**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT KORACH**

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Contribution by Dr. James Cleeman

in honor of Mr. Aryeh Fund,

distinguished alumnus of Yeshivat Har Etzion

and outstanding *ba'al chesed*.

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In memory of Rebbetzin Rebecca Singer z"l,

wife of Rabbi Joseph Singer z"l,
daughter of Rabbi Chaim Heller z"l,

upon her yahrzeit, 27 Sivan

by her daughter Vivian Singer

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**“Who Confirms the Word of His Servant and Performs the Counsel of His Messengers” (*Yeshayahu* 44:26)**

**Moshe vs. Those Who Challenged His Mission**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**I. Three Statements of Moshe**

In three places in our *parasha*, the Torah tells of actions that were taken at the word of Moshe and that involved miracles. In all three cases, God did not first instruct Moshe about the matter, nor did Moshe prayed to God in its regard.

1) The first instance is found at the beginning of the *parasha*, where we read of the accusations hurled by those who assembled against Moshe and Aharon:

16:3: “You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you lift up yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

Moshe responds with an action and with words:

4: And when Moshe heard it, he fell upon his face.

5: And he spoke to Korach and to all his company, saying: “In the morning the Lord will show who are His and who is holy and will cause him to come near to Him; even him whom He may choose will He cause to come near to Him.

6: This do: Take you censors, Korach, and all his company;

7: and put fire therein, and put incense upon them before the Lord tomorrow; and it shall be that the man whom the Lord does choose, he shall be holy; you take too much upon you, you sons of Levi.”

In the end, the events play out in accordance with his instructions:

18: And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood at the door of the Tent of Meeting with Moshe and Aharon.

19: And Korach assembled all the congregation against them to the door of the Tent of Meeting…

The results are described toward the end of the story:

35: And fire came forth from the Lord and devoured the two hundred and fifty men that offered the incense.

What is the source of Moshe's instructions to Korach and his company and to his brother Aharon? Is the source a Divine command that Moshe received but was not recorded in the Torah, or did Moshe initiate the censers-test on his own, trusting that God would perform the required miracle and prove thereby who was the man chosen by Him?

This question relates not only to Moshe's instructions, but also to what precedes those instructions:

5: “In the morning the Lord will show who are His and who is holy and will cause him to come near to Him; even him whom He may choose will He cause to come near to Him.

Is this a prophetic message in the mouth of Moshe given to him by God, or is it perhaps a declaration that Moshe makes on his own, based on absolute confidence in the success of his plan?

2) After Korach and his company assemble at the door of the Tent of Meeting, each man holding his censer in his hand, and all the congregation assemble against Moshe and Aharon in that place, Moshe is commanded to leave that focal point of the events and move to a different focal point of the rebellion – "the dwelling of Korach, Datan, and Aviram" in the camp of Reuven.[[1]](#footnote-1)

23: And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying:

24: “Speak to the congregation, saying: Get you up from about the dwelling of Korach, Datan, and Aviram.”

Moshe does as he was commanded, as is described in verses 25-26, and the congregation found in that location respond as required: "So they got up from the dwelling of Korach, Datan, and Aviram" (v. 27). At that point, Moshe speaks to the congregation:

28: And Moshe said: “Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works and that I have not done them of my own mind.

29: If these men die the common death of all men and be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord has not sent Me.

30: But if the Lord make a new thing, and the ground open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you shall understand that these men have despised the Lord.”

 Moshe's words are immediately fulfilled:

31: And it came to pass, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground did cleave asunder that was under them.

32: And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men that appertained to Korach, and all their goods.

33: So they and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit; and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly.

Is Moshe's announcement in verses 29-30 about what was about to take place a prophecy that was given to him by God that was not recorded (in which case it was certainly given to him together with the instruction recorded earlier in verse 24), or did he say this on his own, confident that God would act accordingly, and indeed that is what happened?

3) In the short story appended to the story of Korach's rebellion (17:6-15), the people of Israel accuse Moshe and Aharon: "You have killed the people of the Lord." God then commands Moshe and Aharon: "Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." At this point, Moshe does not argue against the punishment, as he had done in the previous event (16:2-22).[[2]](#footnote-2) Instead of arguing on behalf of Israel, Moshe turns to a different avenue of rescue:

11: And Moshe said to Aharon: “Take your censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and lay incense thereon, and carry it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun.”

Aharon does what Moshe had told him to do: "And he ran into the midst of the assembly; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people; and he put on the incense, and made atonement for the people… and the plague was stayed" (verses 12-13).

How did Moshe know that carrying the incense through the congregation would stay the plague? Did God tell this to him at this time, such that in his words to Aharon, Moshe is essentially passing on the word of God? Or did Moshe say this to Aharon on his own, trusting that such an action would stop the plague?

And finally, we ask, why do these three questions arise specifically in *Parashat Korach*, in the same historical-chronological context? All of these actions that Moshe commanded to do or announced took place in connection with the rebellion of Korach, Datan, and Aviram. In other contexts, there is hardly any such uncertainty regarding Moshe's actions. How, then, are these questions connected to the content of our *parasha*?

**II. R. Sa’adya Gaon, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra: The Test of the Censers was Told to Moshe by way of Prophecy**

Let us follow in the footsteps of the commentators and see whether they answer our questions. Explicit reference to our question is found primarily with regard to the first event, the words of Moshe to Korach and his company.

Three early commentators hang their answer to our question on the action performed by Moshe before speaking to Korach and his company:

4: And when Moshe heard it, he fell upon his face.

In his translation of the verse, R. Sa’adya Gaon adds several words:

"And he fell upon his face" – to attain and to hear a vision from God.

The late R. Y. Kafih, editor and translator of the interpretations of R. Sa’adya that are embedded in his Arabic translation of the Torah,[[3]](#footnote-3) notes that these words of R. Saadya are cited in his name in the commentary of R. Avraham ben Shelomo to I *Melakhim* 17, where they receive expansive interpretation.[[4]](#footnote-4) The commentator discusses there the oath that Eliyahu takes before Achav: "There shall not be dew or rain these years, but according to my word" (I *Melakhim*). He questions whether Eliyahu “decreed and decided when he said this," or whether he did this based on a vision from God, as some commentators suggest. He inclines toward the second possibility and adds:

Therefore, R. Sa’adya adds in his translation of: "And when Moshe heard it, he fell upon his face," a word that that alludes to this matter, namely: "adjacent to a vision." In other words, he asked that he be informed what would be the end of the people. Therefore, know all that he said in that place and be careful with it.

The Rashbam explains in similar fashion:

"He fell upon his face" – in prayer, and there he was told what he said to Korach.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Ibn Ezra offers two interpretations of Moshe's falling upon his face:

"He fell upon his face" – willingly. And some say: In the manner of prophecies.

According to the first explanation, Moshe fell upon his face willingly, but the Ibn Ezra does not explain his motives for doing so. According to the second explanation, on the other hand, his falling to the ground was a reaction to his receiving prophecy. What prophecy did Moshe receive when he fell upon his face? Without a doubt, this explanation sees in Moshe's words in verses 5-7 the content of the prophecy that Moshe received at that time.

What is common to the explanations of R. Sa’adya Gaon, the Rashbam, and the Ibn Ezra is that in his words to Korach, Moshe delivered the words of God that had been told to him earlier; the test of the censers was not proposed on Moshe's initiative.

Another common element to these three explanations is that they do not suggest the existence of a prophecy to Moshe based on logical argument, but rather look for textual support, and they find it in Moshe's falling to his face. The first two explain this as a prayer to receive prophecy, whereas the third explanation interprets this as a description of Moshe's receiving the prophecy itself.

The problem with the explanations of R. Sa’adya and the Rashbam is the need to fill in what is not stated explicitly in the verse – that God answered Moshe's prayer and instructed him about the answer that he should give Korach and his company. According to the explanation brought by the Ibn Ezra, it was God who initiated this answer, and there was no need for Moshe to pray to God for guidance on the matter. However, that explanation – that Moshe's falling on his face was a reaction to his receiving a prophecy – cannot be accepted.

It is true that when Yechezkel sees "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord," he falls on his face (*Yechezkel* 1:28), and he falls once again on his face in the plain when he sees "the glory of the Lord … as the glory which I saw by the river Chebar" (3:23). But how is this connected to Moshe's falling upon his face in our *parasha*? Where else do we find Moshe falling to his face when God speaks to him? Apart from this argument, the verse clearly states: **"**When Moshe heard **it,** he fell upon his face," which implies that Moshe's falling was a reaction to Korach's arguments – not to hearing the word of God!

In fact, the three commentators' understanding of Moshe's falling to his face as proof that his words to Korach and his company were told to him by prophecy is quite forced. We find that Moshe and Aharon fell upon their faces in the previous *parasha*, *Parashat Shelach*, when the sin of the people in the story of the scouts reaches its climax:

14:4: And they said one to another: “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.”

5: Then Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.

And once again we will find them falling upon their faces in the next *parasha*, *Parashat Chukat*, in response to the people's quarrel with them over the lack of drinking water:

20:6: And Moshe and Aharon went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the Tent of Meeting and fell upon their faces…

It seems that in all three of these places Moshe and Aharon's falling upon their faces expressed despair and helplessness.[[6]](#footnote-6) This is indeed what Rashi explains in our *parasha*, following the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Korach* 4):

"He fell upon his face" – because of the rebellion, for this was already the fourth offense… His hands sunk down [he felt powerless]… He said: How long can I trouble the king? Perhaps he will not again accept advocacy from him![[7]](#footnote-7)

Comparing the various instances of falling to the ground teaches that the explanation that Moshe fell upon his face in order to ask God for prophecy or as a reaction to the arrival of such a prophecy cannot be considered the plain meaning of the text.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**III. The Ramban’s First Explanation: “He thought of this idea by himself”**

The Ramban discusses this question at length in his commentary to v. 5 (s.v., *ve-ta'am ve-yoda Hashem et asher lo*, middle). Here is the first of the three explanations that he proposes:

Moshe thought of his idea on his own, and he preferred incense over other offerings, because he already saw with Nadav and Avihu that when they offered a strange incense before God, they were burned[[9]](#footnote-9)... and he trusted that God "confirms the word of His servant and performs the counsel of His messengers."[[10]](#footnote-10)

Without a doubt, the Ramban opened his discussion regarding our question with specifically this explanation, which raises various theological questions,[[11]](#footnote-11) because he felt that the simple and unmediated reading of the verses gives the impression that Moshe was acting here on his own, without prophetic instructions.

The most fundamental proof that can be brought for this explanation is that had Moshe received the words that he said to Korach by way of prophecy, this should have been stated explicitly! It would not have been necessary for Moshe to repeat the words; it would have sufficed to note that Moshe indeed delivered God's words to Korach and his company.[[12]](#footnote-12)

That Moshe acted in the matter of the incense on his own was also the understanding of the people, at least according to the explanation of the Ramban and other commentators:

17:6: But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moshe and against Aharon, saying: “You have killed the people of the Lord.”

What is the meaning of this accusation levelled by the people against Moshe and Aharon? Those who died – both those who were devoured by fire and those who were swallowed up by the ground – died by way of manifest miracles that mortals of flesh and blood cannot do! Regarding those who died by fire, it is stated: "And the fire came forth **from the Lord"** (verse 35), and regarding those who were swallowed by the ground, it is stated: "**And the earth** opened her mouth" (verse 32), and it was a "new thing" that was "made by **the Lord"!**

This is the Ramban's answer to the question:

"You have killed the people of the Lord" – Onkelos said: "You **caused** the death of the people of the Lord.” They accused them of having suggested that they burn a strange incense before God, knowing that they who offer it would be burned. For God did not tell Moshe to burn this incense, and it was not in the name of God that he told them to do this. Rather it was on their own that they gave this advice, because of which the people died. And they could have given a different sign, with the staff or something else.

The Ramban does not imply that the people were wrong about the facts when they lodged their complaint. It seems that this was precisely what happened: Moshe himself suggested the plan and did not present it to Israel in the name of God. If so, this explanation of the Ramban depends on the explanation brought at the beginning of this section.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The Rashbam explains the people's complaint in similar fashion:

"You have killed the people of the Lord" – Regarding Datan and Aviram we concede that they sinned [for their punishment came from God and Moshe had no part in it]. But the two hundred and fifty people who died the death of Nadav and Avihu, you killed them, for it was you who commanded them to burn incense!

But the Rashbam cannot agree with the facts that constitute the basis of the people's complaint, as he maintains that when Moshe fell upon his face, he did so "in prayer, and there he was told what he said to Korach." If so, it was not on his own that Moshe commanded them to burn incense; rather, it was God who told him to do so!

Because this is the Rashbam’s position, he explained already earlier, in his commentary to verses 28-30, that it is to this that Moshe refers in his words to the congregation around the tents of Datan and Aviram (vv. 28-30): "Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that I have not done them of my own mind. If these men die the death of all men… then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the ground open her mouth…" The Rashbam explains:

(28) "I have not done them of my own mind" – that I consecrated them [*she-chinakhtim*][[14]](#footnote-14) with incense, when I said: "You also, and Aharon, each his censer" (v. 17).

(29) "Then the Lord has not sent me" – but rather I acted on my own when I commanded them to burn incense.

(30) "But if the Lord make a [new] thing on earth" – that is not like the death of Nadav and Avihu.

According to the Rashbam, all of the words of Moshe, as well as the action that is about to take place when the ground will open its mouth and swallow up Datan and Aviram, were meant to persuade the people that Moshe proposed burning the incense not on his own, but as God's agent, and that he should not be blamed for what will soon happen at the door of the Tent of Meeting when the two hundred and fifty incense burners will be devoured by fire. Did he convince the people? It would appear not, for in the end the people of Israel accused Moshe and Aharon: "You have killed the people of the Lord" – "for it was you who commanded them to burn incense."

This interpretive process of the Rashbam is complicated, and to us it seems far from the plain meaning of the text. In the end the question may be raised: Why didn't Moshe speak in the name of God from the beginning, when he first proposed the incense test, and thus preclude the people (and the commentators who disagree with the Rashbam) from thinking that Moshe presented it on his own? The answer must be that, in fact, the people were right: Moshe came up with the idea of the incense test on his own, as argued by the Ramban.

Nevertheless, the people's complaint was unjustified. Surely they were aware of the danger of burning a strange incense from the episode involving Nadav and Avihu! Thus:

They were not stupid… that they agreed to offer [the incense]! They sinned at the cost of their lives, as it is stated: "the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives" (*Bemidbar* 17:3).[[15]](#footnote-15) (Rashi, *Bemidbar* 16:7, based on *Tanchuma, Korach* 5)

**IV. The Continuation of the Ramban’s Comments: Moshe’s Words to Korach by way of Prophecy or the Holy Spirit**

The Ramban continues to discuss our question, and as he does in many places, he presents the reader with a variety of possible ways to deal with the difficulty that he discusses:

Some say that "When Moshe heard it, he fell upon his face" (v. 4) means: to seek God to know what to do. And then he was told (v. 5 and on): "Tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom, etc."[[16]](#footnote-16) This [the prophecy that he received] is mentioned only in Moshe's report to the people. I have already shown you that there are many places – in some the text will expand on God's words to Moshe, but be brief regarding Moshe's report [to the people], and in some the opposite, and sometimes not mention one of them at all.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The exegetical principle proposed by the Ramban at the end of this citation is of utmost importance for anyone studying *Tanakh* (including the Prophets and the Writings), and it helps resolve many problems (see, for example the references in note 17a). But it is not enough simply to know this principle; we must explain the approach adopted by the text in each particular case.

Regarding the final possibility mentioned by the Ramban – "and sometimes not mention one of them at all" (which, as noted in note 17a, can be divided into two) – the following qualification should be added: The argument that Moshe's words to the people are essentially his delivery of the words of God that he had received earlier, even if they do not appear before us in the Biblical text (and similarly the converse) must be proven by the context in which they appear. Otherwise, it is exegetically dangerous to use this principle. Indeed, the commentators who followed this approach in our case and whose words were brought in section 2, as well as the Ramban himself in his words cited here, adduce proof for their argument from the verse, "When Moshe heard it, he fell down upon his face." But as we noted above, their explanation of this verse, as if it alludes to a prophecy received by Moshe, is exceedingly forced according to the plain understanding of the verse.

It seems that even the Ramban himself sensed the forced nature of this explanation, and he therefore moves on to the third explanation, which expresses his own opinion:

My opinion on the matter [regarding Moshe's words in verses 5-7] and regarding what he said to Aharon, "Take your censer, [and put fire in it from off the altar,] and carry it quickly to the congregation, and atone for them" (17:11) [the third place in our *parasha* where it seems that Moshe is acting on his own] is that the hand of God was upon him [in these events], and this is what is called the holy spirit, as in the books of David and Shelomo that were by the holy spirit, as it is stated: "The spirit of the Lord spoke by Me, and His word was upon my tongue" (II *Shemuel* 23:2). For Moshe Rabbeinu is trusted in all His house… Since it was not by way of Moshe's prophecy, God's word is not mentioned.

In this explanation, the Ramban tries to combine the advantages of each of the two previous explanations that he cited. One the one hand, the source of Moshe's two actions in our *parasha* regarding the incense is not "an idea that he had on his own" – an option that raises difficulties of various kinds – but rather in the hand of God that was upon him – the "holy spirit" – and so the source is Divine. On the other hand, there is no need to assume the existence of God's words to Moshe by way of a prophecy over the course of the story, and there is no need to give a forced explanation of the verse, "When Moshe heard it, he fell down upon his face," because, in fact, there was no such explicit prophecy.

This explanation is not free of difficulties, however. It assumes something to which there is not even a hint in the two stories under discussion – that Moshe acted by way of the “holy spirit.” Even if we accept what the Ramban says – that "since it was not by way of Moshe's prophecy, God's **word** is not mentioned" – Scripture should have informed us in one way or another that Moshe's actions in the two stories stemmed from some kind of a Divine impulse.[[18]](#footnote-18)

In addition, a question may be raised against the Ramban's last explanation: Why didn't God tell Moshe how to conduct himself with Korach and his company by way of an explicit prophecy, as He does throughout the Torah, instead leaving it to the somewhat unclear relationship called the holy spirit?[[19]](#footnote-19)

Let us go back to the Ramban's first explanation. The difficulties with the other two explanations do not apply to this explanation, and it also accords with the plain meaning of the text and the strong impression received from them: In our *parasha*,Moshe repeatedly acts on his own, relying on God to fulfill his desire and do as he had decreed – and this is what happened.

**V. The Command to Aharon, “Take the censer” – Moshe said on his own**

The Ramban's third explanation brought us to a discussion of Moshe's instructions to Aharon in the story that is appended to the story of Korach's rebellion (17:11): "Take your censer… and carry it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them." Did Moshe say this on his own, or did he receive God's word?

Here too, before Moshe instructed Aharon to carry the incense, it was said about Moshe and Aharon: "And they fell upon their faces" (v. 10). One might have expected that the commentators cited in section 2 above would say that with this falling upon their faces, Moshe received a prophecy, or that he asked God to inform him by way of a prophecy what he should do, and God instructed him to send Aharon with his censer to atone for the people. But none of the commentators suggest this.[[20]](#footnote-20)

This is because in this case, the context indicates that Moshe acted on his own and not in accordance with a prophecy received by God. After all, Moshe had just received a prophecy:

17:9: And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying:

10: “Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment…”

It does not seem reasonable that God would now instruct Moshe by way of a prophecy something that was the very opposite of the previous prophecy – how to prevent the destruction of the people. This action must therefore be the independent action of Moshe, which God found acceptable.[[21]](#footnote-21)

*Chazal* and the commentators note the connection between this act on the part of Moshe and his previous action. In his previous action, Moshe demonstrated that the incense kills those who bring it but are unfit to do so, whereas here, he shows Israel that the very same incense, in the appropriate circumstances, can save and protect Israel. This is what the Rashbam says:

"And lay incense on it" – to inform them that the [same] incense which kills non-priests is what gives life in the hands of the priests, that they should know that they are fit for the service.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Infer from this that just as Moshe's last instruction was given on his own initiative, without any prophecy, so too his earlier instruction. Or perhaps we should reverse the formulation: Just as Moshe's first instruction regarding the burning of incense was his own idea, so too his last instruction (which involves a repair of his first instruction) was his own idea.

Note that the story of stopping the plague in our *parasha* is similar in several ways to the stopping of the plague at the end of *Parashat Balak.* Just as the plague was stopped there by way of the independent act of Pinchas, so too here it seems that the plague was stopped as a result of Moshe's independent initiative and Aharon's vigorous action.

**VI. The Miracle of the Ground Swallowing the People – The Position of the Ramban**

Let us now discuss Moshe's announcement regarding the punishment of Datan and Aviram:

16:30: But if the Lord make a new thing, and the ground open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain to them, and they go down alive into the pit…

Was this announcement made in the name of God and told previously to Moshe by way of a prophecy, or did Moshe say this on his own, and God fulfilled his words?

The commentators on the spot do not address this question. The Ramban, however, expresses his opinion on the matter elsewhere. In his commentary to the people's complaint the next day, "You have killed the people of the Lord" (17:6), the Ramban explains that this complaint related exclusively to the burning of the two hundred and fifty incense burners.[[23]](#footnote-23) Why didn't they also complain about the swallowing up of Datan and Aviram and their households? The Ramban answers:

The complaint was only about the burning, but not about the swallowing, for God had said to Moshe: "Get you up from about the dwelling of Korach, Datan, and Aviram" (16:27) – **this alludes to the opening of the earth's mouth, and Moshe reported this to Israel in the name of God.**

According to the Ramban, then, God's instructions to Moshe to remove the people who had assembled around the dwellings of Datan and Aviram include a hint to what was soon to happen. When Moshe speaks to the people, he merely explains and reveals the allusion, which he had understood from the words of God. The people also understood that Moshe would have no independent role in this event, and they therefore did not include it in their complaint.

It is possible to challenge each step of the Ramban's explanation, however.

First of all, how do God's words, "Get you up from about the dwelling of Korach, Datan, and Aviram," allude specifically to the earth's opening of its mouth? While it is true that an allusion is made here to the fact that the sinners would be punished and that those who are not sinners must remove themselves from the site of the punishment,[[24]](#footnote-24) there is no hint whatsoever to the type of punishment. One can imagine numerous possibilities, not just the one found in the words of Moshe.

Second, where does the Ramban find that "Moshe reported this to Israel in the name of God"? In the words of Moshe written before us, neither in verse 26 nor in verses 28-30 is the matter mentioned. On the contrary, the impression that rises from his words is that Moshe said them on his own and that it was he on his own initiative who put the verification of his mission to the test!

Third, it is not at all necessary to explain that Israel's complaint "was only about the burning, but not about the swallowing," as the matter was understood by the Ramban (and other commentators). If we explain Moshe's words in verses 28-30 as words stated on his own and that God responded favorably to them, as would appear from the plain sense of the verses, we can explain the people's complaint as referring also to the deaths of the people who were swallowed up by the ground. It was Moshe who initiated this punishment and God agreed to it. If so, the people are arguing that Moshe is responsible for the deaths of those who were swallowed up by the ground!

**VII. The Miracle of the Swallowing – The Disagreement between R. Yosef Albo and R. Yitzchak Arama**

How to understand Moshe's words concerning the ground's opening up its mouth – whether he decreed this on his own or God commanded him about it – is the subject of a dispute between two thinkers whose philosophy and biblical interpretation are intertwined. The context in which they discuss the matter is the explanations that they offer for Moshe's sin at Mei Meriva.

R. Yosef Albo (*Sefer Ha-Ikarim*, part IV, chap. 22) explains as follows:

A great principle of the Torah and a root of the faith… is that God forces nature under the feet of believers… This is found among some of the pious… that nature changes in accordance with the words of the righteous[[25]](#footnote-25)… Countless miracles were performed by them with their simple speech, without coming to this by way of a prophecy or a statement or a command from God.

This is what Elifaz said to Iyov: "You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be established to you" (*Iyov* 22:28), which shows that it was accepted by the prophets and by those who spoke by way of the holy spirit that nature changes at the word of the righteous as they desire.[[26]](#footnote-26)

And all the more so at the word of the prophets, that miracles were performed by them in accordance with what issued from their mouths. Eliyahu said: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (I *Melakhim* 17:1).[[27]](#footnote-27) And he further said: "If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty" (II *Melakhim* 1:10). And so it was.[[28]](#footnote-28) And similarly Elisha: "Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel" (II *Melakhim* 7:1). And it was so.[[29]](#footnote-29) And similarly: "And he made the iron to swim" (II *Melakhim* 6:6), and the rest of the miracles performed by him without them being preceded by a prophecy or by God's command about the matter. And similarly the rest of the prophets. **And Moshe himself said: "If these men die the common death of all men… But if the Lord make a new thing… And it came to pass, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground did cleave asunder that was under them. And he earth opened up her mouth." And we do not find that God commanded him about this.** And similarly Yeshaya said: "Who confirms the word of His servant and performs the counsel of His messengers" (*Yeshayahu* 44:26).

And all the more so in a place where there is a sanctification of God's name, it is fitting and necessary to make known that nature is subject to and forced to comply with the will of those who keep the Torah and observe its commandments… Thus you find that Yehoshua, when he needed something like this, did not wait to receive permission from God or to consult with the *Shekhina*, but rather relied on God doing his will, and on his own he said: "Sun, stand you still upon Givon" (*Yehoshua* 10:12), as Scripture testifies: "Then spoke Yehoshua to the Lord… and he said in the sight of Israel: Sun, stand you still upon Givon" (ibid.). And God fulfilled his word, to the point that Scripture testifies about this that there was nothing as great as this even in the days of Moshe, that Moshe would say something on his own and something as great as this would happen. And it is stated: "And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man" (*Yehoshua* 10:14). In other words, that God would fulfill such a great thing that a man would decree on his own….[[30]](#footnote-30)

R. Yitzchak Arama, in his book *Akeidat Yitzchak* (part 80, in his commentary to *Parashat Chukat*, regarding the sin of Moshe and Aharon at Mei Meriva), cites these words of R. Y. Albo and sharply criticizes them. We will not address their disagreement concerning Moshe and Aharon's sin at Mei Meriva, but rather R. Y. Arama's fundamental critique of the general position asserted by R. Y. Albo:

We find that Moshe was accustomed to deal with their [Israel's] needs only in this manner, that is, by the word of God… For owing to their humility [of Moshe and Aharon], they were not accustomed to deal with such matters on their own, and this was to their praise and wisdom. For because Moshe was trusted in His house, entering at all times into the Holy, to know what he should do regarding every matter, why should he act on his own? **And furthermore, with regard to "But if the Lord make a new thing" – I already proved there that he did not say this on his own, as he says: "Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works and that I have not done them of my own mind."**

I guarantee that all the prophets and pious men that he mentioned, if they had access to the word of God to this degree, they would not have acted on their own.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Elsewhere (part 78, in his commentary to *Parashat Korach*), R. Y. Arama writes:

Now to authenticate prophecy [which Korach, Datan, and Aviram challenged], he said: "Hereby you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works and that I have not done them of my own mind" – as was argued by those who deny prophecy. How will it be known? **For I have told you in the name of God** that you should remove yourselves from the dwelling of these wicked men, not touch anything of theirs, lest you perish with them. **This shows that He decreed for them a strange death, not in the way of the world.** If so, "if these men die the common death of all men and be visited after the visitation of all men, then the Lord has not sent me," and you will know that I am not a prophet, as they say that there is no prophecy. This is a great proof for the veracity of prophecy.

Let us summarize their disagreement:

1) Regarding the matter at hand: R. Y. Albo writes that Moshe decreed on his own how Datan and Aviram would die, and God did as he decreed. The proof that he adduces for this is that "we do not find that God commanded him about this." R. Y. Arama explains the verses as did the Ramban, whose words we cited in the previous section: That which Moshe said to Datan and Aviram **"in the name of God"** indicate that "**He decreed** for them a strange death, not in the way of the world," and the next words of Moshe, "if these men die the common death of all men," are merely a spelling out of the prophecy that he had previously received from God.

 Our critique of the Ramban is valid also for the words of R. Y. Arama: Moshe did not speak to the sinners in the name of God, and God's words to Moshe in verse 24: "Speak to the congregation, saying: Get you up from about the dwelling of Korach, Datan, and Aviram," do not necessarily teach us anything about the manner in which the sinners will die.

 R. Aramadoes, however, have a novel point: The context in which he sets the event – a struggle over the verification of prophecy – seems to necessitate his understanding. Moshe comes in the name of the prophecy that he received and declares that if the prophecy in his mouth will not be fulfilled, it will be known that he is not a prophet. In the last section of our study, we will clarify that this context does not necessarily prove the correctness of R. Y. Arama’sexplanation; on the contrary, it strengthens the position of R. Y. Albo.

2. From the words of the author of R. Y. Albo*,* it seems that Moshe performed additional actions on his own and that God forced nature to conform to his decrees. R. Y. Albo does not say this explicitly, nor does he specify such actions other than those discussed above, but this is implied by what he says at the end of the passage cited above.[[32]](#footnote-32) In his opinion, this constitutes praise for Moshe and for every other prophet who acted in this manner.

R. Aramaargues the opposite: Moshe acted consistently only in accordance with the word of God and did nothing on his own.[[33]](#footnote-33) And it is precisely this that is to Moshe's credit, for Moshe, the trusted one in the house of God, who "entered at all times into the Holy… Why should he act on his own?"

On this issue, it would appear that R. Arama is correct. During the formative period of the exodus from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness, God's governance is so close that there is almost no need and also no possibility of independent actions on the part of Moshe. From this perspective, *Parashat Korach* is exceptional regarding the multiple independent actions performed by Moshe in such a short span of time.

3. R. Y. Albo adduces as proof for his position the actions of Eliyahu and Elisha and other prophets, and similarly those of pious and righteous men in the days of *Chazal*, at whose words nature changed without any command from God.

 R. Y. Arama agrees with these facts, but he does not see this as praise for those people, but rather the result of constraint; they acted independently because they did not merit constant prophetic guidance from God, as did Moshe. R. Arama is ready to guarantee that had those people merited constant prophecy in the manner of Moshe, they would not have acted on their own.

 Even if R. Arama is justified in the "guarantee" that he offers, it is clear that the nature of Moshe's prophecy was one-time. If so, R. Albo is correct in that the prophetic role for later generations allows the prophet, and perhaps even obligates him, to perform actions in independent manner that will change reality, and God will act accordingly and fulfill the desire of the prophet. This is certainly to the praise of the prophet, and to the praise of prophecy itself, in that it turns the prophet into an active partner in his mission and into someone whose judgment and decisions are mobilized to fulfill the purpose of prophecy.

**VIII. The Miracle Initiated by the Prophet as Divine Seal**

We can summarize what we have learned in our study so far: The commentators who see the critical actions in our *parasha* – the test of the censers, the swallowing up of the rebels, and the stopping of the plague with the incense – as actions performed at Moshe's own initiative, without having been prophetically commanded to do so, are correct. Moshe appears in our *parasha* time after time as a prophet who acts in accordance with his own judgement, and God answers him by performing miracles in accordance with his decrees.

But why does Moshe act in this manner specifically in the events described in our *parasha*, all of which are connected to Korach's rebellion? There are only a few places in the Torah where Moshe acts on his own, as was demonstrated by R. Arama. In the vast majority of cases, Moshe acts in accordance with a prophecy received from God, as Moshe is God's trusted one and prophecy is available to him at all times. Why doesn't God guide Moshe in our *parasha* in his struggle with the wicked, as is the case ordinarily?

It seems that the answer to this question stems from the unique nature of the event described in our *parasha*. In the rebellion of Korach, Datan, and Aviram, Moshe's mission is for the first time (and also for the last time) negated. The rebels deny not only the content of his mission, but the very fact that he was sent by God. If Moshe was not sent by God, then all of his actions are an expression of ordinary human leadership. They stem from human motives, including personal interest, pursuit of power, and mistakes in assessing reality and forecasting the future.

The accusation that Moshe was not sent by God is sounded already at the beginning of the *parasha*:

16:3: “You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift you up yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

It appears once again in the hateful speech delivered by Datan and Aviram:

13: “Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, but you must make yourself also a prince over us?”

How should a prophet who is accused of not having been sent by God, but of acting on his own, deal with such a claim?

On the face of it, he should firmly insist that all of his actions were performed at God's instruction and that he did nothing on his own in the framework of his prophetic mission. As proof of that, God should tell him something by way of prophecy, and the prophet should deliver the word of God to those challenging his mission; when God's word will be fulfilled, his prophetic mission will have been verified.

This is essentially how R. Aramadescribes the manner in which Moshe dealt with the denial of his prophecy (in verses 23-34).

However, this kind of confrontation does not convey the truth. A prophet in Israel is not merely a tool for transmitting the word of God to its addressees. Rather he is an active partner in the efforts to achieve the goal of his mission.[[34]](#footnote-34) Sometimes his mission requires him to take independent action, in which he must make available to the mission his talents and judgment, his personality traits, and even his personal life.

How are we to treat the acts that a prophet performs at his own discretion in the framework of his prophetic role? Are these actions performed "at the word of God," equal in value to actions about which the prophet was explicitly commanded? The answer to this is that when these actions conform to the will of God, Scripture not infrequently says about them that they were performed at the word of God.[[35]](#footnote-35) God's seal is attached to these actions of the prophet, as they accord with God's intentions, fulfill His will, and realize His objectives.

The problem is that such actions "invite" a questioning of their prophetic value. Not everyone is capable of understanding this meaning of the prophetic role, as a partner in the prophetic mission. When people encounter the clearly independent actions of a prophet, they are liable to deny his very mission and argue that all that he does he does on his own.

How is the prophet to deal with such claims? Should he deny his part in the prophetic mission? Should he present prophecy in the wrong light, and himself as one whose whole role is to serve as a tool in the service of prophecy?

Here stands the miracle at the prophet's service – not the miracle that the prophet is commanded by way of prophecy to perform, but rather the miracle that he performs at his own initiative, without any command. We do not think that miracles of this type, which are often described in Scripture, come to teach man "a great principle of the Torah and a root of the faith that God forces nature under the feet of believers," as argued by R. Y. Albo. The purpose of these miracles is more modest, but vital to the prophet's functioning and to his recognition as God's prophet. These miracles are not performed by the prophets "to establish their prophecy, since their prophecy was verified for them earlier. But they performed these wonders because they were needed, and to draw them near to God He fulfilled their desires" (Rambam, *Introduction to the Mishna*[[36]](#footnote-36))*.* Nevertheless, the performance of these miracles at the initiative of the prophet negates the wrong impression that the prophet's actions are ordinary human actions that were not performed at the word of God. Since it not within man's power to perform such a miracle and only God can fulfill the desire of the prophet who decreed the miracle, the miracle serves as a Divine seal that is constantly being renewed that the prophet was indeed sent by God.

Let us now return to *Parashat Korach*. Moshe is faced with the need to verify his prophetic mission before those who challenged it. We are not dealing with a mission regarding a particular matter (as explained by Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra), but rather with his mission as a whole, as the Ramban understood the matter (in his commentary to verse 29):

The meaning of "then the Lord has not sent me" – that He did not send me at all to take them out of Egypt… And similarly: "That the Lord has sent me to do all these works" (v. 28) – the works that you have seen with your eyes. He alludes to everything that he did since He said to him: "Come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh" (*Shemot* 3:10). For the beginning of a prophet's mission is called "sending"… And the meaning of "all these works"… is the entirety of the works that Moshe performed in the sight of all of Israel.

Moshe's mission, like that of other prophets, includes also action that he already performed or that he will perform in the future at his discretion. These actions as well are performed at the word of God, and they are marked by a prophetic seal. When Moshe comes to verify his mission, it is fitting that he perform specifically actions of this sort. How should he do this? How should he explain to the challengers that even when he acts in accordance with his own judgment, his actions have complete prophetic value as God's actions? The answer is clear: By acting **without** prophetic guidance and God completing his desire with impressive miracles that will prove to all that Moshe's independent actions have full Divine backing.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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1. See our study of *Parashat Korach*, first series, section 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a comparison of the two events and an explanation of the differences between them, see the study mentioned in the previous note (pp. 206-207). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. These were published as a separate volume, *Peirush Rabbeinu Sa'adya Gaon al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 1963), and republished in *Mikra'ot Gedolot Torat Chayyim* (ed. Mossad Ha-Rav Kook). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. Avraham ben Shelomo lived around the year 1400 and authored an Arabic commentary to the *Tanakh*, of which the part dealing with the Early Prophets has been preserved. R. Y. Kafih, in his last years, began to publish this commentary with a Hebrew translation. The commentary to I *Melakhim* was published in Kiryat Ono in 2006, following the editor's passing. The citation is found in that volume (p. 309). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This interpretation raises difficulties later in the *parasha* (17:6). In the next section, we will discuss those difficulties and the Rashbam's approach to dealing with them in his commentary there. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is not the way the Ramban explains the matter in *Parashat Shelach*: "They saw that that people were threatening to appoint a captain and immediately return [to Egypt], and the righteous arose and prostrated themselves on the ground, saying: I, pray you, my brothers, do not do wickedly… Therefore it says: 'before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel,' for it was before them that they prostrated." One might have explained in our case as well that Moshe fell to his face before Korach in the manner of supplication that he remove himself from the dispute, even though here it does not say before whom Moshe fell to his face. According to this interpretation as well, however, Moshe's falling to his face is not connected to his receiving a prophecy from God. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Based on a different psychological understanding of Moshe, Ri Bechor Shor explains his falling to the ground as follows: "'When Moshe heard' – that they suspected that he was seeking power for his brother; 'he fell upon his face' – he pressed his face into the ground, out of shame." [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. It is true that Moshe's falling upon his face in our *parasha* is different from the other two instances. In the other two cases, Moshe's despair stems from the sin of the entire people. Therefore immediately after he falls down, the glory of God appears (14:10; 20:6). In our *parasha*,only a group of sinners complain to Moshe, and while their words are difficult for Moshe to hear and bring him to despair (or shame), he regains his composure and answers them as necessary. God's glory will appear only later in the story, when Korach succeeds in assembling the congregation against Moshe and Aharon (below v. 19). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The interpretation that the incense test was an idea that Moshe thought of on his own raises two difficulties that cannot be raised against the previous interpretation, that Moshe was commanded to do so by God: First, why did Moshe choose to conduct the test between the chosen one and those who weren't chosen specifically by way of incense? The Ramban answers with the words cited above. Second, how did Moshe permit his brother, who had been chosen for the priesthood, to burn a strange incense? The Ramban answers this question in the portion omitted from the citation: "And he permitted Aharon to burn it **for the need of the hour,** or else it was **the morning incense."** Even according to the second answer, we must add that Moshe issued an emergency ruling to burn the morning incense not in the ordinary place on the golden altar. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The verse in *Yeshayahu* 44:26, that God "confirms the word of His servant and performs the counsel of His messengers," is one of two verses in Scripture that *Chazal* and the commentators bring to prove the daring assertion that the prophets and the righteous have the power to decree that the world should run as they see fit, and God will fulfill their decree. The other verse will be brought later in our study (section 7, note 26). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The first theological question is the one that the Ramban addresses at the end of the passage cite above: How can a person, even a prophet like Moshe, have the confidence that God will act in accordance with what he decreed with his human faculties? Does man have the power to dictate to God what to do? Another question pertains to our case in particular: If Moshe thought of this idea on his own, why did he choose a test that would lead to such dire consequences for those participating in it, as opposed to some other test that would prove who was chosen by God without leading to the deaths of those who were not chosen?

The Chizkuni answers the second question in his commentary to v. 6 (s.v. *kechu lakhem machatot*): "It did not occur to Moshe that they would agree, for it is known that anyone who offers strange incense is liable for the death penalty, as we find with Nadav and Avihu." In other words, Moshe's goal with his proposal was to deter Korach and his company and prevent the execution of the test! We learn from this that according to the Chizkuni as well, Moshe proposed his idea on his own and not at God's command (despite the fact that in verse 4 he cites also the words of the Rashbam).

Another answer can be given to this question: The incense that Moshe proposed as a test was in fact not a strange incense, like that of Nadav and Avihu. They, it would seem, offered the incense in the Holy (and even in the Holy of Holies), whereas Korach and his company offered it outside – at the door of the Tent of Meeting. Moshe thought that God would accept only the incense of Aharon, as he said: "And it shall be that the man whom the Lord does choose, he shall be holy" (v. 7), by way of showing in some way that only the incense of Aharon was accepted. God, however, thought otherwise: He demonstrated His selection of Aharon by way of a fire that issued forth and consumed all those who offered incense except for Aharon. If this is correct, it turns out that Moshe's idea was realized only in part – not as he had planned it, but as Divine wisdom saw fit to carry it out, in such a way that the sinners would be severely punished. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This could have been said in just a few words, such as: "And Moshe spoke the words of God to Korach," or even simply with a description from which this would be implied. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Ramban later brings two additional explanations of this complaint. The common denominator of all of the Ramban's explanations is that the people claim that Moshe and Aharon are responsible for the deaths of those who had been burned because they had advised them to participate in the incense test. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In his commentary to this verse, the Chizkuni writes: "that I distinguished them [*she-hivchantim*] with incense." This may also have been his text the Rashbam, or else he may have chosen to change the wording for the sake of clarification. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. According to what we said in the first part of note 11, the people were wrong for another reason: Moshe's proposal in and of itself did not have to lead to the deaths of those who offered the incense, for they offered it not inside the *Mishkan*, but outside. It was God who punished Korach and his company for having offered incense even though they were not of the seed of Aharon (17:5). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This is, of course, the explanation of R. Sa’adya Gaon and the Rashbam, but the Ramban did not see their commentaries, and so it is difficult to know to whom he is referring. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. a. The Ramban's last words include two possibilities: 1) That God's words to Moshe are mentioned in Scripture, but Moshe's report to the people is not mentioned at all; 2) that Scripture mentions only Moshe's report to the people, and we must understand on our own that Moshe had earlier been commanded by God about them – and this is the case under discussion here according to this explanation. (Examples of the four possibilities noted by the Ramban can be found in our book, *Pirkei Eliyahu*, pp. 375-376, notes 2-6.)

b) The Ramban himself brings an example to support his argument regarding our case:

As we find in the incident involving the children of Gad and the children of Reuven (*Bemidbar* 32), where Scripture reports the incident with respect to Moshe himself [that he negotiated with them on his own and reached an agreement with them], while this was done at the word of God. As it is stated: "As **the Lord has said** to your servants, so will we do" (*Bemidbar* 32:31). And it is written in *Yehoshua* (22:9): "And the children of Reuven and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Menashe returned… to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, **according to the commandment of the Lord** by the hand of Moshe."

The truth is that from the words of Moshe it is difficult to prove that Moshe acted according to the word of God that reached him by way of prophecy over the course of the negotiations with the children of Gad and the children of Reuven. There is no hint in the story to any Divine intervention that guided Moshe in his discussion. On the other hand, Moshe constantly emphasizes that the obligation of the two tribes is "before the Lord" and that if they do not fulfill it, "you have sinned against the Lord" (*Bemidbar* 32:23). In their words in v. 31, the children of Gad and the children of Reuven express their recognition that they relate to Moshe's words (compare with v. 27: "as **my lord** says") as if they had been spoken by God, and that they obligated themselves before Him. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. It would have been appropriate to use phrases such as: "And the hand of God was upon him," or, "And the spirit of God rested upon him," as we find in the books of the Prophets with respect to those who acted under the influence of the holy spirit. Such phrases do not appear in connection with Moshe anywhere in the Torah, because Moshe was a prophet the likes of whom never arose again in Israel. This adds another difficulty to the explanation proposed by the Ramban. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This question does not pose a difficulty to the Ramban's first explanation, according to which Moshe acted on his own. The fact that a person is a prophet does not require that all of his actions be performed according to prophecy. There are situations that require independent action on the part of the prophet, action that comes from a human source. At the end of this study, we will explain how our *parasha* reflects such a situation. But the Ramban in his third explanation is not prepared to forego the Divine source of Moshe's actions in our *parasha.* If so, why does this source not reveal itself in an explicit prophecy? [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The Ibn Ezra explains: "'And they fell to their faces' – to pray," but he does not mean that they prayed that God should reveal Himself to them and instruct them what to do, but rather that they prayed on behalf of Israel, that they not be decimated by the plague. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Even the Ramban’s third explanation, that Moshe acted based on the holy spirit, are not necessary here. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. These words of the Rashbam are repeated by the Chizkuni in a slightly different formulation. See also Rashi in his commentary to v. 3: "Another explanation: Why with incense," which are based on the *Mekhilta*, *Beshalach*, *Va-yasa* 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. So explained also the Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, and Seforno. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Even about this there is no absolute certainty. God's instruction can be understood not as an announcement of impending punishment, but as a demand for disassociation from the sinners and distancing from their influence. Only in the words of Moshe do we find the explicit statement: "Lest you be swept away in all their sins" (v. 26). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In the sections that we have omitted from his words, mention is made of various incidents involving R. Chanina ben Dosa, R. Pinchas ben Yair, Nachum of Gamzu, "and other pious men mentioned in tractate *Ta'anit*." [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. R. Albo alludes here to *Chazal's* exposition in *Ta'anit* 23b regarding Choni Ha-Me'agel: "'You shall also decree a thing' – You have decreed [on earth] below and the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills your word [in heaven] above." [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See my book, *Pirkei Eliyahu*, *Batzoret* 2, pp. 28-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See ibid. *Achazya* 5, pp. 428-429. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. It would appear that R. Y. Albo quoted this from memory. Had he examined the book of *Melakhim*, he would have seen that the verse begins: "And Elisha said: Hear you **the word of the Lord; thus says the Lord:** Tomorrow about this time…" This is one of the few instances among the tens of miracles performed by Elisha where he announces its arrival by the word of God. Of course, it is possible to bring an abundance of examples to support the words of R. Y. Albo from Elisha's other miracles. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. We have cited the words of R. Y. Albo because of their fundamental importance, but we have omitted everything that he writes about the sin of Moshe and Aharon at Mei Meriva because of the forced nature of his remarks. R. Y. Arama rightly critiqued him for his interpretation of that incident. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. At the end of his remarks, he rejects R. Albo's strong proof from the incident involving Yehoshua. According to him, that which is stated there: "Then spoke Yehoshua to the Lord" – it is clear that that speaking… is the praying and crying before Him about the matter. And when [God] was satisfied with him, he said in the sight of Israel: 'Sun, stand you still upon Givon'… Scripture does not mention his prayer, because the time was pressing and the prayer was short…." The following verse: "And there was no day like that before it or after it, **that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man,"** R. Y. Arama explains in relation to God's hearing Yehoshua's prayer: "If he did not pray before Him asking Him about this, what did He hear?" Everything that he says to explain these verses is exceedingly far from the plain meaning of the verses. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. An example of this can be brought from the raising of Moshe's hands on the top of the hill in the war against Amalek. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. R. Arama brings a list of actions performed by Moshe at the word of God to prove his position. We have omitted this from the citation. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. What follows is based on what we wrote in the introduction to *Pirkei Eliyahu*, pp. 13-18, where the matter is discussed in greater detail. The issue is discussed also in various places in *Pirkei Eliyahu* and in *Pirkei Elisha*. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See, for example, *Pirkei Eliyahu*, *Carmel* 1, pp. 147-149; *Pirkei Elisha*, *Tza'adim Rishonim* 3,pp. 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *Hakdamat Ha-Rambam* *La-Mishna*, ed. R. Y. Shilat, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)