

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist

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### Apparently, We Find that Sustenance Can Come for the Sake of an Individual!

Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 9a



#### Background to Our Story

##### Genesis 12:1-2

*And the Lord said to Abram, "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and [you shall] be a blessing!"*

**?** How do you understand the words "and [you shall] be a blessing?"

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

#### Moses



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses>

**Moses** (Hebrew) is a prophet in Abrahamic religions. According to the Hebrew Bible, he was a former Egyptian prince who later in life became a religious leader and lawgiver, to whom the authorship of the Torah is traditionally attributed. According to the Book of Exodus, Moses was born in a time when his people, the Israelites, an enslaved minority, were increasing in numbers and the [Egyptian Pharaoh](#) was worried that they might ally with Egypt's enemies. Moses' Hebrew mother, Jochebed, secretly hid him when the Pharaoh ordered all newborn Hebrew boys to be killed in order to reduce the population of the Israelites. Through the Pharaoh's daughter (identified as Queen Bithia in the Midrash), the child was adopted as a foundling from the [Nile river](#) and grew up with the Egyptian royal

family. After killing an Egyptian slave master (because the slave master was smiting a Hebrew), Moses fled across the Red Sea to Midian, where he encountered the God of Israel speaking to him from within a "burning bush which was not consumed by the fire" on Mount Horeb (which he regarded as the Mountain of God). God sent Moses back to Egypt to demand the release of the Israelites from slavery. Moses said that he could not speak with assurance or eloquence, so God allowed Aaron, his brother, to become his spokesperson. After the Ten Plagues, Moses led the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, after which they based themselves at Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. After 40 years of wandering in the desert, Moses died within sight of the Promised Land.

## Aaron



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aaron>

In the Hebrew Bible was the older brother of Moses. Unlike Moses, who grew up in the Egyptian royal court, Aaron and his elder sister Miriam remained with their kinsmen in the eastern border-land of Egypt (Goshen). When Moses first confronted the Egyptian king about the Israelites, Aaron served as his brother's spokesman ("prophet") to Pharaoh. (Exodus 7:1) Part of the Law (Torah) that Moses received from God at Sinai granted Aaron the priesthood for himself and his male descendants, and he became the first High Priest of the Israelites. Aaron died before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and he was buried on Mount Hor (Numbers 33:39).

## Miriam



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manna>

Miriam (Hebrew) was the elder sister of Moses by seven years and Aaron by four years, and the only daughter of Amram and Jochebed. She was a prophet and first appears in the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible. In Exodus 2, at her mother Yocheved's request, Moses's sister hid her baby brother Moses by the side of a river to evade the [Pharaoh's](#) order that newborn [Hebrew](#) boys be killed. She watched as the Pharaoh's daughter discovered the infant and decided to adopt him. Moses's sister then suggested that the princess take on a [nurse](#) for the child, and suggested Yocheved; as a result, Moses was raised to be familiar with his background as a Hebrew. ([Exodus 2:1-10](#)) It is worth noting that Miriam is not explicitly named in the Exodus 2 accounts of Moses's early life. The connection of the Miriam of later texts to the Exodus 2 account stems from interpretation traditions and not from the text itself. Miriam was a prophetess who sang a victory song recorded briefly in the Bible as the shorter '[Song of the Sea](#)' after [Pharaoh's](#) army was drowned in the [Red Sea](#) ([Exodus 15:20-21](#)).

"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;

Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

It is considered by many that this poetic couplet is one of the oldest parts of the biblical account. She raised a Timbrel in her hand in joy. Later, she objected to the marriage of Moses to a [Cushite](#) woman, which made her guilty of speaking [Lashon hara](#) (gossiping, or speaking negatively about someone), for which she was struck with [tzaraat](#). After Aaron asked Moses to intercede for her, Moses uttered a five-word prayer: "O Lord, make her well," and she recovered within seven days. ([Numbers 12](#)) A passage in [Micah](#) suggests she had one legacy with significant regard among later prophets: "And I brought you forth out

of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, and I sent before you Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam." ([Micah 6:4](#)).

## Manna



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manna>

Manna (Hebrew: מַן) is an edible substance that, according to the Bible God provided for the Israelites during their travels in the desert.



## The Well



## Clouds of Glory



### Exodus 13:20-22

And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. 21 And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, *from* before the people.

### Exodus 16:10

And it came to pass, as Aaron spoke unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

### **The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 9a**

Rabbi Yosei, the son of Rabbi Yehudah says: Three good leaders rose up for Israel, and these are they: Moses, and Aaron, and Miriam. And three good gifts were given at their hand, and these are they: The well, and the cloud, and the manna. The well was because of the merit of Miriam. The pillar of cloud was because of the merit of Aaron. The manna was because of the merit of Moses.

When Miriam died, the well disappeared, as it is said (Numbers 20:1): "*And Miriam died there,*" and it is written after it (Numbers 20:2): "*And there was no water for the congregation.*" But it returned because of the merit of both of them (Aaron and Moses).

When Aaron died, the clouds of glory disappeared, as it is said (Numbers 21:1): "*And the Canaanite, the king of Arad, heard.*" What report did he hear? He heard that Aaron had died and the clouds of glory had disappeared, and he thought that permission had been given to him to go to war against Israel. They [the well and the clouds of glory] both returned because of the merit of Moses.

When Moses died, they [the well, and the cloud, and the manna] all disappeared, as it is said (Zechariah 11:8): "*And I destroyed the three shepherds in one month.*" But did they die in one month? But did not Miriam die in Nisan, and Aaron in Av, and Moses in Adar? Rather, it teaches us that the three good gifts that were given at their hand were withdrawn, and they all disappeared in one month."

Apparently we find that sustenance can come for the sake of an individual!



**Explaining the Structure of the Story** (What is the sequence of events in the story?)

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Who are the three good leaders that rose for Israel according to Rabbi Yosei? **?**  
What are the three gifts given to Israel through these three leaders?

**?** How do we know that the well was given through the merit of Miraim? **?** How  
do we know that the clouds of glory were given through the merit of Aaron? **?**  
How do we know that the manna was given through the merit of Moses?

**Bonus ?** Before Miriam's, Aaron's and Moses' death, to what did the Children of  
Israel attribute the miraculous well, the clouds of glory and the manna?

**Bonus ?** If the well returned anyway after Miraim's death because of the merit of  
both Moses and Aaron, and the clouds of glory returned anyway after Aaron's death  
because of Moses' merit, why did they disappear momentarily?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** How do we know that the well, the clouds of glory and the manna were  
preserved through the merit of Moses?

**?** How do you understand the closing remarks of our story: "Apparently we find  
that sustenance can come for the sake of an individual!"?

**?** Our story seems to imply that some people are special. Do you agree with this  
implication?

**?** It looks like the Children of Israel were able to appreciate the gifts of Moses,  
Miriam and Aaron after these special leaders were gone. What could have they  
done differently to appreciate their gifts when they were alive?

### **"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text**

- !** One special person can make all the difference!
- !** Everybody may have the potential to become a leader, but not everybody is a leader!
- !** Not all the leaders are equal!
- !** Be mindful of your gifts before they are gone!