
WHAT IS MIDRASH?

The word Midrash derives from the Hebrew root *ד-ר-ש*/*d-r-sh*, which means “to search,” “to examine,” or “to investigate.” Midrash can refer to several things:

- the literary techniques used by the Rabbis to search the Bible for hidden or deeper meaning (wordplays and *gematria* [Hebrew numerology] are just two of the many methods of Midrash utilized by the Rabbis);
- the literary product that resulted from such readings and interpretations (the Rabbi began his sermon by quoting Rabbi Avdimi’s Midrash on the giving of the Torah);
- a collection of such interpretations (*Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah* is a book containing Rabbinic commentaries on the biblical Song of Songs).

The term *D’rash* (from the same Hebrew root) is often used—as it is in this book—to denote a short interpretive piece that is based on a sacred text.

In one sense, the process of Midrash began the very first time the Torah was read. In the legal sections, there were always questions about just exactly what the text meant and what was expected of the listener or reader. In the Ten Commandments, for example, we are told “You shall not murder.” At first, that law seems pretty clear. But upon further reflection, we realize that many questions might arise: Is self-defense included in the prohibition? Is suicide? What about warfare? The Rabbinic discussions and answers to such *legal* questions constitute what is known as *מִדְרָשׁ הַלְכָּהּ*/*Midrash Halakhah*.

In the *narrative* portions of the Bible, on the other hand, there was always a curiosity about what was left out of the story. A classic case is the story of Abraham’s life, which begins in the Book of Genesis when he was seventy-five years old. We can’t help but wonder about his childhood, youth, and middle age, and about how he came to be the person who influenced so much of world religion. The famous tale of how a young Abraham smashed the idols in his father’s shop (brought as a Midrash text in this volume) is a response to the desire of the reader to have more information. In addition, Midrash often attempts to smooth over a textual oddity or harmonize contradictory texts. These stories passed down by the Rabbis are known as *מִדְרָשׁ אֲגָדָה*/*Midrash Aggadah*.

The process of interpretation, which culminates in the midrashic literature, begins in the Bible itself. The entire Book of Deuteronomy is really an explication of the Genesis–Numbers narrative. In Deuteronomy, Moses not only reviews Jewish history

but also expands upon it. Thus, the Bible contains the first seeds of its own commentary, with later books often expanding on ideas contained in the Torah. Once the Bible was in its final form, the process of discussions and explanations, which we now call Midrash, began. Readers of the Bible always searched for meaning much as we do today.

It is impossible to know for certain when these *midrashim* (plural of Midrash) were first taught, first written down, first collected, and first edited. Some traditionalists believe that the *midrashim* are part of the *תורה שבעל פה*/*Torah she-b'al peh*, "the Oral Torah," given by God to Moses at Mount Sinai along with the *תורה שבכתב*/*Torah she-bi-khetav*, "the Written Torah"; they were then transmitted orally from generation to generation until they were finally committed to writing so that they would not be lost. Modernists, on the other hand, say that the Midrash is the literary product of brilliant teachers and creative, imaginative writers who lived over several centuries.

One of the earliest midrashic texts is familiar to many of us: it is the Haggadah used at the Passover seder. The central portion of the traditional Haggadah is actually a lengthy interpretation of four verses from the Bible, Deuteronomy 26:5–8. These sentences speak of the Israelites' bondage in Egypt and God's rescuing them from their oppression. The Rabbis, in their *midrashim*, elaborate on the brief tale and flesh out the story of slavery and liberation. A well-known passage (though puzzling to many readers) has Rabbi Yosé ha-G'lili, Rabbi Elazar, and Rabbi Akiva debating how many plagues afflicted the Egyptians at the sea. Their answers—50, 200, and 250—are derived in classic midrashic style by careful scrutiny of other biblical verses. The point of this Midrash might have been to showcase God's great power and to tell the reader that the punishment that befell the enemies of the Israelites was even greater than imagined. This was a theme that may have touched a chord among the Jews living under Roman persecution.

HOW THE RABBIS READ THE BIBLE AND CREATED MIDRASH

A fundamentalist assumes that biblical text has one meaning for all times and all situations. But the Rabbis who wrote Midrash were not fundamentalists. They acknowledged that the Bible, as sacred text, is a *living* document. It can have different meanings in different contexts. One Rabbi can give an interpretation, *his* Midrash on a verse, and another Rabbi, in the exact same time and place can say, in effect, "Here's *another* possible meaning of this sacred Scripture." And later generations would look not only at the biblical text but also at these interpretations; these later teachers would write their own *midrashim*, understanding the Bible in the light of *their* times, *their* backgrounds, *their* needs.

Often, the Rabbis who wrote these interpretations were responding to the particular challenges of their age. The Jews who lived in Israel during the classic age of Midrash experienced foreign occupation, the loss of the Temple, the flourishing of Christianity, and finally the advent of Islam. They needed to understand why these things happened to them as a nation. They needed to be reassured that there was a bright future awaiting them as a people. They needed to know if the promises of God and if the words of the Torah were *still* meaningful and relevant. Midrash makes the biblical text applicable to the issues of the day. The Bible is not a frozen document but a living, breathing work.

The Rabbis also used Midrash to introduce new concepts into Judaism, which itself was developing during the same time that these interpretations were being written. (The Bible, read literally, does not have a concept of "soul"; however, the Rabbis used Midrash to find the basis for a soul in certain verses.) This creative reading allowed Rabbinic Judaism to expand and grow. Similarly, reinterpretations of sacred texts through Midrash provided comfort and consolation as well as a "revised" philosophy of Judaism that would make sense of the cataclysm—the destruction of the Temple—that Jews had only recently experienced.

The basic assumption of the Rabbis was that the Torah was a sacred text, originating from God. The implication of this assumption was that there is more to the Bible than initially meets the eye. In each sentence, word, and letter, there was either a direct message from God or an opportunity for the Rabbi to elucidate what God wanted from the Jewish people. Therefore, the text couldn't just be *read*; it had to be *studied*. It could not be *perused*; it had to be *deciphered*. Everything about it was of ultimate significance.

Scholars of the Midrash speak of two main methodologies used by the Rabbis: creative philology (the study of language and texts) and creative historiography (the study of history and narrative). First and foremost was the attention that the Rabbis paid to the language. Midrashic methodology included the following techniques, which will be found in the passages included in this book:

- Attention to unusual spellings: *מלֵב*/*maleh*, “complete,” and *חסֵר*/*haser*, “missing,” where a *vav* or a *yod* might be included or left out.
- Puns, when a word could change meaning by minor changes in a vowel or consonant.
- The literal interpretation of a word instead of its usual, idiomatic meaning.
- The presence of superfluous words that were believed to have been included in order to transmit additional messages.
- The doubling of words—a common Hebrew form—seen by the Rabbis as signaling a message.
- *Notarikon*, where a word was understood as an abbreviation of two or more other words.
- *Gematria*, whereby the numerical sum of a word’s letters either added up to a significant quantity or equaled another word of the same numerical sum.
- *Gezeira Shava*, in which two distinct stories shared the same word or phrase, and elements of the first were applied to the second.
- The etymology of names, which offered hints about a person’s character.
- The juxtaposition of sections, not considered coincidental or meaningless, which was seen as planned and significant.

These and many other techniques were formalized by the Rabbis in various lists of *middot*, “characteristics” or principles of interpretation. Among the most famous are the Thirteen Middot of Rabbi Yishmael (which became a part of the daily *Shaharit* liturgy).

In addition to the detailed concern with the language, the Rabbis also employed other methodologies in analyzing Bible stories and creating the Midrash texts that have come down to us:

- Logic, interpretations created through reasoning. A classic example of the use of logic is the *kol va-homer*, where a law or a situation applied in a “light” case was also applied to a “serious” case. [This is often referred to as *kal va-homer*, though *kol va-homer* is the more correct reading.]
- The resolution of contradictions within a story or between stories (often accomplished by limiting the situations in which the cases applied).
- The Bible as a paradigm of history, where the deeds of the ancestors are a sign regarding the actions of their descendants.
- The use of biblical stories to mask comments on politics and current events.
- The desire to fill in missing details of biblical stories.

And perhaps most significant for the creation of midrashic narratives was the aversion to anonymity. The Rabbis tried to identify unnamed figures in the Bible and fill in missing background information.

We also find in midrashic texts:

Folk wisdom, including proverbs and parables.

Case studies; incidents that actually occurred were used as precedents.

Fauna and flora, as the source of an ethical lesson.

Imitatio Dei (imitation of the divine), with God serving as a role model for human behavior.

Apologetics, in which stories of interactions with non-Jews were a basis for arguing for Judaism's superiority over other religions.

Ethical lessons derived from legal details, and legal details derived from narrative sections.

Midrash: The Missing Pieces?

Source Sheet by Rabbi Aaron Melman

Creation

Genesis 1:3

(3) God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

בראשית א:ג

(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אֹר וַיְהִי־אֹר:

Bereishit Rabbah 3:8

(8) Rabbi Yannai said: "From the beginning of his creation of the universe the Holy One, blessed be He, scrutinized the deeds of the righteous and the deeds of the wicked. "And the earth was formless", these are the deeds of the wicked. "And God said, let there be light", these are the deeds of the righteous. "And God separated between the light and the dark", [that is] between the deeds of the righteous and the wicked. "And God called the light day", these are the deeds of the righteous. "And the darkness he called night", these are the deeds of the wicked. "And there was evening", these are the deeds of the wicked. "And there was morning", these are the deeds of the righteous. "One day", which the

בראשית רבה ג:ח

(ח) אָמַר רַבִּי יַנַּאי מִתְחִלַּת בְּרִיתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם צָפָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל צְדִיקִים וּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם שֶׁל רְשָׁעִים, וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְּהוֹ, אֱלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם שֶׁל רְשָׁעִים. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אֹר, אֱלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל צְדִיקִים. וַיִּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ, בֵּין מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל צְדִיקִים לְמַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל רְשָׁעִים. וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם, אֱלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה, אֱלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל רְשָׁעִים. וַיְהִי עֶרֶב, אֱלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל רְשָׁעִים. וַיְהִי בֹקֶר, אֱלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל צְדִיקִים. יוֹם אֶחָד, שָׁנַתֵּן לָהֶם הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יוֹם אֶחָד, וְאַיִזָּה זֶה יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים. אָמַר רַבִּי תַנְחוּם בַּר יְרֵמְיָה שָׁבוּ נִבְרָאוֹ אַרְבָּעָה

Holy One, blessed be He, gave to them. And what is this [day]? Yom Kippur. Rabbi Tanchuma the son of Jeremiah said: "on it [that day] four things were created: mountains, heavens, and earth and light". Rabbi Yudan said: "on it [that day] the Holy One, blessed be He, was unique and alone in his universe because there was nothing in his universe except for him". This is in accord with Rabbi Yochanan, but this is not in accord with Rabbi Chanina. Rabbi Yochanan said "on the second [day] the angels were created. See! It is written "He lays the beams of his upper chambers in the waters; he makes the clouds his chariot; he walks upon the wings of the wind (Psalm 104:3)" and it is written "he makes the winds his angels (Psalm 104:4)"". Rabbi Chanina said "on the fifth [day] the angels were created, as it is said: "and let fowl fly above the earth (Genesis 1:20)" and it is written "and with two [wings] it flies (Isaiah 6:2)"". Rabbi Lulyani the son of Tavrai in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak said: "Whether t is according to the opinion of Rabbi Chanina or according to the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan, everyone agrees that they were not created on the first day, so you cannot say that Michael stretched out the southern section of the firmament, and

דְּבָרִים: הָרִים, שָׁמַיִם, וְאָרֶץ, וְאוֹרָה. אָמַר רַבִּי יוּדָן שָׁבוּ הָיָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יְחִידִי בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, שְׁלֵא הָיָה בְּעוֹלָמוֹ אֵלָא הוּא. אֲתֵיָא כְּרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן וְלָא אֲתֵיָא כְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא, רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר בְּשָׁנֵי נִבְרָאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים, הֵדָא הוּא דְכַתִּיב (תהלים קד, ג): הַמְקַרָּה בְּמַיִם עֲלִיּוֹתָיו הַשָּׁם עֲבִים רְכוּבוֹ הַמְהַלֵּךְ עַל כַּנְפֵי רוּחַ, וְכַתִּיב (תהלים קד, ד): עֲשֵׂה מְלֶאכֶיּוֹ רוּחוֹת. רַבִּי חֲנִינָא אָמַר בְּחַמִּישֵׁי נִבְרָאוּ מְלֶאכֶיִם, שְׁנַאֲמַר (בראשית א, כ): וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל הָאָרֶץ, וְכַתִּיב (ישעיה ו, ב): וּבִשְׁתַּיִם יְעוֹפֵף. רַבִּי לוּלִיאֲנִי בַר טַבְרָאִי בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יִצְחָק אָמַר, בֵּין עַל דְּעֵתִיָּה דְרַבִּי חֲנִינָא בֵּין עַל דְּעֵתִיָּה דְרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן הַכֹּל מוֹדִים שְׁלֵא נִבְרָא בְּיוֹם הָרְאשׁוֹן כְּלוּם, שְׁלֵא תֵאמַר מִיכָאֵל הָיָה מוֹתַח בְּדְרוּמוֹ שְׁל רְקִיעַ, וְגַבְרִיאֵל בְּצְפוֹנוֹ, וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְמַדְד בְּאִמְצָעֵיתוֹ, אֵלָא (ישעיה מד, כד): אֲנֹכִי ד' עֲשֵׂה כָל נְטָה שָׁמַיִם לְבִדִּי רַקַּע הָאָרֶץ מֵאֲתִי, מִי אֲתִי כְּתִיב, מִי הָיָה שְׁתַּף עַמִּי בְּבִרְיָתוֹ שְׁל עוֹלָם.

Gabriel the northern section and the Holy One, blessed be He, measured in the middle. Rather "I am Hashem, that makes all things; that stretched forth the heavens alone; that spread abroad the earth by Myself (*meitti*). [Read this as if] "who is with me? (*mi itti*) is written: "who was joined with me in my creation of the universe?"

Avraham and the idols

Genesis 11:28

(28) Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah, in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans.

Bereishit Rabbah 38:13

(13) [Genesis 11:28 says,] "And Haran died in the presence of his father Terach." Rabbi Hiyya said: Terach was a manufacturer of idols. He once went away somewhere and left Abraham to sell them in his place. A man came in and wished to buy one. "How old are you?" Abraham asked the man. "Fifty years old," he said. "Woe to such a man, who is fifty years old and would worship a day old object!" Avraham said. On another occasion a woman came in with a plateful of flour and requested him, "Take this and offer it to them." So he took a stick and broke them, and put the stick in the hand of the largest. When his father returned he demanded, "What have you done to them?" "I cannot conceal it from you. A woman came with a plateful of fine meal and requested me to offer it to them. One claimed, 'I must eat first,' while another claimed, 'I must eat first.'

בראשית י"א:כ"ח

(כח) וימת הרן על־פני תרח אביו
בארץ מולדתו באור כשדים.

בראשית רבה ל"ח:י"ג

(יג) וימת הרן על פני תרח אביו
(בראשית י"א, כח), רבי חזא בר
בריה דרב אדא דקפא, תרח עובד
צלמים הנה, חד זמן נפיק לאתר,
הושיב לאברהם מוכר תחתיו. הנה
אתי בר אינש בעי דיזבן, והנה אמר
ליה בר כמה שנין את, והנה אמר
ליה בר חמשין או שתין, והנה אמר
ליה וי ליה לההוא גברא דהנה בר
שתין ובעי למסגד לבר יומי, והנה
מתבייש והולך לו. חד זמן אתא חד
אתתא טעינא בידה חדא פינה
דסלת, אמרה ליה הא לה קרב
קדמיהון, קם נסיב בוקלסא בידיה,
ותברינון לכלהון פסיליא, ויהב
בוקלסא בידיה דרבה דהנה ביניהון.
פיון דאתא אבוה אמר ליה מא
עביד להון כדיון, אמר ליה מה
נכפור מינה אתת חדא אתתא
טעינא לה חדא פינה דסולת,

Thereupon, the largest arose, took the stick and broke them." "Why do you make sport of me? Have they any knowledge?" Terach said. "Should not your ears hear what your mouth has said?" Avraham said. Thereupon Terach seized him and delivered him to Nimrod. "Let us worship fire," Nimrod said. "Let us rather worship water which quenches fire," Avraham said. "Let us worship water," Nimrod said. "Let us rather worship the clouds which bear the water," Avraham said. "Let us then worship the clouds," Nimrod said. "Let us worship the wind which disperses the clouds," Avraham said. "Let us worship the wind," Nimrod said. "Let us worship human beings which can stand up to the wind," Avraham said. "You are just bandying words, and we will worship nothing but the fire. Behold, I will cast you into it, and let your God whom you adore come and save you from it!" Nimrod said. Now Haran was standing there undecided. "If Avraham is victorious, I will say that I am of Avraham's belief, while if Nimrod is victorious, I will say that I am on Nimrod's side," he thought. When Avraham descended into the fiery furnace and was saved, Nimrod asked him, "Of whose belief are

וַאֲמַרְתָּ לִּי הֲאֵל לָךְ קָרִיב קְדָמִיּהוּן,
 קָרִיבָתָּ לְקְדָמִיּהוּן הֲוֵה דִּין אָמַר אַנְא
 אֵיכּוּל קְדָמָאִי, וְדִין אָמַר אַנְא אֵיכּוּל
 קְדָמָאִי, קָם הֲדִין רַבָּה דִּתְהוּה בִּינִיּהוּן
 נִסָּב בּוּקְלָסָא וְתַבְרִינּוּן. אָמַר לִיּה
 מָה אַתָּה מַפְלָה בִּי, וְיִדְעִין אִינּוּן.
 אָמַר לִיּה וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אֲזוּנִיה מָה
 שְׁפִיךְ אֹמֵר. נִסְכִּיּה וּמְסָרִיּה
 לְנִמְרוּד. אָמַר לִיּה נִסְגוּד לְנוֹרָא,
 אָמַר לִיּה אַבְרָהָם וְנִסְגוּד לְמִיָּא
 דְּמִטְפִּין נוֹרָא. אָמַר לִיּה נִמְרוּד
 נִסְגוּד לְמִיָּא, אָמַר לִיּה אִם כֵּן נִסְגוּד
 לְעִנְנָא דְּטַעִין מִיָּא. אָמַר לִיּה נִסְגוּד
 לְעִנְנָא. אָמַר לִיּה אִם כֵּן נִסְגוּד
 לְרוּחָא דְּמַבְדֵּר עִנְנָא. אָמַר לִיּה
 נִסְגוּד לְרוּחָא. אָמַר לִיּה וְנִסְגוּד לְבָר
 אִינְשָׁא דְּסָבִיל רוּחָא. אָמַר לִיּה מְלִין
 אַתָּ מִשְׁתַּעִי, אֲנִי אִינִי מִשְׁתַּחֲוֵה אֱלֹא
 לְאוּר, הֲרִי אֲנִי מִשְׁלִיכָךְ בְּתוֹכוֹ,
 וְיָבוּא אֱלוֹהַּ שְׁאַתָּה מִשְׁתַּחֲוֵה לוֹ
 וְיִצְיִלְךָ הַיָּמָנוּ. הֲוֵה תַמְזַן הָרִן קָאִים
 פְּלוּג, אָמַר מָה נְפִשָׁךְ אִם נְצַח
 אַבְרָהָם אַנְא אָמַר מִן דְּאַבְרָהָם אַנְא
 וְאִם נְצַח נִמְרוּד אַנְא אָמַר דְּנִמְרוּד
 אַנְא. כִּיּוֹן שְׂיִרְד אַבְרָהָם לְכַבְּשֵׁן
 הָאֵשׁ וְנִצַּל, אָמַרִין לִיּה דְּמֵאן אַתָּ,
 אָמַר לְהוּן מִן אַבְרָהָם אַנְא, נְטָלוּהוּ
 וְהִשְׁלִיכוּהוּ לְאוּר וְנַחֲמֵרוּ בְּנֵי מְעִיו,
 וְיִצָּא וּמַת עַל פְּנֵי תַרְח אָבִיו, הֲדָא

you?" "Of Abraham's," he replied.
Thereupon he seized him and cast
him into the fire; his innards were
scorched and he died in the presence
of his father. Hence it is written,
"And Haran died in the presence of
his father Terach."

הוא דָּכַתִּיב: וַיָּמָת הָרָן עַל פְּנֵי תֵרַח
וּגְר'.

Moses - slow of speech

Exodus 2:10

(10) When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."

שמות ב:י

(י) וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבֹאֶהוּ לְבַת־פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי־לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם מָשִׁיתִהוּ׃

Exodus 4:10

(10) But Moses said to יהוה, "Please, O my lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."

שמות ד:י

(י) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה כִּי אֲדֹנָי לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אָנֹכִי גַם מִתְּמוֹל גַּם מִשְׁלָשִׁם גַּם מֵאָז דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵלַי עֲבֹדָה כִּי כְבֹד־פֶּה וְכִבְד־לָשׁוֹן אָנֹכִי׃

Shemot Rabbah 1:26

(26) "And the child (Moses) grew" - Twenty four months she nursed him, and you say "and the child grew"?! Rather he grew, not in the way of the [rest] land. "And she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh..." The daughter of Pharaoh would kiss and hug and adore him (Moses) as if he were her own son, and she would not take him out of the king's palace. And because [Moses] was so beautiful, everyone

שמות רבה א:כ"ו

(כו) וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד. עֶשְׂרִים וְאַרְבָּעָה חֳדָשׁ הִנְיָקְתֶּהוּ, וְאַתָּה אוֹמֵר: וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד, אֵלָּא שֶׁהָיָה גֹדֵל שְׁלֹא כְּדַרְךָ כָּל הָאָרֶץ. וַתְּבֹאֶהוּ לְבַת פַּרְעֹה וְגו'. הָיְתָה בַת פַּרְעֹה מְנַשֶּׁקֶת וּמְחַבֶּקֶת וּמְחַבֶּקֶת אוֹתוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא בְּנָהּ, וְלֹא הָיְתָה מוֹצִיאֵתוֹ מִפְּלִטְרִין שֶׁל מְלָךְ, וּלְפִי שֶׁהָיָה יָפֵה הַכֹּל מִתְּאוּמִים לְרֹאוֹתוֹ, מִי שֶׁהָיָה רוֹאֶהוּ לֹא הָיָה מְעַבִּיר עֲצָמוֹ מֵעֲלָיו. וְהָיָה פַּרְעֹה

yearned to see him. One that would see him would not leave his presence. And it was that Pharaoh would kiss him (Moses) and hug him, and he would remove Pharaoh's crown and place it on his own head, as he would do to him in the future when he was great. And just as the Holy One Blessed is He said to Hiram (Ezekiel 28:18), "...I have brought fire from within you, it will consume you...", similarly the daughter of Pharaoh raised the one who would punish her father in the future. And even the anointed king, that is destined to punish Edom, sits among them in their [own] province, as it says (Isaiah 27:10) "...there shall the calf (the Messiah) graze and there lie down and destroy its branches." And some of the observers sitting among them were the magicians of Egypt that said, "We are wary of this, that he is taking your crown and placing it on his head, that he not be the one we say (i.e. prophesy) that will take the kingship from you." Some said to kill him, and some said to burn him. And Jethro was sitting among them and said to them, "This child has no intent [to take the throne]. Rather, test him by bringing in a bowl [a piece of] gold and a coal. If he outstretches his hand towards the gold, [surely] he has intent [to take

מִנְשָׁקוֹ וּמִחֶבְקוֹ, וְהוּא נוֹטֵל כִּתְרוֹ
שֶׁל פַּרְעֹה וּמְשִׁימוֹ עַל רֵאשׁוֹ, כְּמוֹ
שְׁעֵתִיד לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ כְּשֶׁהָיָה גָדוֹל. וְכֵן
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אָמַר לְחִירָם
(יחזקאל כח, יח): וְאוֹצֵא אֶשׁ
מִתּוֹכָךְ הִיא וְגו'. וְכֵן בֵּית פַּרְעֹה
מִגְדֵּלֶת מִי שְׁעֵתִיד לַפָּרַע מֵאֲבִיהָ.
וְאִף מֶלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ שְׁעֵתִיד לַפָּרַע
מֵאֲדוּם יוֹשֵׁב עִמָּהֶם בְּמִדְיָנָה,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיה כז, י): שָׁם יִרְעָה
עֵגֶל וְשָׁם יִרְבֵּץ וְגו'. וְהָיוּ שָׁם יוֹשְׁבֵי
חֶרְטָמֵי מִצְרַיִם, וְאָמְרוּ, מִתְיָרְאִין
אֲנֹן מִזֶּה שֶׁנוֹטֵל כִּתְרָךְ וְנוֹתְנֵנוּ עַל
רֵאשׁוֹ, שְׁלֵא יִהְיֶה זֶה אוֹתוֹ שְׁאֲנֹ
אוֹמְרִים שְׁעֵתִיד לְטַל מְלָכוֹת מִמֶּךָ.
מִהֶם אוֹמְרִים לְהִרְגֵנוּ, מִהֶם אוֹמְרִים
לְשַׂרְפוֹ, וְהָיָה יִתְרוֹ יוֹשֵׁב בֵּינֵיהֶן
וְאוֹמֵר לָהֶם, הַנֶּעַר הַזֶּה אֵין בּוֹ דַּעַת,
אֲלֵא בְּחִנּוֹ אוֹתוֹ, וְהִבִּיאוּ לִפְנֵינוּ
בְּקַעְרָה זָהָב וְגַחְלֵת, אִם יוֹשִׁיט יָדוֹ
לְזָהָב יֵשׁ בּוֹ דַּעַת וְהִרְגֵנוּ אוֹתוֹ, וְאִם
יוֹשִׁיט יָדוֹ לְגַחְלֵת אֵין בּוֹ דַּעַת וְאֵין
עָלָיו מִשְׁפָּט מוֹת. מִיָּד הִבִּיאוּ לִפְנֵינוּ
וְשָׁלַח יָדוֹ לְקַח הַזָּהָב, וּבֵא גְבַרְיֵאל
וְדַחָה אֶת יָדוֹ וְתַפֵּשׂ אֶת הַגַּחְלֵת
וְהַכְנִיֵס יָדוֹ עִם הַגַּחְלֵת לְתוֹךְ פִּי
וְנִכְוָה לְשׁוֹנוֹ, וּמִמֶּנּוּ נַעֲשֶׂה (שמות
ד, י): כְּבִד פֶּה וְכִבֵּד לְשׁוֹן. וְתִקְרָא
שְׁמוֹ מִשֶּׁה, מִכָּאֵן אֶתָּה לְמַד שְׁכָרָן

the throne], and you should kill him. And if he outstretches his hand towards the coal, he [surely] does not have intent [to take the throne], and he does not deserve the death penalty.” They immediately brought the bowl before him (Moses), and he outstretched his hand to take the gold, and Gabriel came and pushed his (Moses’) hand, and he grabbed the coal. He then brought his hand along with the coal into his mouth and burned his tongue, and from this was made (Exodus 4:10) “slow of speech and slow of tongue.” “And she called his name ‘Moshe’” – From here you can learn about the merit of those that perform acts of kindness. Even though Moses had many names, the only name that was set throughout the Torah, was the name that Bathyah daughter of Pharaoh called him. Even the Holy One Blessed is He did not call him by another name.

שֶׁל גּוֹמְלֵי הַסֹּדִים, אֵף עַל פִּי
שֶׁהֲרֵבָה שְׁמוֹתָ הָיוּ לוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה, לֹא
נִקְבַּע לוֹ שֵׁם בְּכָל הַתּוֹרָה אֲלֵא כְּמוֹ
שֶׁקָּרְאתוּ בְּתֵיבָה בֵּת פֶּרְעֹה, וְאֵף
הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לֹא קָרָאָהוּ בְּשֵׁם
אַחֵר:

Moses shattering the tablets

Exodus 34:1

(1) יהוה said to Moses: “Carve two tablets of stone like the first, and I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered.

Deuteronomy 9:15-17

(15) I started down the mountain, a mountain ablaze with fire, the two Tablets of the Covenant in my two hands. (16) I saw how you had sinned against your God יהוה: you had made yourselves a molten calf; you had been quick to stray from the path that יהוה had enjoined upon you. (17) Thereupon I gripped the two tablets and flung them away with both my hands, smashing them before your eyes.

Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 26:2

(2) Similarly, since He had indicated His wrath through the words *Go, get thee down*, He became reconciled with him through the words *Depart, go up hence*. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: With the very expression (with which) I humbled you, I will

שמות ל"ד:א

(א) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פְּסֹל־לָךְ שְׁנֵי־לְחֹת אֲבָנִים כְּרֵאשֹׁנִים וְכַתְּבֵתְלִי עַל־הֶלְחֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל־הֶלְחֹת הַרְּאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר שִׁבַּרְתָּ.

דברים ט"ו:ט"ו-י"ז

(טו) וְאֶפֶן וְאֶרֶץ מִן־הַקָּר וְהַקָּר בְּעַר בְּאֵשׁ וּשְׁנֵי לְחֹת הַבְּרִית עַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי. (טז) וְאָרָא וְהִגַּה חֲטָאתְכֶם לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם עֲשִׂיתֶם לָכֶם עֲגֹל מִסַּכָּה סָרְתֶם מִכֹּר מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם. (יז) וְאֶתְפַּשׁ בְּשֵׁנֵי הֶלְחֹת וְאֶשְׁלַכְכֶם מֵעַל שְׁתֵּי יָדַי וְאֶשְׁבַּרְכֶם לְעֵינֵיכֶם.

מדרש תנחומא, כי תשא כ"ו:ב'

(ב) וְאִף בְּמֹשֶׁה בְּלָךְ רַד כְּעַס עָלָיו, וּבְלָךְ עָלָה נְתַרְצָה. אָמַר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: בְּלָשׁוֹן שֶׁהִשְׁפַּלְתִּי אוֹתָהּ, בּוּ בְּלָשׁוֹן אֲנִי מַעֲלָה אוֹתָהּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: לָךְ עָלָה מִזָּה (שמות לג, א). דְּבַר

exalt you, as is said: *Depart, go up hence*. Another comment on *Depart, go up hence*. What is written previously concerning this matter? *And Moses turned, and went down from the mountain* (Exod. 32:15).

After they had performed the wicked deed, Moses descended from the mountain and, as he approached the camp, observed the golden calf they had made. Until that moment, the tablets that the Holy One, blessed be He, had given him had been virtually self-borne, but as he descended the mountain, approached the camp, and saw the calf, the letters flew from the tablets and they became heavy in the hands of Moses.

Forthwith, *Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hand* (ibid., v. 19).

אחר, לה עלה מזה. מה כתיב
למעלה מן הענין, ויפן וירד משה,
כשעשו אותו מעשה וירד משה מן
ההר וקרב אל המחנה וראה את
העגל שעשו, בשעה שנתן לו
הקדוש ברוך הוא את הלוחות, היו
סובלין את עצמן. כיון שיירד וקרב
אל המחנה וראה את העגל, פרח
אות הכתב מעליהם ונמצאו כבדים
על ידיו של משה. מיד ויחר אף
משה וישלך מידי (שמות לב, יט).