

MORASHAH
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Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Shemot

The Torah tells us nothing at all about *Moshe's* formative years growing up in Pharaoh's palace. Our first genuine encounter with *Moshe* occurs when he is already an adult (*Shemot* 2:11-12):

<p>ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו ויפן כה וכה וירא כי אין איש ויך את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול:</p>	<p><i>Now it came to pass in those days that Moses grew up and went out to his brothers and looked at their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brothers He turned this way and that way, and he saw that there was no man; so he struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.</i></p>
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RASHI, citing a *midrashic* story from *Shemot Rabbah*, informs us that in turning “*this way and that way*”, *Moshe* was not just looking around for witnesses but also searching the future genealogy of Egyptian taskmaster to see whether he would have any worthy offspring. Having concluded that nothing worthwhile would ever issue forth from this man, *Moshe* quickly dispatched him to his Maker.

I suggest that there are two aspects of this *midrash* that deserve our attention. Firstly, we lack *Moshe's* ability to turn “*this way and that way*”, to see into the future and to determine the consequences of our actions many generations later. As a result, we tend to judge people and situations in the moment only. Whether in politics or personal relationships, it behooves us to look as deeply as we can and to search as fully as our limits permit before condemning others. After all, many are they whose forebears were less than righteous.

Secondly, while he exhibited great courage in protecting a single Hebrew by felling the taskmaster, *Moshe* also abandoned his people immediately afterwards as he sought asylum in *Midian*. It took *Moshe* another forty years to see the burning bush and to finally accept the charge to return to Egypt to challenge Pharaoh. If indeed, as the *midrash* suggests, *Moshe* had a prophetic vision so early on, then his decision to flee to *Midian* must be seen as a forty-year refusal to accept his mission.

Perhaps *Moshe's* punishment for turning his back on his people was that he had to

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spend the final forty years of his life shepherding an often ungrateful nation through difficult terrain. And perhaps *Moshe's* reward for finally rising to the occasion – albeit reluctantly and belatedly – was to spend the final forty years of his life teaching God's Torah to God's people.

Shabbat Shalom!

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