



A Fascinating Interpretation from the Holy Master the Chasam Sofer Korach and His Assembly Accused Moshe Rabeinu of a Serious Impropriety

In this week's parsha, parshas Korach, the Torah describes the terrible episode related to Korach and his assembly. They included 250 tribal leaders, chieftains, and men of stature, who had the audacity to confront Moshe and Aharon with serious, outrageous accusations (Bamidbar 16, 1):

“ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן, ויקומו לפני משה ואנשים מבני ישראל חמישים ומאתים נשיאי עדה קרואי מועד אנשי שם, ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן ויאמרו אליהם רב לכם כי כל העדה כולם קדושים ובתוכם ה' ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל ה'.”

Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, separated himself, with Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and Ohn the son of Peles, sons of Reuven. They arose before Moshe with men of Bnei Yisrael, two hundred and fifty of them, princes of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown. They gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them, “It is much for you! For the entire assembly—all of them—are holy and Hashem is among them, so why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?”

In this essay, we would like to focus on the passuk describing the immense stress and impact this had on Moshe Rabeinu. It appears that even the “cheit ha'eigel” and the tragedy with the meraglim did not affect him to such a degree. For here it says (ibid. 4): **“וישמע משה ויפול על פניו” —Moshe heard and fell on his face.** Rashi explains why Moshe reacted in this manner: **He fell on his face, because of the dispute, for this was already the fourth foulness (affront) they (the people of Yisrael) had committed. They had sinned with the eigel . . . with the complainers . . . and with the meraglim . . . At the dispute with Korach, he no longer had the strength (to defend and plead on behalf**

of the people). **It is analogous to the son of a king who behaved disgracefully toward his father, and whose friend appeased him (his father) on the first three occasions. However, when he (the son) committed the fourth insult, he no longer had the strength to defend him. He said, “How many times can I bother the king? Perhaps he will no longer hear me out!”**

How can this be? After all, it is our fundamental belief that HKB”H is a forgiving and pardoning King; His mercy knows no limits; His hand is always open to receive back those who repent. Rabeinu Yonah explains this in Yesod HaTeshuvah towards the end of the sefer Sha'arei Teshuvah:

“ולא יבהילוהו רעיוניו אשר לא יניחוהו לשוב, כי יבוש מחטאיו, כי יחשוב איך אוכל להעניו בני ולשוב, ואני חטאתי עויתי ופשעתי, כזאת וכזאת עשיתי, עברתי ושניתי ושלשתי עד אין ספורות, ואיך אבוא עוד לפניו כבושת גנב כי ימצא, כי בושתי לעמוד לפניו, ואף איך ארמוס חצרוני, ואיך אשמור חוקיו. אל יחשוב כן, כי המוסית יושב כזבוב במפתחי הלב מתחדש עליו בכל יום, צופה ומביט להכשילו, ומשים לבו לעצה הרעה הזאת, רק יחשוב כי כן מדת הבורא יתברך, ידו פשוטה לקבל שבים, לכן טוב לו להשליך פשעיו ולעשות לו לב חדש.”

A person should not despair thinking that he will not be allowed to repent. Seeing as he sinned and transgressed, he is liable to feel that he should not have the audacity to ask for forgiveness after all the negative things he did repeatedly, countless times. I am embarrassed to stand before Him or even to come crawling. How do I dare observe His precepts?! A person should not entertain such thoughts. These thoughts come from the negative influence (the yetzer hara) sitting like a pestering fly at the doorways of his heart, who attacks him daily with new strategies to cause him to fail. Instead, a person should recognize the true nature of the blessed Creator; His hand is always open to receive penitents. Therefore, it is advisable to rid oneself of one's past transgressions and start (to serve Hashem) with a new heart (and attitude).

Let us now introduce an amazing insight from the holy Rabbi Yisrael of Rozhin, zy" a. In the middle berachah of our tefilos on Yom HaKippurim (Shacharis and Mussaf), we say: "כי אתה סלחן לישראל ומחלן לשבטי ישורון בכל דור ודור"—**for you are the Forgiver of Yisrael and the Pardoner of the tribes of Yeshurun in every generation.** He explains the difference between the descriptives "סלחן"—**one who forgives**—and "מחלן"—**one who pardons**—based on the following elucidation in the Gemara (B.M. 33a) regarding the passuk (Shemos 23, 5): "כי תראה חמור שונאך רובץ תחת משאו, רובץ ולא רבצן": **"if you see the donkey of someone you hate collapsed under its burden"**—**"collapsed," but one that collapses habitually.** As Rashi explains, the passuk being expounded refers to a donkey that has collapsed only on this particular occasion, but it does not do so on a regular basis. Now, applying this to the aforementioned Yom Kippur liturgy, the descriptive "סלחן" indicates that HKB" H forgives endlessly, while "מחלן" indicates that He pardons endlessly.

We can suggest that it is precisely for this reason that the Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah chose to conclude the berachah of חנון לנו אבינו" in our daily Shemoneh Esrei with the formula "המרבה לסלוח"—**the gracious One Who repeatedly forgives.** These words encourage us not to fall prey to the yetzer hara, who wants man to despair by thinking that he has sinned so much that forgiveness and pardon are no longer available for him. Therefore, this formula encourages us and reminds us that HKB" H forgives endlessly, without any limits. This being the case, how are we to make sense of Moshe Rabeinu's loss of hope in the incident involving Korach causing him to consider: **"How many times can I bother the King? Perhaps He will no longer hear me out!"**

The Incredible Explanation of the Chasam Sofer

We will begin to shed some light on the matter by introducing a precious explanation from the incredible teachings of the Chasam Sofer, zy" a, in Derashos Chasam Sofer (Part II). He begins by focusing on what they expounded in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) on this passuk: "וישמע משה ויפול על פניו, מזה שמועדה שמעו, אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן, שחשדוהו מאשת איש". The passuk says: **"Moshe heard and fell on his face."** What report did he hear that elicited this reaction? **Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi YoNasan: He heard that they suspected him of committing adultery with a married woman.** All the commentaries are dumbfounded by this. It is

mind-boggling to imagine that the people could suspect Moshe Rabeinu, the man of G-d, of such an outrageous aveirah.

The Chasam Sofer explains that the people questioned the degree of Moshe's righteousness. They argued that he did not possess the extreme level of kedushah (of certain tzaddikim) associated with **"בעלה דמטרוניתא"—the husband of the Matron** (Mistress, woman in charge)—namely, the holy Shechinah, so to speak. For, in that capacity, he would have had the power to annul the decrees of HKB" H. On the contrary, they argued that he was no different than the rest of Yisrael who are viewed as the wife of HKB" H. As such, they are obligated to fulfill His every wish; they do not possess the power to annul His decrees. Here are the sacred words of the Chasam Sofer:

"אך אקדים, כתיב (שמואל ב כג-א) אלה דברי דוד האחרונים נאום הגבר הוקם על, צדיק מושל יראת אלקים, ואמרו חז"ל (מועד קטן טז:) צדיק מושל על [הקב"ה] כביכול, כי הוא מבוטל גזירותיו. ונראה לומר על כן אמר נאום 'הגבר' דייקא, כי אותו צדיק שהוא בבחינת גבר וזכר, איש אלקים, בעלה דמטרוניתא, הוא יכול לבטל גזרותיו כבעל המפר לאשתו, כמו שאמר בת קול (בבא בתרא עד.) עכשיו שנשבעתי מי מפר לי, אמנם מי שאינו בבחינת גבר, אלא בבחינת נקבה ומקבל מלמעלה, אינו יכול להפר שבועה שלמעלה.

הנהגה עד עכשיו חשבו [קרח ועדתו], אף על פי (במדבר טז-ג) שכל העדה קדושים ובתוכם ה', מכל מקום משה רבינו ע"ה גבר הוא, בעלה דמטרוניתא, אבל עכשיו נאמר [בחטא המרגלים] (דברים א-לה) חי ה' אם יראה איש וגו' [באנשים האלה הדור הרע הזה את הארץ הטובה אשר נשבעתי לתת לאבותיכם], ומשה רבינו ע"ה לא ביטל השבועה, אם כן חשדוהו שאיננו איש אלקים, אלא חשדוהו באשת איש, שהוא נקבה ומקבל מאיש למעלה [היינו מהקב"ה], ואם כן (במדבר שם) מדוע תתנשא על קהל ה'."

In other words, previously, the people viewed Moshe as **"the man of G-d"—the husband of the Shechinah**—possessing the power to annul G-d's decrees. In the aftermath of the episode of the meraglim, however, when it was decreed that the generation was flawed and would not be allowed to enter the land, they saw that Moshe Rabeinu, a" h, did not annul the divine decree. Hence, they suspected that he was not the "man of G-d" but rather akin to the woman who acquiesces to the will of her husband above—namely, HKB" H—just like them. This realization prompted them to protest (Bamidbar 16, 3): **"So, why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?"**

HKB" H Betrothed Yisrael Like a Bridegroom Betroths a Bride

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to latch onto the coattails of the Chasam Sofer, zy" a, and

explain his sacred remarks in greater depth. As we know, the amazing relationship between HKB”H and Yisrael is compared to that of a “Chasan” and “kallah”; HKB”H is the supreme Chasan in the heavens above, whereas the congregation of Yisrael are His kallah down on earth. The divine poet expresses this fact in the poetic song “אל מסתתר”: “אל מסתתר—**the congregation of Yisrael is sweetly called a bride.**”

Now, at Matan Torah, HKB”H wed Yisrael by giving them the Torah. This is the implication of the passuk related to the revelation at Har Sinai (Shemos 19, 10): “דיאמר ה' אל משה לך אל העם: **‘Go to the people and prepare them today and tomorrow.’**” According to Chazal, the word “וקדשתם” had a deeper significance. HKB”H appointed Moshe Rabeinu to be his agent to wed Yisrael, analogous to a Chasan who weds a kallah with a binding marriage document. In this instance, the official document was Torah she'b'chsav. Here is the pertinent passage from the Midrash (D.R. 3, 12):

Our Sages taught as follows: Betrothal and marriage documents are written only with the assent of both parties, and the groom provides the payment. From whom do we learn this? From HKB”H when He betrothed Israel on Sinai, as it is written: “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Go to the people and prepare them today and tomorrow.’” And who wrote this document? Moshe. From where do we know this? As it says (Devarim 31,9): “Moshe wrote down this Torah.” And what payment did HKB”H give him? The splendor (radiance) of his face, as it is written (Shemos 34,29): “Moshe was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant.”

Additionally, we can derive this fact from the following passuk (ibid. 19, 17): “ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלקים מן המחנה ויתיצבו” **—Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood under the mountain.** Rashi explains in the name of the Mechilta: **This informs us that the Shechinah went out towards them like a “Chasan” who goes out to greet a “kallah.”** In other words, when Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, HKB”H greeted them like a bridegroom greeting his bride, as she prepares to step under the “chuppah.”

This explains beautifully the continuation of the text: “ויתיצבו” **—and they stood beneath the mountain—**and Chazal’s elucidation (Shabbas 88a): “מולמד שכמה הקב”ה עליהם את ההר”

“כגיגית—this teaches that HKB”H held the mountain over them like an upturned barrel. According to the Mateh Moshe (Hachnasas Kallah 1, 1), the mountain was held over their heads as a makeshift chuppah. Furthermore, he writes that **all the minhagim related to a Chasan and kallah are learned from Matan Torah, when Hashem presented Himself as a Chasan opposite a kallah, who were Yisrael. As the Tashbatz writes (467): Therefore, we place them under the chuppah, in keeping with: “They stood beneath the mountain.”**

Thus, we can conclude from all the above that the wonderful relationship between HKB”H and the congregation of Yisrael is that of a husband and wife. Hence, we can infer as taught in the Midrash (Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu Rabbah, Chapter 9): “אין לך אשה כשרה בנשים אלא אשה שהיא עושה רצון בעלה”—the only proper woman is one who abides by her husband’s will. In similar fashion, Yisrael, are considered to be a proper wife, if they behave and act in compliance with the will of HKB”H.

Moshe Rabeinu Is Referred to as the “Man of G-d” because He Is the “Husband of the Shechinah”

Notwithstanding, we find that Moshe Rabeinu was on a higher level. On account of his extreme kedushah, he was, so to speak, akin to the “**husband of the Matron**”—in other words, the husband of the holy Shechinah, who is like a woman. Therefore, everything that Moshe ordered, HKB”H fulfilled, so to speak, like a proper wife who does what her husband requests. The Zohar hakadosh (Vayechi 236b) teaches that this is why Moshe Rabeinu is described as **איש האלקים**, because he was like a husband in relation to HKB”H, Who fulfilled Moshe’s requests. Here is a loose translation of the passage in the Zohar:

Come and see what is written (Devarim 33, 1): “This is the berachah that Moshe, the man of G-d, bestowed . . . He was the man (master) of the house, the husband of the mistress (the queen, the Shechinah). As it is written (Bamidbar 30, 14): “Her husband may uphold it (her vows and oaths), and her husband may annul it.” After all, she (the Shechinah) is called Moshe’s kallah (ibid. 7, 1). Hence, Moshe could bless whomever he wanted without fear (since HKB”H fulfilled his wishes like a wife fulfills her husband’s wishes).

Now, this illuminates for us the incredible interpretation of the Chasam Sofer, zy" a. Recall that the Gemara asked what Moshe heard that caused him to fall on his face. It answered: "שחשדוהו מאשת איש". The straightforward interpretation is that they suspected him of committing adultery with a **married woman**. The Chasam Sofer, however, interprets the Gemara as follows: When Korach and his assembly saw that it was decreed from above that the meraglim and that generation would not enter the land, they believed that Moshe was capable of annulling the decree. When he didn't, they belittled him by claiming that he was not "איש האלקים"—**the husband of the Shechinah (the Matron)**—but he was merely an "אשת איש"—**the wife of HKB" H**, so to speak. We find that HKB" H is referred to as "איש"—**a man**—in the following passuk (Shemos 15, 3): 'ה' איש מלחמה ה' "—**Hashem is a "man" of war; Hashem is His name**. As a wife, Moshe was obligated to honor and uphold the decrees of HKB" H; he did not have the capacity to annul them.

The Chasam Sofer explains that our blessed sages deduced that Korach and his assembly suspected Moshe of this outrageous thing from their statement: "רב לכם כי כל העדה כולם קדושים ובתוכם ה' ומדוע "—**it is much for you (Moshe and Aharon)! For the entire assembly—all of them—are holy and Hashem is among them, so why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?** They were so arrogant that they did not discern the difference between Moshe and the rest of Yisrael. In their eyes, his status was no different than theirs; they were all considered "אשת איש" vis a vis HKB" H, Who wed all of them equally at Matan Torah. This concurs very nicely with Rashi's comment: "כי כל העדה כולם קדושים, כולם שמעו דברים בסיני מפי הגבורה"—**"for the entire assembly, all of them, are holy,"** because **all of them heard words from the mouth of the Almighty at Sinai**. With this pronouncement, they inferred that Yisrael also were sanctified and wed to HKB" H as a married woman—"eishet ish"—at Matan Torah. That being the case: "**Why do you exalt yourselves over us?**" We are all equal!

The Lie of Korach and His Assembly Who Were Unaware that Moshe Saved Them from Annihilation in the Aftermath of the Sin of the Meraglim

Upon careful reflection, the gross falsehood inherent in the claim of Korach and his assembly becomes apparent. They

argued that Moshe Rabeinu did not have the status of the "**Husband of the Matron**," on the basis of the fact that he did not annul the decree imposed upon them as a consequence of the "cheit hameraglim." But this is not entirely true. In truth, after the tragic sin of the meraglim, Moshe Rabeinu did annul a divine decree; HKB" H had sentenced all of Yisrael who heeded the words of the meraglim to be annihilated. Here is the relevant passuk (Bamidbar 14, 11): "ויאמר ה' אל משה עד אנה ינאצוני העם הזה ועד אנה לא יאמינו בי בכל האותות אשר עשיתי בקרבם, אכנו בדבר ואורישנו." **Hashem said to Moshe, "To what point will this people provoke Me, and how long will they not have faith in Me, despite all the signs that I have performed in its midst? I will smite them with the plague and annihilate them, and I will make you a greater and more powerful nation than they."**

Notwithstanding, Moshe stood in the breach and prayed to HKB" H on their behalf to save them from annihilation. As we know, HKB" H accepted his heartfelt tefilah. But instead of annihilating them, HKB" H sentenced them to die in the midbar to atone for having been swayed by the meraglim and their refusal to enter the land, as it is written (ibid. 13):

"ויאמר משה אל ה' ושמעו מצרים כי העלית ככוחך את העם הזה מקרבם... והמתה את העם הזה כאיש אחד, ואמרו הגוים אשר שמעו את שמעך לאמר, מבלתי יכולת ה' להביא את העם הזה אל הארץ אשר נשבע להם וישחטם במדבר... סלה נא לעון העם הזה כגדל חסדך וכאשר נשאתה לעם הזה ממצרים ועד הנה. ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך, ואולם חי אני וימלא כבוד ה' את כל הארץ... אם יראו את הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאבותם וכל מנאצי לא יראוה."

Moshe said to Hashem, "Then Mitzrayim will hear—he from whose midst You brought up this nation with Your power . . . and if You were to put this people to death like a single man, then the goyim that heard of Your fame will say, 'It is because Hashem lacked the ability to bring this people to the land that He had sworn to give them, He slaughtered them in the midbar' . . . So, forgive now the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your kindness and as You have forgiven this people from Mitzrayim until now." Hashem responded, "I have forgiven in accordance with your words. But as I live, and the glory of Hashem fills the entire world . . . if they will see the land that I have sworn to give their forefathers; and all who scorned Me shall not see it!"

Thus, we have explicit proof that even after the "cheit hameraglim" Moshe Rabeinu demonstrated his status as the "**husband of the Matron**." HKB" H had sentence Yisrael to

annihilation, and Moshe succeeded in annulling the decree. As the Torah teaches us, HKB”H acquiesced to Moshe’s request with the proclamation: “סלחתי כדבריד” — **I have forgiven in accordance with your words.** Despite Moshe’s valiant effort to spare Yisrael, Korach and his assembly still managed to sway the people against him, since Yisrael were totally ignorant of the fact that Moshe Rabeinu had saved them from annihilation. For, the following words of HKB”H were addressed only to Moshe: “**I will smite them with the plague and annihilate them, and I will make you a greater and more powerful nation than they.**” Therefore, when they were informed of the decree that they would not be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael, Korach and his assembly managed to perpetrate the lie that Moshe was not in truth “איש האלקים”, endowed with the power to annul the decrees of HKB”H. They portrayed him as one of them, an “אשת איש”, no better than any other member of Yisrael.

Moshe Rabeinu Was Unable to Save Korach and His Assembly because They Did Not Believe in Him

Following this glorious, enlightening path, we will now continue to elaborate on the passuk: “**Moshe heard and fell on his face.**” We presented Rashi’s comment: He fell because of the dispute; for this was already the fourth offense they were guilty of . . . This prompted Moshe to think in frustration: **How many times can I bother the King, perhaps He will no longer hear me out.** To make sense of this, let us introduce a fundamental concept from our sacred sefarim. They teach us that a tzaddik can only pray for salvation on behalf of Yisrael on the condition that they believe in him and his abilities. We find an example of this at Krias Yam Suf (Shemos 14, 31): “ויאמינו בה’ ובמשה: **—and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.** They expounded in the Mechilta: **If they had faith in Moshe, all the more so, they had faith in the Makom; so, this teaches you that anyone who has faith in the shepherd of Yisrael, it is as if he had faith in He Who spoke and the world came into existence.**

We find an important concept in the incredible teachings of the Noam Elimelech (Beshalach): “זוהו הוא כלל גדול, כשרוצה צדיק לעשות טובה לאיזה איש, אז צריך מקודם להכניס במקבל הטובה אמונה, שיאמין בזה שיהיה לו טובה על ידי זה הצדיק.” **When a tzaddik wishes to perform a good deed on behalf of a particular person, he must first instill faith in the beneficiary—that he sincerely believes that something good will happen to him on**

account of this tzaddik. He writes something similar in greater detail in parshas Balak: “ובאמת הצדיק יכול להמשיך השפע על ידי דיבורו הקדוש בלי שום פעולה גשמיות כלל, רק שלפעמים צריך הצדיק דווקא לעשות פעולה גשמיות, כי בדיבור אינו יכול לפעול, כי אם לבני אדם המאמינים בזה שהצדיק יכול לפעול בדיבור, אבל אותם שאין מאמינים בזה, צריך הצדיק להמשיך לו בדרך הטבע, ולזה **In reality, the tzaddik can accomplish this feat (extending benefit) by means of his holy speech without any physical action whatsoever. But occasionally the tzaddik is specifically required to perform a physical act, because he cannot accomplish it by speech (alone). Because if the people have faith in this tzaddik then he can accomplish the feat through speech; however, for those who do not have faith in him, the tzaddik must affect him through natural means. That demands a physical action.**

We will now introduce the amazing, sacred words of the holy master Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz, zy”a, brought down in the sefer HaBinah V’HaBerachah (Vayetztei) regarding the passuk (Bereishis 30, 1): “**ותרא רחל כי לא ילדה ליעקב ותקנא רחל באחותה,**” ותאמר אל יעקב הבה לי בנים ואם אין מתה אנכי, ויחר אף יעקב ברחל ויאמר התחת אלקים Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Yaakov, and Rachel became envious of her sister. She said to Yaakov, “**Give me children; if not, I am dead.**” Yaakov’s anger flared up at Rachel, and he said, “**Am I instead of G-d, Who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?**”

He explains in his own sacred, inimitable way: **In the event that a person approaches a tzaddik with a request of salvation and mercy, it is imperative that he believes sincerely (be’emunah sheleimah) that the words of the tzaddik will certainly be fulfilled without any doubt—as it is written (Iyov 22, 28): “You would utter a decree and it would be done.”** With this in mind, he explains the reason that Yaakov became enraged with Rachel Imeinu. Had Rachel simply said to him: “**Give me children,**” and nothing more, Yaakov would have been able to provide her with salvation and fulfill her request immediately on account of her emunah.

However, since she expressed her doubt and uncertainty by adding: “**If not, I am dead**”—she demonstrated that she did not believe wholeheartedly that Yaakov possessed the power to provide her salvation. Therefore, his anger flared up, since he doubted his ability to help her, and he declared angrily and with frustration: “**Am I instead of G-d**”—I do not have

the power to grant you children. Why? "אשר מנע ממך פרי בטן"—he focuses on the word "ממך"—"from you." In other words, you are the reason that I cannot help you, because you indicated your lack of confidence in me by saying: "ואם אין"—if not.

"How many times can I bother the King" without the Support of the People's Emunah

Now, this enlightens us as to why Moshe Rabeinu fell on his face in despair. The people had already committed four offensive acts, so he feared that he could not pray on their behalf. Based on what we have just learned, let us try to explain his profound concern. Had Yisrael sinned only against HKB"H, chas v'shalom, Moshe Rabeinu could have continued praying on their behalf endlessly. This fourth transgression, however, introduced a novel aspect that had not been present previously. This time they disputed the authority and power of Moshe and Aharon. In other words, they demonstrated a serious lack of emunah in these tzaddikim. Consequently, Moshe's prayers on their behalf would be to no avail.

To embellish this thought, let us revisit the commentary of Rashi. He brought an analogy to someone who felt he could no longer trouble the king with his pleas: "How many times can I bother the King? Perhaps He will no longer hear me out!" He indicates that a limiting factor had come into play. As long as the people believed sincerely in the power and status of tzaddikim, he could continue approaching the king, as indicated by the passuk: "They had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant." In that scenario, the tzaddik is able to continue to provide salvation in keeping with the concept of "the tzaddik decrees and HKB"H fulfill." Once, however, the people no longer had faith in Moshe Rabeinu, he was forced to bother the King Himself without any assistance from the tzaddik. Hence, he feared that he could not provide them with the required salvation.

This explains very nicely words Moshe Rabeinu chose to restore Yisrael's emunah in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant (Bamidbar 16, 19): "ויאמר משה בזאת תדעו כי ה' שלחני לעשות את כל המעשים האלה כי לא מלכתי, אם כמות כל האדם ימותו אלה ופקודת כל האדם יפקד עליהם לא ה' שלחני, ואם בריאה יברא ה' ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אותם ואת כל אשר עלהם לא ה' שלחני, וידעו כי נאצו האנשים האלה את ה'." Moshe said, "Through this shall you know that Hashem has sent me to perform all these acts, for it was not from my heart. If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me. But if Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the abyss ("Sheol"), then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem!"

We can suggest that with these words Moshe intended to demonstrate to all of Yisrael that his status was truly that of "בעלה דמטרוניתא"—the husband of the Matron (the Shechinah). For, in that capacity, he possessed the power to decree a change in the forces of nature and have HKB"H fulfill his decree. To this end, he proposed a test: "If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me." In other words, if they were to die by natural means, it would not confirm the tremendous power of Moshe Rabeinu. On the other hand: "But if Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the abyss"—in other words, if HKB"H performs a miracle altering the forces of nature—"then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem!"—by daring to dispute the authority of His servant, Moshe, and failing to acknowledge him as "בעלה דמטרוניתא".

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