YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

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Dedicated by the Wise and Etshalom families
in memory of Rabbi Aaron M. Wise, whose yahrzeit is 21 Tamuz.
Y'hi Zikhro Barukh.

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In memory of our beloved father and grandfather,
Fred Stone, Ya’acov Ben Yitzchak,
whose yahrzeit will be Sunday, 25 Tammuz, July 15th.
Ellen, Stanley, Jacob, Chaya, Zack, Yael, Ezra, Yoni, Eliana, and Gabi Stone

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PARASHAT PINCHAS

SICHA OF HARAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN

The Leadership of Moshe

Translated by Kaeren Fish

In addressing the appointment of Yehoshua bin Nun as the new leader of *Am Yisrael*, as recounted in this week’s *parasha*, we cannot avoid making mention of Moshe’s sin, which resulted in his being denied entry into the Land of Israel. A great many commentators have offered explanations as to what exactly the sin entailed, and why it was sufficiently severe to prevent him from entering the Promised Land. As I understand it, the story of Mei Meriva, occurring at the end of the forty years of wandering, demonstrated the generation gap between Moshe and the second generation. The relationship that had developed between Moshe and the younger generation was such that he could no longer continue functioning as their leader.

This problematic relationship is highlighted and intensified in the sin of Mei Meriva, but is also manifest in other episodes, including the copper serpent, the sin of Pe’or, the bounty from the war against Midian, and the appeal by the tribes of Gad and Reuven to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It becomes apparent that Moshe can no longer lead the people owing to the vast chasm that separates him from the generation that will be entering the land. Therefore he will not lead them into the land, but rather will die in the wilderness, like the rest of his own generation who had met the same fate (in their case, owing to the sin of the spies).

We find that Chazal regard Moshe’s denial of entry into the land as being connected towards his role as leader, rather than against himself individually and personally. Moreover, according to the midrash, Moshe could in fact have entered the land as a regular member of the nation, had he so wished:

“Call Yehoshua” – [Moshe] said to [God]: “Master of the universe, let Yehoshua inherit my office, but let me continue to live.”

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: “Then act towards him in the same manner in which he acted towards you.”

Moshe got up early in the morning and went over to Yehoshua’s home. Yehoshua was afraid, and Moshe said: “Rabbi, come with me.” They set off, Moshe walking on Yehoshua’s left side. They entered the Tent of Meeting, and the pillar of cloud descended, separating them.

When the pillar of cloud disappeared, Moshe went over to Yehoshua and said: “What did the Divine word tell you?”

Yehoshua answered, “When God’s word was revealed to you, was I aware of what He had said to you?”

At that moment Moshe cried out and said, “A hundred deaths are better than feeling envy even once!” And Shlomo explained thus: “For strong as death is love; terrible as Sheol is envy” (*Shir haShirim* 8:6) – this refers to the love that Moshe had for Yehoshua, and the envy that he felt towards Yehoshua [at that moment].

Since he had resigned himself to death, God began to comfort him. He told him: “In this world, you were the leader of My children. In the time to come, too, I shall lead them by your hand.” From where do we know this? As it is written: “Then He remembered the days of old, Moshe, and His people” (*Yishayahu* 63:11). (*Devarim Rabba* 9:9)

What the midrash is telling us is that it was not decreed that Moshe himself could not enter the land; rather, he was prevented from entering the land as the nation’s leader. He had to hand over his position and his authority to the next generation. However, unlike his early years which he had spent in Midian, attempting to forge ahead as a private individual while ignoring the situation of his brethren (see <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-shemot/young-moshe>), he discovers that after forty years during which his entire being has been attuned and directed towards the needy, impatient nation, he is no longer capable of living without being fully involved in leadership of the people, and therefore he asks to die. God’s consolation, promising him leadership of *Am Yisrael* in the time to come, demonstrates the extent to which Moshe’s identity is bound up with his role as shepherd and leader of Israel, and how far he has come since the days when, as a young man, he had fled Egypt and escaped to Midian, turning his back on his people’s needs.

It is therefore no wonder that the conclusion of the Torah mentions leadership as one of the three qualities and virtues that sum up Moshe’s lifetime achievements, describing him as the servant of God, the master of the prophets, and the leader of Israel:

In all the signs and wonders which God sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all of his servants and to all of his land. And in all that mighty hand, and in all that great terror which Moshe performed in the sight of all of Israel. (*Devarim* 34:11-12)