



# Likkutei Sichos

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## Waiting for Miriam

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## 1.

### WHO WANTED TO WAIT

At the end of our *parshah*, on the verse,<sup>1</sup> “Miriam was shut out of the encampment camp for seven days; and the people did not travel until Miriam was readmitted,” Rashi quotes the words, “and the people did not travel,” and remarks:

The Omnipresent accorded her this honor because of the one hour she lingered for Moshe when he was cast into the river, as it says:<sup>2</sup> “His sister stationed herself at a distance, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

Commentators<sup>4</sup> clarify that Rashi offers this explanation to address a question arising from the words, “and the people did not travel on until Miriam was readmitted.” The following verse states, “**And afterwards, the people traveled.**” Meaning, “the people traveled,” **after** “Miriam was shut out of the encampment for seven days.” Why then does the Torah need to first say, “and the people did not travel...”?

Rashi resolves this question by saying that Torah repeats this to teach us that the people did not travel in Miriam’s honor.

However, we need to clarify: The verse says, “**The people** did not travel.” Why does Rashi say (and from where does he learn) that “the **Omnipresent** accorded her”? Moreover, in doing so, Rashi deviates from the wording of our Rabbis in the mishnah,<sup>5</sup> “Therefore, the **Jewish people** waited...”

On a simple level, we can offer the following answer:<sup>6</sup> The Jewish people always traveled and camped, not as they decided, but rather, as the *parshah* says earlier,<sup>7</sup> “In accordance with the lifting of the Cloud from atop the Tent,

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<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar* 12:15.

<sup>2</sup> *Shemos* 2:4.

<sup>3</sup> {After Moshe was cast into the Nile, Miriam stood nearby to watch what would happen.}

<sup>4</sup> *Maskil LeDavid* on Rashi’s commentary.

<sup>5</sup> *Sotah* 9b.

<sup>6</sup> See *Be’er Mayim Chaim* (by Maharal’s brother) and *Devek Tov* on Rashi’s commentary.

<sup>7</sup> *Bamidbar* 9:17.

afterwards the Children of Israel would travel; and in the place where the Cloud would rest, there the Children of Israel would encamp.” Thus, the reason “the people did not travel on until Miriam was readmitted,” was because the Cloud of Hashem did not move upward.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, “the **Omnipresent** accorded her this honor....”

Furthermore, the following is also evident: Rashi says, “the Omnipresent accorded her” (and not just “this honor was accorded to her,” or, “she received this honor”), in contrast to the mishnah, which says, “therefore, the **Jewish people** waited.” — Although, even according to the mishnah, it is understood that the traveling of the Jewish people depended on the Cloud rising. — This is because, according to the mishnah, the Jewish people waited, and this was **also** by their choice. Meaning, the Jewish people also wanted to wait for her.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, according to Rashi, the **only** reason the people remained with her was because “the **Omnipresent** accorded her” (that is, because the Cloud remained), and not because the Jewish people wanted to wait for her.

However, this explanation seems quite a stretch. Scripture says, “the people did not travel on.” Why would we then interpret this verse at odds with *pshat*,<sup>10</sup> that the Jewish people themselves did **not** want to wait?

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<sup>8</sup> *Daas Zekeinim* by the *Baalei HaTosafos*; *Rabbeinu Bachya*, ad loc.; *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 14, par. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See *Or HaChaim*, ad loc.

<sup>10</sup> {The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

## 2.

### ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ON RASHI'S COMMENTARY

Additionally, we need to clarify:

a) Why does Rashi add, “when he was cast into the river”? Why is this relevant considering that Rashi already said, “the one hour she lingered for Moshe”? Rashi should have (just) said, as the mishnah says,<sup>11</sup> “Miriam waited for Moshe for one hour, as it says....”

b) Why does Rashi also quote the words from the verse, “at a distance”? He could have just quoted the words, “his sister stationed herself,” and we would have understood that she waited for Moshe.

c) Not only that — but Rashi adds, “etc.”<sup>12</sup> — an allusion to the continuation of the verse! Of what relevance is the continuation of the verse to the interpretation here?

## 3.

### HONORING HER OR SAVING HER LIFE

We will clarify all the above by first explaining the “honor” bestowed upon Miriam by the Jewish people waiting for her.

At first glance, the implication is that if the Jewish people would not have waited, then her delay in the desert<sup>13</sup> would have been some form of dishonor.

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<sup>11</sup> And in *Sifri* and *Mechilta*, it is stated similarly.

<sup>12</sup> Which is omitted in our version of the mishnah and in *Sifri*. Likewise, it is omitted in the second ed. of Rashi and in several manuscripts of Rashi.

<sup>13</sup> See *Toras Moshe* (by Chasam Sofer) on *Bamidbar* 12:9.

This, however, seems perplexing: Had Miriam remained alone in the desert, it would not only have constituted dishonor — it would have literally **placed her life in danger!**

Perhaps, we can say that in order to forestall this difficulty, Rashi adds the words, “when he was cast into the river,” to emphasize that Miriam’s reward was “measure for measure.” Meaning, just as the one hour that Miriam waited for Moshe was at a time when his life was hanging in the balance, similarly, the reward that Hashem gave her (i.e., that she should not remain alone in the desert) was at a time that her life was in peril. But this cannot be the case because if this were true, Rashi should not have said, “The Omnipresent accorded her this **honor**,” for Hashem’s intention here was not to honor Miriam but to spare her life.

#### 4.

NOW OR LATER

The explanation is as follows:

Hashem had said,<sup>14</sup> “Let her be shut out of the camp for seven days, and then let her be readmitted.” This intimates that Miriam’s cure (“then let her be readmitted”)<sup>15</sup> depended on her remaining “**out** of the camp for seven days,” that is, outside the three Jewish camps.<sup>16</sup> The description and nature of a “camp,” etymologically related to the word “encampment”<sup>17</sup> — in this instance (and similarly, being shut out outside the camp) it was only possible {for Miriam to be readmitted into the camp} when the Jewish people were encamped. As Rashi has already explained:<sup>18</sup> “The area within the curtains {of the courtyard of the *Mishkan*} was the ‘camp of the *Shechinah*,’ the encampment of the Levites round about this... this is the Levite camp; and from there outward up to the end of the

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<sup>14</sup> *Bamidbar* 12:14.

<sup>15</sup> See Rashi on *Bamidbar* 12:14 (and Rashi’s second interpretation on *Bamidbar* 12:12).

<sup>16</sup> {The encampment in the desert was divided into three zones: the camp of the *Shechinah*, the camp of the Levites, and the camp of the Israelites, as will be discussed.}

<sup>17</sup> See also Rashi on *Bamidbar* 10:34: “*From the camp* — from the place where they encamped.”

<sup>18</sup> *Bamidbar* 5:2.

encampment of the divisions... was the ‘camp of the Israelites.’” In contrast, when the Jewish people traveled, the description “outside the camp (the three camps)” is completely immaterial.

Therefore, if the Jewish people had not have waited, **encamped**, for the seven days during which Miriam was shut outside, although obviously she would not have remained alone in the desert — she would have traveled with them — Hashem’s command, “Let her be shut out of the **camp** for seven days” would not have been fulfilled, since, by definition, there was no longer an encampment. If that would have happened, the duration of Miriam’s isolation from the encampment would have extended beyond than the seven days, since the days spent traveling would not have counted in the seven days of isolation.

This, then, was the honor that Hashem showed her: All the Jewish people waited another seven days **while encamped**, in order for her to be isolated **immediately** outside the encampment for seven days.

## 5.

### A METZORA NOWADAYS

On this basis, one sees how from Rashi’s commentary, wondrous insights also in Jewish law can be derived. On the words, “and then let her תִּצָּטֵר {be readmitted; lit., *brought in*},” Rashi explains:

I say that all the different forms of the verb צִטָּר that are written {in the Torah} concerning *metzora'im*<sup>19</sup> are used because the *metzora* is sent out of the camp, and when he is cured, he is readmitted. Therefore, {a form of the word} צִטָּר is used; it means “bringing in.”

This intimates that the command, “Let her be shut out of the camp for seven days,” with Miriam, was related to her being a *metzora*. On this basis, we can posit that the law of the *metzora*, “All the days that the affliction is upon

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<sup>19</sup> {Plural of *metzora*, A person afflicted with *tzaraas*, a spiritual disease with physical symptoms affecting the skin.}

him, he shall remain impure... he shall dwell in isolation, his dwelling shall be outside the camp,”<sup>20</sup> is not an incidental obligation (the requirement to remain outside the camp being based on his being impure). Rather, this is (also) a condition in the *metzora*’s process of becoming pure. If the *metzora* does not fulfill the directive, “He shall dwell in isolation, his dwelling shall be outside the camp” while he is impure, he cannot become pure, as discussed above concerning the case of Miriam’s isolation.

[The same applies to a *metzora musgar*.<sup>21</sup> The *metzora musgar* also becomes cured by isolating himself for several days: “The Kohen shall isolate the affected person for seven days.”<sup>22</sup> Based on the above, we must presume that should the *metzora musgar* not complete the seven days of isolation outside the camp, he cannot become pure until all seven full days are completed.]

However, regarding a *metzora*, about whom the verse says, “he shall dwell in isolation — his dwelling shall be outside the camp,” there is room to deliberate: Is the main point of the imperative that “he shall dwell in isolation,” a negative one? Meaning, the *metzora* is obligated *not* to remain in the encampment. Instead, and consequently, he needs to dwell alone (even while outside the encampment). Or is the main point the fulfillment of the positive obligation — that he **dwells outside** the encampment?

The difference (similar to the case of Miriam) would be in a scenario that it would be impossible for the *metzora* to leave the encampment (because there was no encampment). Rather, the only part of the obligation he could fulfill would be to dwell alone. Would this thwart the purification process?

[And the same would apply to a *metzora musgar*, as discussed above. In a situation where it would be impossible for him to leave the encampment, as mentioned, do his days of isolation count as part of the seven days? According to the first rationale, since during those seven days, he was not dwelling in the

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<sup>20</sup> Vayikra 13:46.

<sup>21</sup> {The term *metzora musgar* refers to someone who develops a skin condition that presents with some properties of *tzaraas*. In such a case, the Torah requires the Kohen to isolate this person for a week to determine whether his symptoms develop into full-blown *tzaraas*.}

<sup>22</sup> Vayikra 13:4.

{traveling} camp, therefore, those days could count to complete his seven. However, according to the second rationale, the *metzora musgar* would need to wait for there to be encampment in order to complete his seven days of dwelling outside the camp.]

In light of the above, it emerges that this concept may be relevant to actual halachah nowadays: The law is that “the purification of a person afflicted by *tzaraas* is carried out in Israel and in the Diaspora, while the Temple is standing and in the era when the Temple is not standing.”<sup>23</sup> On this basis (according to the opinions who maintain that the laws and holiness of [the camps and of] Jerusalem do not apply these days), the question becomes: Can a *metzora* ever become pure after the destruction of the Temple?

If the primary aspect of the *metzora*’s purification is that he should be isolated — he should not be in the camp — this is also possible nowadays. However, if the *metzora* needs to dwell **outside** the encampment, this cannot be done nowadays, in an era after the destruction of the Temple.

True, we could presume that since nowadays there is no “encampment” whatsoever (also when the *metzora* had become impure), therefore, the *metzora*, in fact, does not need to **dwel outside the camp** in order to become purified.<sup>24</sup>

But the aforementioned question stands in a situation in which he became impure when the Temple stood, and then, during the days of his impurity, the Temple and the city were destroyed: Can this person become pure<sup>25</sup> after the destruction of the Temple?

Based on the aforementioned discussion regarding Miriam, we can infer that the law concerning every *metzora* is that what is pivotal is the obligation for

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<sup>23</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas*,” ch. 11, par. 6.

<sup>24</sup> As is the case in several areas, for example, during the time of the Temple, a convert was required to bring a sacrifice and have its blood sprinkled. Nowadays, when there are no sacrifices, this does not prevent conversions. (See *Ritva* on *Yevamos* 46b, s.v., “*dilma*”; *Nimukei Yosef* on *Yevamos* 47a, s.v., “*tanu rabanan*”; and see *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, entry, “*ger*.”)

<sup>25</sup> The same question would apply to a *metzora musgar*: If the Temple and the city were destroyed during his seven or fourteen days of seclusion, would the following days count to complete his days of seclusion?



the *metzora* to dwell outside the encampment. Thus, in a situation where there are no encampments, and he cannot fulfill his obligation that “his dwelling shall be outside the camp,” he cannot become pure.

## 6.

### WHY MENTION HASHEM

Based on the idea (discussed above in Section 4) that the honor accorded to Miriam consisted of the time described in the verse, “let her be shut out of the camp for seven days” (and consequently, her becoming cured,) not being postponed to a later (and lengthier) time, we can also explain why Rashi says, “the **Omnipresent** accorded her this honor.” Ostensibly, Rashi should have used wording that was aligned with the simple reading of the verses, similar to the wording of the mishnah, “Therefore (**all**) the **Jewish people** waited for seven days,” as discussed above. On the other hand, if Rashi wanted to point out the greatness of the honor accorded to Miriam, he should have written something similar to what is written in *Sifri* (and *Mechilta*): “The Omnipresent caused the *Shechinah*, the Ark, the Kohanim, the Levi'im, Israel, and the seven Clouds of Glory to wait for her.”

This is because Rashi's intent was not really to teach us **who** accorded her this honor — Hashem or the Jewish people. Rather, Rashi's intent was to emphasize that the honor was associated with the place — with Hashem's (“*Hamakom*,” “the Omnipresent,” lit., “the place”) directive to her to isolate herself **immediately** outside the camp for seven days.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Rashi's intention in saying “this honor...” is not to emphasize the **greatness** of the honor conferred upon Miriam, but rather the favor and benefit **she would receive**. Therefore, the number of those who tarried for her sake and whether the Jewish people wanted to wait are both of little consequence.

## FAR AWAY

However, we can still ask: How do we see that the honor that the Omnipresent accorded her is “measure for measure” because of “the one hour she lingered for Moshe”? In that case (when Moshe was cast into the river), Moshe was in grave danger — how is the honor that Hashem accorded her an **appropriate** reward for this action? [This question holds true from both perspectives: on account of her actual act — standing next to the river to save a life, one of the noblest of deeds; and giving her “honor” as a reward (even the greatest honor) was not commensurate with her deed. On the other hand, for Miriam to wait an “hour” is something that anyone would do. Even a simple person can understand why she did this. After all, she did so in order to save a child, and particularly a child who was her own brother! What is so special about her conduct? {Yet} Hashem rewarded her by **honoring** her and having the entire Jewish nation and the *Mishkan*, etc., wait for her for such a long time.]

Therefore, Rashi also quotes the words from the verse “**at a distance.**” This teaches us she didn’t wait in order to save Moshe’s life. Since she stood far away, she would not have been able to do anything to save him.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, there is no question how the honor that Hashem showed her could serve as an adequate reward for her lingering, etc., because her waiting was not an act associated with saving a life.

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<sup>27</sup> As the verse continues: “To know what would be done with him”; see *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel*, loc. cit.: “To know what will happen to Moshe in the end.”

## 8.

### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

However, we can still ask: What is the connection in substance between the honor that Hashem accorded Miriam and her waiting for Moshe for one hour? The phrase “at a distance” only explains how Miriam’s waiting had nothing to do with saving Moshe’s life, but it does not show a commonality between the two events.

Therefore, Rashi adds, “etc.” The continuation of the verse and the *parshah* help us understand this idea.

The Torah<sup>28</sup> recounts how, because “his sister stationed herself at a distance to see what would befall him,” when Pharaoh’s daughter came down “to bathe in the river...” and she saw “a child crying, and she took pity on him,” she tried, in vain, to calm him. Then, “His sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, ‘Shall I get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?’ And Pharaoh’s daughter answered, ‘Go.’ So the girl ran (**as quickly as a mature girl**)<sup>29</sup> and called the child’s mother.”

Presumably, even if Miriam had not stood there, Pharaoh’s daughter, after “having taken Moshe around to many Egyptian women to nurse him, but he had not nursed {from them},”<sup>30</sup> ultimately would have realized what was happening, and would have looked for a Jewish woman. But then all this would have taken a longer time.

Her act — “His sister stationed herself at a distance” — resulted in Miriam accelerating the entire story and minimizing Moshe’s suffering.

Thus, the honor that Hashem accorded her — “and the people did not travel on until Miriam was readmitted” — so that her pain — “let her be shut out

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<sup>28</sup> *Shemos* 2:4 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Rashi on *Shemos* 2:8.

<sup>30</sup> Rashi on *Shemos* 2:7.

of the camp for seven days” — would end sooner, was measure for measure: “Because of the one hour she lingered for Moshe when he was cast into the river.”

## 9.

### WINE OF TORAH

From “the wine of Torah”<sup>31</sup> in Rashi’s commentary:

We discussed (at the beginning of this *sichah*) that the mishnah uses slightly different wording: “Therefore, the Jewish people waited” (even though, obviously, the Jewish people waited because Hashem caused them to do so since the Cloud did not ascend.)<sup>32</sup> This is because, according to the mishnah, the Jewish people also desired to wait for Miriam.

Although, presumably,<sup>33</sup> Rashi would agree that the Jewish people also wanted to wait for her, Rashi emphasizes the “**Omnipresent**,” whereas the mishnah just says, “the **Jewish people** waited.” We can posit a rationale for this difference in wording between Rashi and the mishnah, according to the inner-dimension of Torah:

Our Sages say,<sup>34</sup> “Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except the fear of Heaven.” For this reason, it is difficult to suggest that this praiseworthy behavior — the Jewish people waiting for Miriam and thereby, honoring her — came only from “the hands of Heaven,” by the Cloud (not rising), and had nothing to do with their own wishes.

It is reasonable to presume that, on the contrary, the reason the Cloud stayed put was because the Jewish people wanted to wait for her. The mishnah

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<sup>31</sup> {The deeper ideas in Torah.}

<sup>32</sup> {The ascent of the Cloud was a signal from Hashem that the Jewish people should travel. If it did not ascend, they were not permitted to travel. See *Shemos* 40:36-37.}

<sup>33</sup> Based on a simple understanding of the words “and the people did not travel.”

<sup>34</sup> *Berachos* 33b; Rashi on *Devarim* 10:12: “**Our Sages** derived from this....”

emphasizes this by saying, “Therefore, the Jewish people waited for her.” This is congruent with the theme **and continuation of the mishnah**. Namely, the Jewish people are treated “measure for measure.”

However, Rashi maintains that even if it is true that the Jewish people also wanted to wait for her, according to *pshat*, it is difficult to suggest that this encampment differed from other encampments — that this encampment depended on the will of the Jewish people.

On an even deeper level, we can posit the following: Rashi’s commentary, “the wine of Torah,” expresses the inner dimension and truth of everything. Meaning, even matters of “fear of Heaven,” brought about by a **person’s *avodah***,<sup>35</sup> really also come from Above. But this influence extends from a “place” even beyond “the **hands** of Heaven.”<sup>36</sup> Meaning, even the Jewish people’s desire to honor Miriam was inspired from Above.

This is in contrast to the mishnah, the **revealed** part of the Torah. From this perspective, it is not **openly** sensed how this {influence} also comes from Above (as this would conflict with the principle of free choice). Rather, according to the mishnah, this choice was a product of the people’s *avodah*.<sup>37</sup>

## 10.

### INSPIRATION FROM ON HIGH

Based on all the above, we can also appreciate why this idea — that in reality, everything comes from Above — is alluded to in Rashi’s comments regarding *tzaraas*.

The general idea of a *metzora* being sent out of the three camps is because a *metzora* personifies the converse of holiness. Therefore, the *metzora* must

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<sup>35</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>36</sup> *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 15a-b, and the sources cited there.

<sup>37</sup> See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 15a-b.

dwelling outside the camp — even outside the camp of ordinary Jews. This shows that he is far from even the lowest level of the camp of ordinary Jews.

[We can posit that this is the deeper reason for what was explained above: The main point of the procedure involving the *metzora* is specifically his obligation to be outside the camp. For when there are no camps, it is not evident how he stands outside the **parameters of holiness**.]

Therefore, this idea, too, that even the fear of Heaven descends from Above is alluded to in the context of a *metzora* and expediting his purification. This is because the overall idea of purifying a *metzora* comes specifically from Above. As explained elsewhere,<sup>38</sup> this is why it says regarding the *metzora*,<sup>39</sup> “He shall be brought to the Kohen.” The wording<sup>40</sup> intimates that the *metzora* is compelled. This is because the impetus to return to Hashem on such a low plane, outside the three camps, does not emerge from within the person. For when one is in such a low state, it is very difficult for a person to be self-motivated to do *teshuvah*. Rather, the inspiration comes from Above, conferred to the person predicated on Hashem’s promise,<sup>41</sup> “No one shall remain banished.” This promise also empowers the person. Hashem provides a person with help.

— Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Behaaloscha*, 5725 (1965)

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<sup>38</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 101 ff., and the sources cited there.

<sup>39</sup> Beg. of *parshas Metzora*.

<sup>40</sup> *Shach* and *Kli Yakar* on *Vayikra* 14:2.

<sup>41</sup> {*Shmuel II* 14:14.}