Sefer Bemidbar: 40 Years of Living Dangerously

1) Midrash Tanḥuma Nasso §4

מדרש תנחומא נשא סי' ד

The thief and the adulterer are obdurate (*kasheh*), because they remove the Divine Presence. The Holy One, blessed be He, as it were, fills the realms above and the realms below, as stated [Jer. 23:24], "Do I not fill heaven and earth?', says the Lord." Also in regard to the place where the adulterer comes to commit adultery, the Holy One, blessed be He, is there in His glory. It is so stated [Isa. 6:3], "The whole earth is full of His glory." Now the adulterer says to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Remove Yourself, and give way to me for a while.' The matter is exceedingly difficult (*kasheh*). Since He is slow to anger, He temporarily gives way to him, as it were...

קָשֶׁה הַנּוֹאֵף וְהַגַּנָּב, שֶׁמְּסַלְּקִין אֶת הַשְּׁבִינָה, בּּבְיָבוֹל. שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךּ הוּא מָלֵא אֶת הָעֶּלְיוֹנִים וְאֶת הַתַּחְתּּוֹנִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמֵר: "הְּלֹא הָעְלְיוֹנִים וְאֶת הָתָּחְתּוֹנִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמֵר: "הְלֹא אֶת הַשָּׁמְיִם וְאֶת הָאֶרֶץ אֲנִי מָלֵא" [ירמיה בג, כד)] וּבִמְקוֹם שֶׁהֵוּ בָּאִיון לִנְאֹף וְלִגְיֹב, בְּבוֹדוֹ שֶׁלֹא כָל כָל הָבָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְּ הוּא שֶׁם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמֵר: "מְלֹא כָל הָאָרֶץ בְּבוֹדוֹ" [ישעיה ו, ג]. וְהַנּוֹאֵף אוֹמֵר, 'סְלֵּק אֶת עַצְמְף וְתֵן לִי מָקוֹם לְשָׁעָה.' הַדְּבָר לְשָׁעָה.' הַדְּבָר לִי מִקוֹם לְשָׁעָה.' בִּדְּבָר לִי מִקוֹם לְשָׁעָה.' מְּלִּים וְנְּוֹתֵן לִי מְקוֹם לְשֶׁעָה.' מְּלִּים וְנְּוֹתֵן לוֹ מִוֹם לְשָׁעָה...

2) Avivah Zornberg, Bewilderments: Reflections on the Book of Numbers

We have seen, then, that although other situations open the question of "fear of God"—like denying a loan on oath, or placing obstacles before the blind, or giving bad advice—the illicit sexual relation is its most challenging arena. Here, the clandestine nature of the relationship means that the lovers may come to inhabit an enclave of dissociated experience.

For the husband, the unknowable nature of the event, the doubt in which he lives, may connect with a prevalent masculine myth about woman as troubling enigma: she is inscrutable, inward in her sexuality, covering her tracks. Even the paternity of the child she bears is always in doubt; even her sexual satisfaction cannot be ascertained. The most intimate aspect of his relation with her must be based on trust. In the worst case, her femininity constitutes a mockery of law and society. She may arouse in him anxiety, even terror. (p. 48)

3) Rashi Numbers 21:1

רש"י במדבר כא:א

"The inhabitant of the south country": This is Amalek, as it is said, "Amalek was the inhabitant of the south country" [Num. 13:29]. But [Amalek] purposely changed its speech, talking in the "Canaanite" tongue, so that Israel might thereby be misled and would pray to the Holy One, blessed be He, that He should give the Canaanites into their power, while really they were not Canaanites, and their prayer would be ineffectual against the Amalakites. But Israel perceived that their clothing was as the clothing of Amalakites whilst their language was the language of Canaan; they thereupon said, "Let us pray against our enemies in general terms, as it is stated, "if Thou wilt indeed give this people into my hand".

"ישב הנגב": זָה עֲמָלֵק, שֶׁנֶּאֶמָר "עֲמָלֵק יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגָב" [במדבר יג,כט], וְשִׁנָּה אֶת לְשׁוֹכוֹ לְדַבֵּר בְּלְשׁוֹן בְּנַעֵּן, בְּדֵי שָׁיִהְיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתְפַּלְלִים לְהַקּבְּ"ה לְתַת בְּנַעֲנִים בְּיָדָם, וְהֵם אֵינָן בְּנַעֲנִים, רָאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבוּשִׁיהֶם בִּלְבוּשִׁי עֲמָלֵקִים וּלְשׁוֹנָם לְשׁוֹן בְּנַעַן, אָמְרוּ נִתְפַּלֵל סְתָם, שֶׁנָּאֱמֵר "אָם נָתֹן תִּתַּן אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּיָדִי".

4) Midrash Tanhuma Hukat 20:1

מ**דרש תנחומא** חקת כ'

"Then Israel sang this song": [This song] was uttered at the end of forty [years], while the well was given to them at the beginning of the forty [years]? So what was the purpose of writing [it] here? This matter has been explained from what is above, "Therefore the Book of the Wars of

"אָז יָשִׁיר יִשְּׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזּאֹת": נֶאֶמְרָה בְּסוֹף אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה, וְהַבְּאֵר נִתְּנָה לְהֶם מִתְּחַלֵּת אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה. מָה רָאָה לִכְּתֹּב בָּאן? הָעִּנְון הַזָּה בְּבָר נִדְרַשׁ לְמַעְלָה הֵימֵנּוּ: "עַל כֵּן the Lord speaks of [=, אֶת=] "... Waheb in Suphah [=סּוּפָּה=]." What is this? That the Holy One blessed be He did for them signs [אוֹתוֹת] and miracles in the Arnon wadis like the miracles which He did for them in the Reed [סוּפּס] Sea.

The troops entered into the caves; for they said, "As soon as Israel comes down into the wadi, those ahead of them who are in the wadi and those in the caves will arise and kill all of them. When Israel did arrive at that place, the Holy One, blessed be He, did not make it necessary for them to go down into the wadi. Instead, He gave a signal to the mountains, and the breasts of the latter mountain entered the caves, so that they all died, and the mountains brought their summits so close to each other that they became a highway, and there was no knowing [where] each [mountain] joined its neighbor... So the crags entered into the caves and all those warriors were crushed. Then the well descended to the wadi, where it became a mighty [torrent] and destroyed the troops, just as the [Reed] Sea had destroyed those [Egyptians]. Scripture therefore juxtaposed Waheb in Suphah [חַבּוס-קוֹס בַוֹן] and the wadies of the Arnon.

When Israel crossed over those mountains without knowing about all these miracles the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "Behold, I will let My Children know how many troops I destroyed because of them." [So] the well descended into the caves and brought out innumerable skulls, arms, and legs. Thus when Israel returned to seek the well, they saw it shining like the moon in the midst of the wadi, as it discharged the limbs of the troops. And where is it shown that the well informed [Israel] about them? Where it is stated, "And the slope of the wadies.... And from there they continued to the well." But was [the well] with them from there; was it not with them from the beginning of the forty years? It is simply that it had gone down to inform about the miracles, while Israel remained at the wadies and said to it, "Rise up, O well, sing to it."

יֵאָמֵר בְּסֵפֶר מִלְחֲמוֹת ה' אֶת וָהֵב בְּסוּפָה." מַהוּ? שֶׁעָשָׂה לָהֶם הַקַּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְּ הוּא אוֹתוֹת וְנִסִּים בְּנַחֲלֵי אַרְנוֹן, כַּנִּסִים שֶׁעָשָׂה לָהֶם בְּיַם סוּף.

וּמַה הֵם נִּסִּים שֶׁל נַחֲלֵי אַרְנוֹן? אָדָם עוֹמֵד עֵל הָהָר מִיָּה וּמְדַבֶּר עִם חֲבֵרוֹ בְּהַר אַחֵר, וְהוּא רָחוֹק מִמֶּנוּ שִׁבְעָה מִילִין, וְהַדֶּרֶךְ יוֹנֵד לְתוֹךְ הַנַּחַל וְעוֹלֶה לְדַרְכָּן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲבֹר בְּתוֹךְ הָנָּחַל וְעוֹלֶה לְדַרְכָּן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲבֹר בְּתוֹךְ הָנָּחַל וְעוֹלֶה סִוֹף. יָשְׁבוּ מִקְצְתָן בְּתוֹךְ הַנַּחַל, שָׁצִין לָהֶם סוֹף. יְשְׁבוּ מִקְצְתָן בְּתוֹךְ הַנַּחַל, וְהָבָּר מִלְּמַעְלָן עֲשׁוּי מְעָרוֹת מְעָרוֹת, וּבְנֶגֶד הַמְּעִרוֹת הַר שֶׁבָּנְגְדוֹ עָשׁוּי סְלָעִים סְלָעִים סְלָעִים כְּלְעִים כְּלְעִים כְּלְעִים כְּנִין שָׁדִּים, שֵׁנֵּאֲמַר: וְאָישִׁד הַנְּחַלִים.

נִכְנְסוּ הָאֵבְלוּסִין לְתוֹךּ הַמְּעָרוֹת וְאָמְרּ,
בְּלָנְסוּ הָאֵבְלוּסִין לְתוֹךּ הַמְּעָרוֹת וְאָמְרּ,
בְּשֵׁיֵרְדוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְתוֹךּ הַנַּחַל, אֲלוּ עוֹמְדִין
לְּמְנִיהֶם בְּתוֹךְ הַנַּחַל, וְאָנוּ לְמַעְלָה מִן
הַמְּעָרוֹת וְנַהֲרֹג אֶת בֵּלְוּ. בִּיוָן שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְאוֹתוֹ מָקוֹם, לֹא הִצְרִיבָן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְּ הוּא
לְיבִר לְמַשָּׁן לְנַחָל, אֶלֶא רָמַז לָהָרִים, וְנַבְנְסוּ
שָׁל הַר זֶה לְתוֹךְ מְעָרוֹת שֶׁל הַר זֶה,
וְמַשְׁה דֶּבֶּךְ בְּבוּשָׁה, וְלֹא נוֹדֵע אֵי זֶה הַר נְסְמַךְּ
וְתְבֵּבוּשְׁה, וְלֹא נוֹדֵע אֵי זֶה הַר נְסְמַךְּ
לַחֲבֵרוֹ... כָּךְ נִבְּנְסוּ הַסְּלְעִים לְתוֹךְ הַמְּעְרוֹת
וְנִבְנְסוּ וְמִבְּבָרִה עְם וְאבְּדָה כָּל הָאוּכְלָסִין,
הַנַּחַל וְנִתְנַבְּרָה שָׁם וְאִבְּדָה כָּל הָאוּכְלָסִין,
בְּעֵשׁ שָׁאבֵּד אוֹתָם הַיָּם. לְכַףְ הִקִּישׁ הַבָּתוּב
"אֶת וָהֶב בְּסוּפָה" לְנַחֲלֵי אַרְכוֹן.
"אֶת וֶהֶב בְּסוּפָה" לְנַחֲלֵי אַרְכוֹן.

וְעָבְרוּ וִשְּׂרָאֵל עַל אוֹתָן הָהָרִים וְלֹא יָדְעוּ כָּל הַנְּסִים הָאֵלּוּ. אָמֵר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְּ הוּא: הַרֵינִי מוֹדִיעַ לְבָנִי כַּמָּה אוּכְלֵסִין אַבּּדְתִּי מִפְּנֵיהֶם. יֶּרְדָה הַבְּאֵר לְאוֹתָן הַמְּעָרוֹת וְהוֹצִיאָה גֵּלְבָּלְּיוֹת וּדְרוֹעוֹת וְרַגְלִיִם שָׁאֵין לָהֶם חֵהֶר. וְיִשְּׂרָאֵל חָזְרוּ לְבַקֵשׁ אֶת הַבְּאֵר וְרָאוּ אוֹתָהּ מְאִירָה כַּלְּבָרָה בְּתוֹךְ הַנַּחַל, שֶׁהָיְתָה מוֹצִיאָה אֵבְרִים אֵבְרִים אַבְרִים. וּמְנֵין שֶׁהַבְּאֵר הוֹדִיעָה לָהֶן? שֶׁנָּאֱמֵר: "וְאָשֶׁד הַנְּחָלִים וְגוֹ' וּמִשְׁם בְּאֵרָה", וְכִי מִשְׁם הְיְתָה וְלֹא מִתְחַלָּת אַרְבָּעִים שְׁנָה הְיְתָה עִּמָּהֶם? עוֹמְדִים עַל הַנְּחָלִים וְאוֹמְרִים לָהָּ, "עָלִי בְּאֵר עוֹמְדִים עַל הַנְּחָלִים וְאוֹמְרִים לָהָּ, "עַלִי בְּאֵר