**Transitioning to a Direct Connection With G-d**

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1. [**Numbers 21:1-22**](https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.21.1-22)
   1. **Jews taking initiative**

(א) וַיִּשְׁמַ֞ע הַכְּנַעֲנִ֤י מֶֽלֶךְ־עֲרָד֙ יֹשֵׁ֣ב הַנֶּ֔גֶב כִּ֚י בָּ֣א יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל דֶּ֖רֶךְ הָאֲתָרִ֑ים וַיִּלָּ֙חֶם֙ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וַיִּ֥שְׁבְּ ׀ מִמֶּ֖נּוּ שֶֽׁבִי׃ (ב) וַיִּדַּ֨ר יִשְׂרָאֵ֥ל נֶ֛דֶר לַֽה' וַיֹּאמַ֑ר אִם־נָתֹ֨ן תִּתֵּ֜ן אֶת־הָעָ֤ם הַזֶּה֙ בְּיָדִ֔י וְהַֽחֲרַמְתִּ֖י אֶת־עָרֵיהֶֽם׃ (ג) וַיִּשְׁמַ֨ע ה' בְּק֣וֹל יִשְׂרָאֵ֗ל וַיִּתֵּן֙ אֶת־הַֽכְּנַעֲנִ֔י וַיַּחֲרֵ֥ם אֶתְהֶ֖ם וְאֶת־עָרֵיהֶ֑ם וַיִּקְרָ֥א שֵׁם־הַמָּק֖וֹם חָרְמָֽה׃ (פ)

(1) When the Canaanite, king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negeb, learned that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he engaged Israel in battle and took some of them captive. (2) Then Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, “If You deliver this people into our hand, we will proscribe their towns.” (3) The LORD heeded Israel’s plea and delivered up the Canaanites; and they and their cities were proscribed. So that place was named Hormah.

* 1. **Backtracking?**

(ד) וַיִּסְע֞וּ מֵהֹ֤ר הָהָר֙ דֶּ֣רֶךְ יַם־ס֔וּף לִסְבֹ֖ב אֶת־אֶ֣רֶץ אֱד֑וֹם וַתִּקְצַ֥ר נֶֽפֶשׁ־הָעָ֖ם בַּדָּֽרֶךְ׃ (ה) וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר הָעָ֗ם בֵּֽאלֹקִים֮ וּבְמֹשֶׁה֒ לָמָ֤ה הֶֽעֱלִיתֻ֙נוּ֙ מִמִּצְרַ֔יִם לָמ֖וּת בַּמִּדְבָּ֑ר כִּ֣י אֵ֥ין לֶ֙חֶם֙ וְאֵ֣ין מַ֔יִם וְנַפְשֵׁ֣נוּ קָ֔צָה בַּלֶּ֖חֶם הַקְּלֹקֵֽל׃

(4) They set out from Mount Hor by way of the Sea of Reeds to skirt the land of Edom. But the people grew restive on the journey, (5) and the people spoke against G-d and against Moses, “Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food.”

* 1. **Consequences, reliance on Moshe, but perhaps not…**

(ו) וַיְשַׁלַּ֨ח ה' בָּעָ֗ם אֵ֚ת הַנְּחָשִׁ֣ים הַשְּׂרָפִ֔ים וַֽיְנַשְּׁכ֖וּ אֶת־הָעָ֑ם וַיָּ֥מָת עַם־רָ֖ב מִיִּשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ (ז) וַיָּבֹא֩ הָעָ֨ם אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֜ה וַיֹּאמְר֣וּ חָטָ֗אנוּ כִּֽי־דִבַּ֤רְנוּ בַֽה' וָבָ֔ךְ הִתְפַּלֵּל֙ אֶל־ה' וְיָסֵ֥ר מֵעָלֵ֖ינוּ אֶת־הַנָּחָ֑שׁ וַיִּתְפַּלֵּ֥ל מֹשֶׁ֖ה בְּעַ֥ד הָעָֽם׃ (ח) וַיֹּ֨אמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֗ה עֲשֵׂ֤ה לְךָ֙ שָׂרָ֔ף וְשִׂ֥ים אֹת֖וֹ עַל־נֵ֑ס וְהָיָה֙ כָּל־הַנָּשׁ֔וּךְ וְרָאָ֥ה אֹת֖וֹ וָחָֽי׃ (ט) וַיַּ֤עַשׂ מֹשֶׁה֙ נְחַ֣שׁ נְחֹ֔שֶׁת וַיְשִׂמֵ֖הוּ עַל־הַנֵּ֑ס וְהָיָ֗ה אִם־נָשַׁ֤ךְ הַנָּחָשׁ֙ אֶת־אִ֔ישׁ וְהִבִּ֛יט אֶל־נְחַ֥שׁ הַנְּחֹ֖שֶׁת וָחָֽי

(6) The LORD sent seraph serpents against the people. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died. (7) The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Intercede with the LORD to take away the serpents from us!” And Moses interceded for the people. (8) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a seraph figure and mount it on a standard. And if anyone who is bitten looks at it, he shall recover.” (9) Moses made a copper serpent and mounted it on a standard; and when anyone was bitten by a serpent, he would look at the copper serpent and recover.

1. **R. Amnon Bazak**

Here we encounter a new phenomenon: Moshe and Aharon offer no response. Instead, there is an immediate response by G-d: "G-d sent amongst the nation the poisonous snakes, and they bit the people and a great many people of Israel died." Then the story grows even stranger: "The nation came to Moshe and said: 'We have sinned, for we have spoken against G-d and against you. Pray to G-d that he remove the snakes from upon us." Moshe prays, and Bnei Yisrael are saved from the deadly snakes by means of a brass snake that he fashions. But attention should be paid to the fact that this is the first time that Bnei Yisrael recognize their sin and acknowledge it openly! This is something that never happened after earlier complaints about Moshe. What is the reason for this repentance by Bnei Yisrael taking place specifically here? It would seem that the story of the poisonous snakes symbolizes a change in leadership style. Words of admonishment, it appears, are not sufficient; a complaint must be responded to with the proper severity: it must be punished. This harsh and unprecedented step [3] is aimed at halting the deterioration and forcing Am Yisrael to serve G-d out of fear, with the ultimate goal of leading them towards faith. Indeed, following this episode, there is no further complaint that arises amongst the nation. Hence we can understand the significance of the punishment appearing specifically in the form of snakes. The snake was meant, from the beginning of the story of the Exodus, to lead to faith deriving from fear. When Moshe appealed to G-d at the burning bush, expressing his doubts ("But they will not believe me and will not listen to my voice, for they will say, 'G-d did not appear to you,'" [Shemot 4:1](https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.4.1?lang=he-en" \t "_blank)), G-d suggests that he use a snake as a way to bring the nation to believe

1. [**Exodus 4:1-5**](https://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.4.1-5)**, 30-31**

(א) וַיַּ֤עַן מֹשֶׁה֙ וַיֹּ֔אמֶר וְהֵן֙ לֹֽא־יַאֲמִ֣ינוּ לִ֔י וְלֹ֥א יִשְׁמְע֖וּ בְּקֹלִ֑י כִּ֣י יֹֽאמְר֔וּ לֹֽא־נִרְאָ֥ה אֵלֶ֖יךָ ה' (ב) וַיֹּ֧אמֶר אֵלָ֛יו ה' מזה [מַה־] [זֶּ֣ה] בְיָדֶ֑ךָ וַיֹּ֖אמֶר מַטֶּֽה׃ (ג) וַיֹּ֙אמֶר֙ הַשְׁלִיכֵ֣הוּ אַ֔רְצָה וַיַּשְׁלִיכֵ֥הוּ אַ֖רְצָה וַיְהִ֣י לְנָחָ֑שׁ וַיָּ֥נָס מֹשֶׁ֖ה מִפָּנָֽיו׃ (ד) וַיֹּ֤אמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֔ה שְׁלַח֙ יָֽדְךָ֔ וֶאֱחֹ֖ז בִּזְנָב֑וֹ וַיִּשְׁלַ֤ח יָדוֹ֙ וַיַּ֣חֲזֶק בּ֔וֹ וַיְהִ֥י לְמַטֶּ֖ה בְּכַפּֽוֹ׃ (ה) לְמַ֣עַן יַאֲמִ֔ינוּ כִּֽי־נִרְאָ֥ה אֵלֶ֛יךָ ה' אֱלֹקֵ֣י אֲבֹתָ֑ם אֱלֹקֵ֧י אַבְרָהָ֛ם אֱלֹקֵ֥י יִצְחָ֖ק וֵאלֹקֵ֥י יַעֲקֹֽב׃…(ל) וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר אַהֲרֹ֔ן אֵ֚ת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֔ים אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּ֥ר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֑ה וַיַּ֥עַשׂ הָאֹתֹ֖ת לְעֵינֵ֥י הָעָֽם׃ (לא) וַֽיַּאֲמֵ֖ן הָעָ֑ם וַֽיִּשְׁמְע֡וּ כִּֽי־פָקַ֨ד ה' אֶת־בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֗ל וְכִ֤י רָאָה֙ אֶת־עָנְיָ֔ם וַֽיִּקְּד֖וּ וַיִּֽשְׁתַּחֲוּֽוּ׃

(1) But Moses spoke up and said, “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: The LORD did not appear to you?” (2) The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he replied, “A rod.” (3) He said, “Cast it on the ground.” He cast it on the ground and it became a snake; and Moses recoiled from it. (4) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail”—he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand— (5) “that they may believe that the LORD, the G-d of their fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob, did appear to you.”…(30) Aaron repeated all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people, (31) and the people were convinced. When they heard that the LORD had taken note of the Israelites and that He had seen their plight, they bowed low in homage.

1. [**Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8**](https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Rosh_Hashanah.3.8)

(ח) וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים משֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגוֹ' (שמות יז), וְכִי יָדָיו שֶׁל משֶׁה עוֹשׂוֹת מִלְחָמָה אוֹ שׁוֹבְרוֹת מִלְחָמָה. אֶלָּא לוֹמַר לְךָ, כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִסְתַּכְּלִים כְּלַפֵּי מַעְלָה וּמְשַׁעְבְּדִין אֶת לִבָּם לַאֲבִיהֶם שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם הָיוּ מִתְגַּבְּרִים. וְאִם לָאו, הָיוּ נוֹפְלִין. כַּיּוֹצֵא בַדָּבָר אַתָּה אוֹמֵר (במדבר כא), עֲשֵׂה לְךָ שָׂרָף וְשִׂים אֹתוֹ עַל נֵס, וְהָיָה כָּל הַנָּשׁוּךְ וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ וָחָי. וְכִי נָחָשׁ מֵמִית, אוֹ נָחָשׁ מְחַיֶּה. אֶלָּא, בִּזְמַן שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִסְתַּכְּלִין כְּלַפֵּי מַעְלָה וּמְשַׁעְבְּדִין אֶת לִבָּם לַאֲבִיהֶן שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם, הָיוּ מִתְרַפְּאִים, וְאִם לָאו, הָיוּ נִמּוֹקִים.

(8) “And so it was, when Moshe raised his hand, Israel prevailed…” (Exodus 17:11). And is it Moshe’s hands that make [success in] war or break [success in] war? Rather, [this comes to] tell you, [that] whenever Israel would look upward and subjugate their hearts to their Father in heaven, they would prevail; and if not, they would fall. Similar to this matter, you [can] say concerning the verse; “Make a [graven] snake and place it on a pole, and everyone bitten who sees it will live” (Numbers 21:8): And is it the snake that kills or [is it] the snake that [revives]? Rather, whenever Israel would look upward and subjugate their hearts to their Father in heaven, they would be healed; and if not, they would be harmed.

1. Symbolic of the first Snake, who tried to make man into G-d
   1. The staff is also such a symbol. This time, the snake/staff is forever
2. [**Numbers 16:28**](https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.16.28-30)

(כח) וַיֹּאמֶר֮ מֹשֶׁה֒ בְּזֹאת֙ תֵּֽדְע֔וּן כִּֽי־ה' שְׁלָחַ֔נִי לַעֲשׂ֕וֹת אֵ֥ת כָּל־הַֽמַּעֲשִׂ֖ים הָאֵ֑לֶּה כִּי־לֹ֖א מִלִּבִּֽי׃…

(28) And Moses said, “By this you shall know that it was the LORD who sent me to do all these things; that they are not of my own devising:

1. [**Bemidbar Rabbah 14:20**](https://www.sefaria.org/Bemidbar_Rabbah.14.20) **(**R. Yitzchak Twersky –Bilaam and the donkey proves that the prophet merely represents G-d).

וְלֹא קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמשֶׁה, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא קָם אֲבָל בְּאֻמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם קָם, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹא יְהֵא פִּתְחוֹן פֶּה לְאֻמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם לוֹמַר אִלּוּ הָיָה לָנוּ נָבִיא כְּמשֶׁה הָיִינוּ עוֹבְדִים לְהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא. וְאֵיזֶה נָבִיא הָיָה לָהֶם כְּמשֶׁה זֶה בִּלְעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר

“And no other prophet arose in Israel like Moshe” - in Israel, none did arise, but among the nations of the world, one did arise; so that there not be a claim open to the nations to say, “If we had a prophet like Moshe, we would have worshiped the Holy One, blessed be He. And which prophet did they have [that was] like Moshe? This was Bilaam the son of Beor. However there is a difference between the prophecy of Moshe and the prophecy of Bilaam: Three characteristics were in

1. This leads to the Jews returning to independence (continuation of Bamidbar 21)

(טז) וּמִשָּׁ֖ם בְּאֵ֑רָה הִ֣וא הַבְּאֵ֗ר אֲשֶׁ֨ר אָמַ֤ר ה' לְמֹשֶׁ֔ה אֱסֹף֙ אֶת־הָעָ֔ם וְאֶתְּנָ֥ה לָהֶ֖ם מָֽיִם׃ (ס) (יז) אָ֚ז יָשִׁ֣יר יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָ֖ה הַזֹּ֑את עֲלִ֥י בְאֵ֖ר עֱנוּ־לָֽהּ׃ (יח) בְּאֵ֞ר חֲפָר֣וּהָ שָׂרִ֗ים כָּר֙וּהָ֙ נְדִיבֵ֣י הָעָ֔ם בִּמְחֹקֵ֖ק בְּמִשְׁעֲנֹתָ֑ם וּמִמִּדְבָּ֖ר מַתָּנָֽה׃ (יט) וּמִמַּתָּנָ֖ה נַחֲלִיאֵ֑ל וּמִנַּחֲלִיאֵ֖ל בָּמֽוֹת׃ (כ) וּמִבָּמ֗וֹת הַגַּיְא֙ אֲשֶׁר֙ בִּשְׂדֵ֣ה מוֹאָ֔ב רֹ֖אשׁ הַפִּסְגָּ֑ה וְנִשְׁקָ֖פָה עַל־פְּנֵ֥י הַיְשִׁימֹֽן׃ (פ) (כא) וַיִּשְׁלַ֤ח יִשְׂרָאֵל֙ מַלְאָכִ֔ים אֶל־סִיחֹ֥ן מֶֽלֶךְ־הָאֱמֹרִ֖י לֵאמֹֽר׃ (כב) אֶעְבְּרָ֣ה בְאַרְצֶ֗ךָ לֹ֤א נִטֶּה֙ בְּשָׂדֶ֣ה וּבְכֶ֔רֶם לֹ֥א נִשְׁתֶּ֖ה מֵ֣י בְאֵ֑ר בְּדֶ֤רֶךְ הַמֶּ֙לֶךְ֙ נֵלֵ֔ךְ עַ֥ד אֲשֶֽׁר־נַעֲבֹ֖ר גְּבֻלֶֽךָ׃

(16) And from there to Beer, which is the well where the LORD said to Moses, “Assemble the people that I may give them water.” (17) Then Israel sang this song: Spring up, O well—sing to it— (18) The well which the chieftains dug, Which the nobles of the people started With maces, with their own staffs. And from Midbar to Mattanah, (19) and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth, (20) and from Bamoth to the valley that is in the country of Moab, at the peak of Pisgah, overlooking the wasteland. (21) Israel now sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, (22) “Let me pass through your country. We will not turn off into fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from wells. We will follow the king’s highway until we have crossed your territory.”

1. **Connection to Az Yashir, but this time the Jews are singing,** [**Rashi on Numbers 21:14:3**](https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Numbers.21.14.3)

כשם שמספרים בנסי ים סוף כך יש לספר בנסי נחלי ארנון שאף כאן נעשו נסים גדולים (תנחומא כ). ומה הם הנסים:

Just as they relate the miracles at the Red Sea, so there should be related, too, the miracles at the valleys of Arnon, for here, also, great miracles were wrought. And what were those miracles? (the reply is given in the next passage).

1. Note also the well is dug by people, the Jews send the messengers, not Moshe as above.

11. R. Samet: On death and punishment of Moshe, Aharon Miram

Why did these three personalities continue to lead the people into the fortieth year, while their generation has disappeared? This, too, reveals the dual nature of this year – it is a time of transition between those events associated with the exodus from Egypt and wandering in the desert and those associated with the conquest of the land and its inheritance. From the DEMOGRAPHIC perspective this year belongs to the generation of the conquerors and inheritors of Eretz Canaan, but from a GEOGRAPHICAL perspective the year still holds more wandering in the vast and terrible wilderness, and the wanderers – like their fathers – still need miraculous leadership in order to ensure their continued survival there. The fortieth year may therefore be described as one of transition, with a gradual process of a wandering nation becoming a war-faring, conquering, and settling one. Although at the beginning of the year it becomes clear that the wanderings are not yet over and that Bnei Yisrael will have to circumvent Edom and Moav, journeying again through barren wilderness for another half a year, when they reach the plains of Moav in the second half of the year it becomes clear to them that they are already engaged in a war of conquest, and even in the first stages of settlement of those areas which they have conquered.  Since the fortieth year represents a gradual transition from the miraculous existence that characterized the desert period to a natural existence worthy of a nation entering its land, we see a corresponding gradual disappearance of the previous leadership. At the beginning of the year Miriam dies, in the middle – Aharon, and at the end of the year we read of the death of the leader who brought his nation to the border of the land and witnessed the initial wars and victories, but was not permitted to see the full realization of the vision.