

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist

[244]

"...and he was about to reach for the gold..."

Insights into Exodus Rabbah 1:26



Background to Our Story

Moses



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

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 themselves 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, 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 Angel of the Lord, speaking to him from within a burning bush 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 eloquently, 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 on Mount Nebo.

Exodus 4:10

Moses said to the LORD, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue."

The Text: Exodus Rabbah 1:26

כִּן וַיִּגְדַּל
הַיֵּלֶד • כִּדְ חֹדֶשׁ הִנִּיקְתְּהוּ וְאַתָּה אוֹמֵר וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֵּלֶד • אֲלֵא שְׁהִיָּה
גֹּדֵל שְׁלֵא כְּדֹרֶךְ כָּל הָאָרֶץ • וְתִבְיָאֵהוּ לְבַת פְּרַעֲהַ וְגו' • הִיתָה בַת
פְּרַעֲהַ מְנַשְׁקָת וּמְחַבֶּקֶת וּמְחַבֶּבֶת אוֹתוֹ כְּאֵלוֹ הוּא בְּנָה וְלֹא הִיתָה
מוֹצִיאָתוֹ מִפְּלִטְרִין שֶׁל מֶלֶךְ • וּלְפִי שְׁהִיָּה יִפָּה הַכֵּל מִתְּאוּמִים לְרֵאוֹתוֹ
מִי שְׁהִיָּה רֹוֹאוֹ לֹא הִיָּה מְעַבִּיר עֲצָמוֹ מֵעֵלְיוֹ • וְהִיָּה פְּרַעֲהַ מְנַשְׁקָה
וּמְחַבֶּקָה וְהוּא נוֹמֵל כְּתִירוֹ שֶׁל פְּרַעֲהַ וּמְשִׁימוֹ עַל רֵאשׁוֹ כְּמוֹ שְׁעִתִּיד
לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ כְּשֶׁהִיָּה גֹּדֵל • וְכֵן הִקְבִּ"ה אָמַר (ט) לְחִירִם (יִמְחַקֵּל כֹּה)
וְאוֹצִיא אֶשׁ מִתּוֹכְךָ הוּא וְגו' • וְכֵן בַּת פְּרַעֲהַ מְגַדֶּלֶת מִי שְׁעִתִּיד
לִיִּפְרַעַ מֵאַבִּיָּה • וְאַף מֶלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ שְׁעִתִּיד לִיִּפְרַעַ מֵאֲדוּמִים יוֹשֵׁב
עַמְהֶם בְּמִדְיָנָה שְׁנֵאמַר (יִשְׁטִיט כז) שֵׁם יִדְעָה עֵגֶל וְשֵׁם יִרְבִּץ וְגו' •
וְהָיוּ שֵׁם יוֹשְׁבֵי תְּרַשׁוּמֵי מִצְרַיִם וְאָמְרוּ מִתִּירָאִין אֲנִי מוֹה שְׁנוֹמֵל
כְּתֹרֶךְ וְנוֹתְנִי עַל רֵאשׁוֹ • שְׁלֵא יִהְיֶה זֶה אוֹתוֹ שְׁאֲנִי אוֹמְרִים שְׁעִתִּיד
לִישׁוֹל מַלְכוּת מִמֶּךָ • מֵהֶם אוֹמְרִים לְהוֹרְגוֹ מֵהֶם אוֹמְרִים לְשׁוֹרְפוֹ •
וְהִיָּה יִתְרוֹ יוֹשֵׁב בֵּינֵיהֶן וְאוֹמֵר לָהֶם הִנֵּנִי הוּא אֵין בּוֹ דַּעַת אֲלֵא
בְּחַנּוֹ אוֹתוֹ וְהִבִּיאוּ לְפָנָיו בְּקַעֲרָה זָהָב וְגַחְלָת • אִם יוֹשִׁיִּם יָדוֹ לְזָהָב
יֵשׁ בּוֹ דַּעַת וְהִרְגוּ אוֹתוֹ • וְאִם יוֹשִׁיִּם יָדוֹ לְגַחְלָת אֵין בּוֹ דַּעַת וְאֵין
עֵלְיוֹ מְשַׁפֵּם מוֹת • מִיָּד הִבִּיאוּ לְפָנָיו וְשִׁלַּח יָדוֹ לִיקַת הַזָּהָב וּבֵא
גְּבִרְיָאֵל וְדַחַח אֶת יָדוֹ וְתַפֵּשׂ אֶת הַגַּחְלָת וְהִכְנִים יָדוֹ עִם הַגַּחְלָת
לְתוֹד פִּיּוֹ (ל) וְנִכְוָה לְשׁוֹנוֹ • וּמִמֶּנּוּ נַעֲשָׂה כְּבֹד פָּה וְכְבֹד לְשׁוֹן •

Pharaoh's daughter used to kiss and hug him [Moses], and loved him as if he were her own son and [she] would not allow him out of the royal palace.

Since he [Moses] was so handsome, everyone was eager to see him, and whoever saw him could not tear himself away from him.

Pharaoh also used to kiss and hug him, and he [Moses] used to take the crown of Pharaoh and place it upon his own head, as he was destined to do when he became great.

....

The magicians of Egypt sat there and said: We are afraid of him who is taking off your crown and placing it upon his own head, lest he be the one of whom we prophesy that he will take away the kingdom from you.

Some of them counselled to slay him and others to burn him, but Jethro was present among them and he said to them: This boy has no sense. However, test him by placing before him a gold vessel and a live coal; if he stretches forth his hand for the gold, then he has sense and you can slay him, but if

he makes for the live coal, then he has no sense and there can be no sentence of death upon him.

So they brought these things before him and he was about to reach for the gold when Gabriel came and thrust his hand aside so that it seized the coal, and he thrust his hand with the live coal into his mouth, so that his tongue was burnt, with the result that he became slow of speech and of tongue.



Explaining the Story (What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Why did Pharaoh's daughter not allow Moses out of the royal palace?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why was everybody so eager to see Moses and why couldn't they tear themselves from him?

? Why did Pharaoh kiss and hug Moses?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Why did Moses take Pharaoh's crown and place it upon his own head?

? Why did the magicians of Egypt see an omen in Moses' playing with the crown?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why did the magicians advise Pharaoh to get rid of Moses?

Bonus ? Why did Jethro save Moses?

Bonus ? Why did Jethro suggest the "coal vs. gold" test as opposed to saying to Pharaoh and the magicians: "leave the boy alone!"

Bonus ? Why did Moses reach for the gold?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Bonus ? Why did the Angel Gabriel thrust Moses' hand aside?

? What did Moses do “to deserve” his speech impediment?

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Undeserved Pain: The Price of Leadership

EPILOGUE

The Torah tells us that Moses was *slow of speech and tongue without giving us any background to why such an impediment. Our story, while coming to fill in the biblical gap, leaves us with a disturbing, yet inescapable reality: Moses, who is meant to become the leader of the Children of Israel, is burned through no fault of his own. Jethro, the magicians, and Pharaoh not only talk freely about Moses, ascribing meaning to a non-existing plot, but they act upon their talks, hurting baby Moses in the process.*

I like to suggest that this story gives us a glimpse in the call of leadership. Leaders, especially community leaders, might get burnt, hurt, and slayed in the process of their leadership, and will suffer pain -sooner or later- without having done anything to deserve it. Those who venture themselves into the exciting yet uncharted territory of leadership should know the challenges they face.