose to emphasize Moshe's modesty at this juncture:

- **Explaining G-d's intervention** – According to Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and R. Hirsch the statement is clarifying that Moshe himself was not bothered by his siblings' criticism. Since he would never defend himself, Hashem intervened on his behalf.
- **Clarifying the complaint** – Abarbanel asserts that this statement is not a parenthetical statement made by the text, but is rather a rhetorical question posed by Miryam and Aharon.<sup>26</sup> They raise, and reject, the possibility that it is Moshe's extreme humility that led him to abstain from relations.
- **Defense of Moshe** – R. Hirsch suggests that this statement proves that Moshe's actions could not have been motivated by any feelings of pride or gloating.<sup>27</sup>
- **Defense of Miryam and Aharon** – R. Hirsch further proposes that Moshe's extreme modesty is what led the siblings to their error. Due to Moshe's humility, they never knew that there was a difference in the level of Moshe's prophetic status and that he, thus, had a good reason for his separation from Zipporah.

- I would suggest this highlights that even as Moshe's leadership is facing challenges, the Torah reminds us how great he is.

### 14. R. Bachya (Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh <https://dafyomireview.com/article.php?docid=383>) – contrast with Moshe reaction to them and Eldad and Medad! [see Nechama Leibowitz]

If one of your peers is greater than you in some aspect of the service of G-d, and his acts are greater than yours, and he tries harder than you to come close to G-d. The yetzer will incite you against him and say: "any zeal by your peers in the service of G-d highlights your own deficiencies. Because, if it were not for this man, you would be in the eyes of men and G-d the most righteous of your generation. Denigrate him, envy him, hate him, seek out his faults, wait for his transgressions, watch for his mistakes, and publicize them as much as you can, and belittle him for them. If you can spread false rumors about him to lower his esteem in the eyes of the public, do it."

Then answer him: "How could I be repulsed by someone who G-d loves, and denigrate one who the Creator deems praiseworthy. Is it not enough that I am lazy in not doing the service of G-d as zealously as him, that I must also hate one who serves G-d? This is certainly no way to repay the Creator for what I owe Him. Rather, it is my duty, out of love of G-d, to love those who love Him, and out of honor of G-d, to honor those who honor Him, as written and he honors those who honor G-d" (Tehilim 15:4). And you already know what happened to Miriam, as written: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moshe.." (Bamidbar 12:1), and what happened to Korach and his followers in envying Moshe and Aharon due to their closeness to G-d.

### 15. Some resolution? R Samet:

Now let us turn to this triangular relationship in section b of the second half. MIRIAM, who spoke about her brother, is now silent - perhaps because, as the Netziv explains on verse 10, "She was astounded, and dumbfounded from sorrow."

AHARON, who was Miriam's partner in speaking against Moshe, now turns to Moshe and represents his sister, too, in requesting of Moshe: "Do not hold our sin AGAINST US...", and requesting that he heal Miriam. MOSHE - the humble, silent one - now "cries out" to G-d, asking that He heal Miriam.

The one who "was spoken about" now cries out without any grudge or any accounting, thereby revealing his humility and his trait of returning evil with kindness.

This change of status in the sibling triangle demonstrates the positive effect of the punishment on Aharon and Miriam's perception of their brother Moshe.

### Comments:

#### 16. R. Samet:

Miriam's words about Moshe concerned "the KUSHITE woman that he had taken." A "kushite" woman is one with black skin, and Miriam's punishment turned her into a "leper LIKE SNOW" - demonstrating quite eloquently that white can be very much worse than black.

**17. R. Bazak:**

In conclusion, it is worth noting an important discrepancy between the literal reading of the text, as addressed above, and the *midrash Chazal* (discussed briefly above, as cited by Rashi). Aside from the difference between the literal text and the *midrash* as to the extent of the sin involved, there is also a significant contrast between them on the matter of sexual abstinence in Divine service. According to the *midrash Chazal*, Divine service on the level of Moshe requires complete abstinence. From the literal reading, however, it would seem that even the greatest prophet is permitted to marry (a Cushite wife, at that), and that his separation from her at the time of the Revelation at Sinai (see *Devarim* 5:26-27 and Rashi on verse 8 in our chapter) was only a temporary measure, not a practice extending over many years

18. This question relates to the issue of Moshe's missing years.