

**for PARSHAT CHUKAT[& Parshat Devarim]**

**BETWEEN KADESH & KADESH BARNEA**  
**(or When did the Mei Meriva incident take place?)**

Most all commentators assume that the Mei Meriva incident (as described in Bamidbar 20:1-14) took place in the fortieth year. Hence, it is also assumed that Bnei Yisrael spent most of the 38 years wandering from place to place in the desert.

Nonetheless, the Torah never provides us with a precise date for the Mei Meriva incident. In fact, we are only informed of the month, but not the year (see Bamidbar 20:1). Furthermore, from a careful reading of how Moshe Rabeinu describes those events in Parshat Devarim, one could arrive at a very different conclusion concerning what transpired during those forty years!

In the following shiur, we will explore this possibility, by undertaking a careful comparison between several psukim in Parshat Devarim and their parallel sources in Sefer Bamidbar. [To follow the shiur, you'll definitely need a Tanach in hand; in fact using two Tanachim (and a "mikraot gdolot") would come in very handy.]

**INTRODUCTION**

There's a very simple reason why everyone takes for granted that the Mei Meriva incident takes place in the 40th year. Later on, in that very same chapter in Sefer Bamidbar, we are told of Aharon's death (see 20:22-29), an event which definitely took place on the fifth month of the fortieth year (according to Bamidbar 33:38).

Therefore, it is only logical to assume that all the events in chapter 20 took place in the fortieth year. Hence, upon reading its opening pasuk:

"And Bnei Yisrael [the entire congregation] arrived at MIDBAR TZIN on the first month, and the people settled down in Kadesh, there Miriam died and was buried." (20:1)

- most all commentators conclude that Miriam died if the first month of that very same year (i.e. four months before Aharon). For example, let's note Rashbam's commentary:

"And Miriam died there: On the first month at the end of the FORTY years - for Aharon died on the fifth month of the fortieth year, as it states [explicitly] in Parshat Masei."

Note however that Rashbam's assumption is based on "parshanut" (exegesis) and not on a "masoret" (tradition).

/ see Rashi 20:1).

However, one could suggest that it would be safe to assume that conclusion is based on

is quite simple - Mei Meriva takes place immediately after the death of Miriam (see Bamidbar 20:1), and Miriam died in the first month of the FORTIETH year - didn't she?

Let's double check this assumption by taking a closer look at that pasuk in Parshat Chukat:

Note, that we are only told that this took place on the first month, but there is no mention of the year at all! So why does everyone assume that it is year FORTY?

Most of the classical commentators deal with this question. Let's start with Rashbam's explanation (on 20:1):

Rashbam's logic is quite straightforward. Since later in this same chapter we

[In other words, Rashbam doesn't say that we have a tradition that tells that Miriam died in the 40th year; rather,

one can deduce this date from the psukim. Therefore, if by using the same tools of "parshanut" [i.e. by carefully studying all of the psukim involved] one arrives at a different conclusion, it is permitted to suggest (and discuss and debate) other possibilities as well - better known as "la'asok b'divrei Torah" / "v'akmal"]

In the commentary of Ibn Ezra (to Bamidbar 20:1), we find a very similar conclusion:

"In the first month: In the FORTIETH YEAR. And (thus) there is neither a story nor a prophecy in the Torah other than in the FIRST year and in the FORTIETH year."

Ibn Ezra is making a very bold statement, as he claims that from the moment that God decreed the punishment of forty years (after chet ha'meraglim) Chumash goes into a 'coma' for 38 years, no stories, no mitzvot. Hence, Ibn Ezra must explain that all of the mitzvot and narratives recorded in Chumash between chapters 15 and 20 (i.e. between the story of the spies and the death of Miriam) took place at an earlier time, i.e. before Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai. [See Ibn Ezra on Bamidbar 16:1.]

However, Ibn Ezra does not explain here how he arrives at this conclusion. [We'll return to a possible source later in the shiur, but most probably he would explain as Rashbam does.]

Also RAMBAN agrees that Bnei Yisrael first arrive at Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year; but note how he concludes his commentary to 20:1

"But this KADESH is located in MIDBAR TZIN, and [Bnei Yisrael] arrived there in the FORTIETH year, and there Miriam died, and the psukim are EXPLICIT!"

[Note that the "girsu" in Torat Chaim's Ramban is "u'mikraot m'furashim HEYM" while Chavel's edition has: "u'mikraot m'furashim SHAM"!]

Now Ramban tells us that the psukim are explicit, but he doesn't say which psukim he is referring to!

[Note again how neither Chavel's Ramban nor Torat Chaim's provide a footnote to explain what psukim Ramban is referring to (even though you would expect them to).]

Most likely, Ramban is referring to psukim in Moshe's first speech in Sefer Devarim. In fact, in CHIZKUNI's parallel explanation (on 20:1/ he concurs that they arrive at Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year), he attempts to reconcile these psukim with parallel psukim both in Parshat Masei and in Sefer Devarim.

[I suggest that you see that Chizkuni inside, but AFTER you are familiar with those sources.]

To figure out what Ramban is referring to we must first take a step back and try to follow the flow of events, and then take inventory of all of the related sources in Chumash that describe this leg of Bnei Yisrael's journey.

**WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN TILL NOW?**

Where were Bnei Yisrael before they arrive at KADESH Midbar Tzin (in 20:1)? To figure this out, we'll need to 'work backwards'.

The two chapters that precede the "mei meriva" incident contain only mitzvot (whic previous story in Sefer Bamidbar was the incident with Korach. But nowhere in that narrative are we told WHERE that story took place. [That is what allows Ramban & Ibn Ezra to argue about it.] Therefore we must work our way backwards again to the story of the "meraglim" in Parshat Shlach which took place in KADESH BARNEA.

In other words, the last PLACE (in Chumash) before Miriam's death that Bnei Yisrael were 'spotted' was in KADESH BARNEA. But the Torah never tells us WHEN they left Kadesh Barnea, and what they did (and how longed they traveled) until they arrived at Midbar Tzin!

However, if we return to the story of the "meraglim", we can bring a very strong proof that they must have left Kadesh Barnea soon after. Recall that immediately after the chet ha'meraglim

God commands them to leave Kadesh Barnea and head SOUTH:  
"... the Amalekites and Canaanites are sitting in the valley,  
TOMORROW turn around and travel into the desert towards the  
Red Sea." (14:25)

Despite this warning the "ma'apilim" decide to attack anyhow  
(and are defeated/ see 14:39-45), but that defeat would not be a  
reason for Bnei Yisrael to stay in Kadesh Barnea. That incident  
would only be an additional reason for them to travel into the  
desert - to the south- AWAY from Eretz Canaan. If they would  
stay near Kadesh Barnea, there would be fear of an attack by  
Canaanites who most likely are already on guard because of the  
'rumors' about Bnei Yisrael's plan to conquer 'their' land.

Now Parshat Shlach stops right here without telling us if,  
when, or how they actually left Kadesh Barnea; but according to  
"pshat", based on 14:25 (quoted above), it would be safe to  
assume that they left immediately, just as God commanded them  
to!

As Sefer Bamdibar continues, the next time an encampment  
is recorded is in Parshat Chukat, as Bnei Yisrael arrive at Kadesh  
Midbar Tzin (see 20:1). What happened in the meantime. How  
many year elapsed? Did they travel to (or toward) the Red Sea as  
God commanded them?

At least partial answers to these questions are found in  
Parshat Masei and in Sefer Devarim.

### THE 18 STOP JOURNEY IN PARSHAT MASEI

Parshat Masei provides with a detailed list of Bnei Yisrael's  
journey through the desert (see 33:1-49). Even though that  
account mentions many locations that are not mentioned  
elsewhere in Chumash (and skips many locations that are  
mentioned - such as Kadesh Barnea itself!) - it will still be helpful  
for our discussion.

Let's pick up Parshat Masei as it records Bnei Yisrael's  
journey from Har Sinai (see 33:16). From Sinai they travel to  
Kivrot ha'taava, and then to Chatzerot, and then to Ritma. Now  
Kivrot ha'taava and Chatzerot have already been mentioned in  
Parshat Bha'alotcha (see 11:34-35), but Ritma is not. However,  
Parshat Bha'alotcha tells us that they camped next in Midbar  
Peraan (see 12:16), and from there Moshe sent the meraglim  
(see 13:3) from an area known as KADESH BARNEA in Midbar  
Peraan.

[Parshat Shlach never mentions Kadesh Barnea itself, but  
everywhere else in Chumash when chet ha'mergalim is  
mentioned, it states explicitly KADESH BARNEA - see Bamidbar  
32:8 and Devarim 1:3,19; 2:14; and 9:23! Most likely "Kadesha"  
mentioned in 13:26 refers to (and is a short form of) Kadesh  
Barnea.]

Therefore, Chazal identify Ritma with Kadesh Barnea, and its  
'new name' reflects the events which took place there (see Rashi  
33:18). Then Parshat Masei mentions an additional 18 stops from  
Ritma until Bnei Yisrael arrive in Midbar Tzin (see 33:18-36),  
which were not mentioned anywhere else earlier in Sefer  
Bamidbar.

[Now you can read the first part of the Chizkuni on 20:1 and  
better understand what he's talking about.]

Now among the 18 locations we find Yotvata and Etzion  
Gaver, sites which almost for sure are somewhere in the  
SOUTHERN Negev, not far from the Red Sea (i.e. near Eilat).  
Most likely, this journey SOUTHWARD was a fulfillment of God's  
command to leave Kadesh Barnea towards the Red Sea (see  
again 14:25).

Then, Parshat Masei tells us that Bnei Yisrael travel from  
Etzion Gaver and arrive at Kadesh Midbar Tzin (see 33:36-38/  
compare with 20:1), but does not tell us on what year they  
arrived.

[However, it is quite clear that they LEAVE Kadesh Midbar  
Tzin in the fortieth year, for from Kadesh they travel to Hor Ha'Har  
to bury Aharon - and that event for sure took place in year 40 as

the pasuk itself testifies (33:38).]

So was Kadesh Midbar Tzin the LAST stop after a long 38  
year journey wandering through the desert, OR was Kadesh  
Midbar Tzin the LONG stopover where Bnei Yisrael may have  
spent MOST of the years while waiting for the first generation to  
die?

Enter Parshat Devarim!

Recall that in Moshe Rabeinu's first speech in Sefer Devarim  
(chapters 1->4), he explains why forty years had elapsed since  
Bnei Yisrael SHOULD have entered. Therefore, the first part of  
that speech includes the story of chet ha'meraglim, for that was  
the primary reason for the forty year delay.

### WILL THE REAL 'KADESH' PLEASE STAND UP

That story states specifically that the meraglim were sent  
from KADESH BARNEA (see 1:19), and also includes God's  
commandment that Bnei Yisrael must immediately leave and  
travel back into the desert toward the Red Sea (see 1:40). But  
after the story of the "ma'apilim" (see 1:41-45) there is one small,  
but very important pasuk:

"va'teshvu ba'KADESH yamim rabim, kayamim asher  
ya'shavtem."

[And you settled (or sat) in KADESH many days - as the days  
that you settled (or sat) there." (1:46)

[Note the difficulty in translating this pasuk! See for example  
JPS and its footnote.]

So what KADESH is this pasuk referring to? There are two  
'candidates':

- 1) KADESH BARNEA - where the meraglim were sent from
- 2) KADESH MIDBAR TZIN - where the Mei Meriva story took  
place

But based on our analysis above, it CANNOT be Kadesh  
Barnea! After all, God commanded them to LEAVE Kadesh  
Barnea - "machar" -the NEXT DAY. Why then would they stay  
there for a long time?

[It cannot be because the ma'apilim lost their battle, since  
that defeat is only more reason to retreat to a safer location  
farther away. Most likely the Canaanites have heard rumors of  
Bnei Yisrael's impending attack and now that they are camped so  
close [Kadesh Barnea borders on eretz canaan (see Bamidbar  
34:4)] - God commands that they move to the south for their own  
safety. Otherwise they will be attacked and God is no longer 'with  
them' to protect them in battle.]

So why do almost all of the commentators explain that  
KADESH here means KADESH BARNEA? [see Ibn Ezra &  
Chizkuni]

After all, in this very same chapter Kadesh Barnea has  
already been mentioned twice (see 1:3 & 1:19 and 2:14) and  
each by its full name KADESH BARNEA! Why then would Moshe  
refer to it now simply as KADESH - especially when there is  
another location called KADESH (i.e. Kadesh Midbar Tzin) which  
is always referred to simply as KADESH?!

### THE EVENTS FROM MERAGLIM TO ARVOT MOAV

Most probably, the reason why everyone explains KADESH  
here as KADESH BARNEA is because of the immediate context  
of this pasuk.

[Before continuing, you must review 1:40->2:14 on your own,  
and attempt to follow the flow. Compare them with the parallel  
account in Bamidbar 20:14->21:4, and especially 20:16 & 21:4!  
Pay careful attention to Dvarim 2:14 as well.]

Let's follow the flow:

- \* the story of chet ha'meraglim (1:19-40)
- \* God's command to LEAVE Kadesh Barnea -> Yam Suf  
(1:40)
- \* The "ma'apilim" are defeated, Bnei Yisrael cry (1:41-45)
- \*\* -- AND YOU SETTLED IN KADESH FOR MANY DAYS

(1:46)

\* "Then we turned and travelled into the DESERT towards YAM SUF, as GOD HAD COMMANDED US, and we circled Har Seir for many days". (22:1 / this pasuk is KEY)

The last pasuk which we quoted is the KEY to understanding what happened, [and its most likely what Ramban was referring to when he said "ha'mikraot m'furashim"].

As Chizkuni (on 2:1) explains - the travel described in this pasuk is precisely the same 18 stops described in Parshat Masei from Ritma to Kadesh Midbar Tzin. Most likely, he reaches this conclusion for the following reason:

Since God commanded Bnei Yisrael to travel towards Yam Suf in 1:40, it only makes sense that this pasuk describes HOW Bnei Yisrael fulfilled this command. In fact the pasuk states explicitly "as God had commanded us" (2:1) - i.e. his command in 1:40. Furthermore, that journey took "many days" - therefore it coincides perfectly with the 18 stop journey from Ritma to Kadesh as described in Parshat Masei. If so, then KADESH which is mentioned in the previous pasuk (1:46) CANNOT be Kadesh Midbar Tzin, since Bnei Yisrael had not arrived there yet, since they only arrive there after the journey described in 2:1. Therefore, KADESH in 1:46 must be KADESH BARNEA, and it would seem that Bnei Yisrael remained for a long time in Kadesh Barnea, most probably feeling quite devastated by the events of the meraglim and ma'apilim.

But what about God's command of "machar, pnu u'su lachem" (1:40)? Should they not have left right away?

On the other hand, 2:1 must be talking about the 18 stop journey, for that is the only journey when Bnei Yisrael travel for 'many days' in the direction of Yam Suf. [Isn't it?]

Therefore all of the commentators prefer this explanation of 2:1, and prefer to overlook the problem with "machar" (in 1:40) - and hence KADESH in 1:46 must be KADESH BARNEA and therefore, they only arrive in Kadesh Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year.

[I'm almost sure that this is how all of the rishonim understood these psukim, if anyone has heard a different explanation - please write me.]

### NOT SO FAST!

However, there is one small 'hole' in this interpretation. The assumption that 2:1 refers to the 18 stop journey was based on two very strong points:

- 1) they travelled south to Yam Suf/ at that was only once.
- 2) just as God had commanded / in 1:40

But one can argue with both of these points. [It's a bit complicated, so follow carefully with your Tanach in hand.]

Note how the next set of psukim in Sefer Devarim (see 2:2-8) relate BACK to the journey described in 2:1. Let's explain how:

"Then God said to me saying: You have been circling this mountain for too long - turn to the NORTH. And command the people saying: You are passing now along the border of your brother Esav... then we passed thru the land of 'bnei Esav' along the way of the ARAVA from Eilat & Etzion Gaver and then we passed Moav... until we reached Nachal Zared."

(see 2:2-14)

Now this journey CANNOT be the 18 stop journey from Ritma to Kadesh, since this journey ends in Transjordan, in the land of Moav. In fact, this is the final journey of the end of the fortieth year when Bnei Yisrael pass thru Seir, Moav, and Amon and fight with Sichon & Og and camp in Arvot Moav. In other words, this is no the journey of 33:16-36 in Parshat Masei, rather it is the last leg of the journey described in Parshat Masei, i.e. 33:40-49, AFTER they leave Kadesh Midbar Tzin.

And if the journey described in 2:2-13 is from Kadesh Midbar Tzin to Arvot Moav, then (based in its context) so must be the journey described in 2:1!

And if 2:1 describes this last leg of the journey, the KADESH mentioned in 1:46 must be Kadesh Midbar Tzin - just as its name implies!

But how about our two anchors? How can this last leg of the journey be considered a travel TOWARDS YAM SUF, and how could it be referred to "as God had commanded us" (see 2:1)?

The answer is simple. Go back to Parshat Chukat and the parallel account of Bnei Yisrael's departure from KADESH Midbar Tzin:

"And Moshe sent messengers from KADESH to the King of Edom saying:... we are now in Kadesh - a city on your border - let us pass thru your land..." (see Bamidbar 20:14-21)

But Edom [=bnei Esav] did not allow Bnei Yisrael to pass. But God COMMANDED them not to attack Edom, but instead to CIRCLE the land Edom by travelling south TOWARDS YAM SUF, and then crossing the ARAVA towards the east, and then turning north towards Moav!

And this is exactly what Parshat Chukat tells us in the next chapter:

"And we left Hor ha'Har (next to Kadesh), and travelled TOWARDS YAM SUF, to CIRCLE the land of EDOM..." (21:4)

[From there they travelled north (see 21:10-20) thru Moav etc. ending up in Arvot Moav. Compare this journey with the second leg in Parshat Masei (33:38-48/ you'll see that its the same journey!]

So lo and behold we find a SECOND journey, commanded by God, where Bnei Yisrael travel TOWARDS YAM SUF and CIRCLE HAR SEIR. It is this journey, described in Parshat Chukat and detailed in Parshat Masei (33:38-48) that Devarim 2:1 could very easily be referring to! And hence, this SECOND journey as well fulfills both criterions mentioned above ("derech Yam Suf" and "as God commanded") - and KADESH in 1:46 can still be KADESH Midbar Tzin - and all of the psukim work out perfectly!

The final proof that Bnei Yisrael must have left Kadesh Barnea immediately and not waited there for too long is from Devarim 2:14:

"And the days that we travelled from KADESH BARNEA until we reached NACHAL ZARED (border with Moav) were 38 YEARS..."

This pasuk states explicitly that Bnei Yisrael LEFT Kadesh Barnea in YEAR 2, and therefore, they could not have stayed there for "yamim rabim" [which implies many years / see Breishit 24:55].

### IN CONCLUSION / & SOME REMARKS

So "Imai nafka minah" - what difference does it make when Bnei Yisrael first arrived in KADESH.

If we understand that they arrive in Kadesh Midbar Tzin only in year 40, the Mei Meriva takes place in year 40 and begins the events of that final year, and Miriam dies at an age well over 130!

If we understand that they possibly could have arrived in Kadesh Midbar Tzin only several years after chet ha'meraglim, i.e. after the 18 stop journey towards Yam Suf back, then back north to Kadesh (which could have taken several years and served as a precaution against any further Canaanite attacks); then Moshe's sin at Mei Meriva could have taken place only a short time after chet ha'meraglim and the story of Korach. If so, this would fit in thematically very nicely with our shiurim on Bhaalotcha, Shlach, and Korach, which all indicate a slow but definite gap between Moshe and people and hence the collapse of his leadership. [It would also have Miriam's death at an age under 120.]

There are several other implications, but the main purpose of the shiur is simply to study Chumash, trying to figure out all of the possibilities. Once again, it could be I missed something, since I'd expect to find the possibility in one of the commentaries. [I haven't looked that much yet, so if anyone finds something, please write. Also if anyone finds a mistake in the shiur or another source that I overlooked, please write.]

In the meantime, it's a two hours before sunset in Israel and want to send it out before shabbat (at least for those of you in the western hemisphere). As you must have noticed, the shiur is a very rough draft, hopefully, after hearing your comments, by next year we'll have an edited and updated version. Till then,

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

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**FOR FURTHER IYUN**

A. Note also from Bamidbar 34:4 that Kadesh Barnea is located on the SOUTHERN border of Eretz Canaan, and that's exactly why the meraglim are sent from there. (Today, this area is identified just over the Egyptian border with Israel in the Negev, about 20 kilometers east of Sdeh Boker and south of Nitzana.)