

# על פלגי מים

## STUDIES IN GEMARA, TANAKH, & JEWISH THOUGHT

**SHANA BET 5781**



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Edited by Michael Kay,  
Nachum Krasnopsky,  
and Akiva Sturm

Rabbinic Advisor:  
Rav Chanoch Waxman

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*In honor of our son Isaac Abboudi and all his fellow  
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*In memory of:  
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Seymour Madow z"l,  
Pauline Madow z"l*

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Lester Segal as we celebrate his 95th year**

*Dear Elazar,  
The Mesorah of your grandfather  
is alive and well in your hands.  
עֲטָרַת זִקְנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים  
We are so proud of your accomplishments  
over the past two years.  
Love, Ima and Abba*

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*Rav Chanoch Waxman*

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# THE ELECTION OF MOSHE

*Natan Blank*

## WHAT MADE MOSHE SPECIAL?

**M**oshe is an enigmatic and unique character, the most important leader in Jewish history, leading the Bnei Yisrael out of slavery and to the promised land of Canaan. Yet, when the reader reaches the point where Moshe is selected by Hashem to be the people's "redeemer," a giant question looms: Why does Hashem choose Moshe? What sets him apart to be qualified for this mammoth task? To add to this question, Moshe himself repeatedly questions the decision to select him to liberate the Jewish people (3:11, 4:1); he does not feel fit to be the representative of God.

It is not clear that Moshe fits the complicated job description of a redeemer. Firstly, Moshe would need to be a leader of these specific people. Yet, despite being born to Hebrew parents and identifying with his brethren, he is not fully like them. He is raised in the house of Pharaoh's daughter (2:10), viewed as an Egyptian by the Midianite shepherdesses (2:19), and, ultimately, ends up living under the roof of a Midianite priest. Secondly, we might expect the leader to be spiritually unique: both subservient to God and capable of leading the nation to become God's People. While this is apparent regarding the character of Moshe in the later chapters of the Torah, in which Moshe converses with God, it is not explicit prior to God's selection of Moshe that he had any heightened spiritual abilities. None of his famed actions in the second chapter – striking the Egyptian, splitting up the quarrel between the Hebrew men and rescuing the shepherdesses at the well – allude to spiritual motivations.

A virtue commonly associated with Moshe is his extreme humility, but modesty alone does not make a leader of people. While the trait of humility perhaps reinforces why Moshe's selection was wise, it does not explain the decision. Further, before God

formally appointed Moshe (Shemot 3:10),<sup>1</sup> there are no explicit textual references to humility on Moshe's part like those that follow his appointment.<sup>2</sup>

This essay will aim to display that Moshe did indeed display many laudable traits in the narrative before his appointment as a 'redeemer.' Through an analysis of the first three chapters of Shemot, we will see Moshe was not just a worthy choice but the only viable choice to lead the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. He was suitable from both human and spiritual perspectives as a courageous, ideologically charged man with a defined moral compass who also lived on a high spiritual plane.

### SEFORNO AND RASHI – MOSHE'S SPIRITUALITY

One can argue that the sole reason Moshe was chosen by God was because he has a profound religious or spiritual awareness. This made him capable of *nevu'ah*, prophecy, and communicating directly with God. The Seforno and Rashi both find allusions to these prophetic abilities or Moshe's profound spiritual heights in carefully reading the opening of the third chapter of Shemot:

(א) וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רָעָה אֶת-צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתְנֹו כֹהֵן מִדִּין וַיְהִי  
אֶת-הַצֹּאן אַחֵר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל-הַר הָאֱלֹהִים חֲרֹבָה:  
(ב) וַיֵּרָא מִלְּאֶפְיֹהּ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלִבַּת-אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֵּרָא  
וְהָיָה הַסֵּנֶה בָּעֵר בָּאֵשׁ וְהַסֵּנֶה אֵינֶנּוּ אֲכָל: (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה  
אֶסְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-הַמְּרָאָה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה: מִדּוּעַ לֹא-יָבֵעַ  
הַסֵּנֶה: (ד) וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי סָר לְרֹאשׁוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים  
מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּנִי: ... (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר  
מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אֲנֹכִי כִּי אֵלךְ אֶל פְּרַעֲה וְכִי אוֹצִיא  
אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי-אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְהָיָה-  
לְךָ הָאֹת כִּי אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ: בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת-הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם  
תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה:

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent quotes or references, unless otherwise specified, can be assumed to be from the book of Shemot.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Shemot 3:11 – “But Moshe said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Children of Israel from Egypt?’”

(1) “Now Moshe, tending the flock of his father-in-law Yitro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Chorev, the mountain of God. (2) An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. (3) Moshe said, ‘I must turn aside to look at this marvellous sight; why doesn’t the bush burn up?’ (4) When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: ‘Moshe!’ Moshe!’ He answered, ‘Here I am.’ ... (11) But Moshe said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Bnei Yisrael from Egypt?’. (12) And He said, ‘I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.’”

(3:1-4, 11-12)

Rashi argues in his comments on verses ten and eleven that Moshe’s somewhat miraculous arrival at Chorev is an immediate indication of heightened spiritual sensitivity. Moshe asked God “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Children of Israel from Egypt?” (3:11) and God responded that He “will be with you [Moshe], and **this** shall be your sign that it was I [God] who sent you” (3:12). Rashi suggests that the ‘this’ in “this is your sign...” refers to Moshe’s arrival at the mountain (ad loc. s.v. “*Vazeh Lecha Ha’ot*”). Moshe was able to trek across the wilderness and was somehow attracted to the mountain on which God manifested Himself in the world. This attribute of being drawn to Godliness is the sign for Moshe that he will ultimately lead the Jews to serve God on that very mountain. This sensitivity to God’s presence constitutes the definite proof of Moshe’s worthiness.

Moshe's profound spiritual sensitivity is further demonstrated by his reaction to the Burning Bush. He understood that it was no natural phenomenon: it was something of note, something he "must turn aside to look at" (3:3). Moshe was astounded at "this marvellous sight" (3:3). Other shepherds or Israelites may have mistaken the burning bush for nothing more than it appeared, a shrub engulfed in flames. Moshe, by contrast, understood the peculiarity of the situation. Moshe stopped to examine, and as a direct consequence God called out to him "Moshe! Moshe!" (3:4). Thus began the formal relationship between God and the most venerated prophet in Jewish history.<sup>3</sup>

The Seforno posits that the passive conjugation of the verb "to see" in the phrase "*vayera malach adonay eylav*," "an angel of the Lord appeared to him," (rather than the active "and he saw") demonstrates that the experience Moshe had at the burning bush was a *mar'eh nevu'ah*, a prophetic vision (3:2 s.v. "*Vayera Malach Adonay Eylav*"). He argues that the unnatural sustained burning of the bush, which Moshe takes notice of in the next verse, further demonstrates the prophetic nature of Moshe's experience (ad loc. s.v. "*Vayar Vehinei Hasneh Bo'er Ba'esh*"). He also rejects the idea that Moshe wandered aimlessly into the desert in verse one. Rather, Moshe had a deliberate goal in his journeying: to find total isolation for meditation and prayer (3:1 s.v. "*Vayavoh El Har Ha'Elokim Chorevah*"). Moshe's search for and subsequent discovery of God on the spiritual plane is reflected textually on the physical plane, in his journey.

The significance of this spiritual consciousness cannot be understated. While Moshe was also utterly ethical and brave, perhaps his spiritual sensitivity is what really cemented his role as leader. The leader that was to take the Jewish people out of Egypt had to be on another spiritual plane. He had to have not only the

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, this theory posits that in some informal way the relationship between Moshe and God, albeit perhaps unbeknownst to Moshe himself, had already begun. This connection is what attracted Moshe to the mountain to begin with.

desire to converse with God but also the ability to do so. The leader needed to be a prophet.

## MOSHE'S MORALITY

Much like his humility, Moshe's status as a prophet did not necessarily dictate that he would make a good leader of people. Three key events found in chapter two demonstrate Moshe's refined moral sense that would make him an excellent leader for the Bnei Yisrael. These are rescuing the Israelite from the Egyptian's attack, rebuking the Israelite aggressor, and saving the Midianite shepherdesses. In each case, Moshe intervenes to help the characters experiencing injustice (Shemot 2):

(יא) וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אָחִיו וַיֵּרָא, בְּסַבְלָתָם; וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מַכָּה אִישׁ-עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו: (יב) וַיִּפֹּן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ; וַיֵּךְ אֶת-הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַּחֹל: (יג) וַיֵּצֵא בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי וְהָיָה שְׁנֵי אַנְשִׁים עִבְרִים נָצִים; וַיֹּאמֶר לְרָשָׁע לָמָּה תִּכֶּה רֵעִי... (טז) וּלְכֹהֵן מִדְיָן שֶׁבַע בָּנוֹת; וַתִּבְאֲנָה וַתִּדְלְנָה וַתִּמְלֹאנָה אֶת-הַרְהָטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת צֹאן אֲבֵיהֶן: (יז) וַיֵּבֹאוּ הָרָעִים וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹשַׁעַן וַיִּשְׁקוּ אֶת-צֹאֲנָם.

(11) “Sometime after that, when Moshe had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labours. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. (12) He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (13) When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, ‘Why do you strike your fellow?’ ... (16) Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. (17) But shepherds came and drove them off. Moshe rose to their defense, and he watered their flock.”

The Seforno astutely highlights how these events demonstrate a clear development in ethical motivation and morality. In the first, the Egyptian was harming one of Moshe's brethren. Moshe's intervention stemmed from a mixture of fraternal love, responsibility and sympathy towards suffering. The addition of "and he witnessed their labors" (2:11) stresses this; Moshe made it a concern and "gave his heart to see the afflictions of his brethren" (Seforno 2:11 s.v. "*Vayar Besivlotam*"). Seforno understands that this feeling of "brotherliness" drove him to act as an "avenger" (ibid. s.v. "*Vayar Ish Mitzri Makeh Ish Ivri Me'echav*"). Moshe's second intervention occurs between two Israelite men. Here, Moshe acted solely based on moral obligation. Since both men were Israelites and therefore his brethren, he was not driven by a desire to 'avenge' inequality; rather, Moshe rebuked the aggressor to aid the victim (2:13 s.v. "*Vayomer Lerasha*").

But aiding the Midianite shepherdesses shows the highest level of ethical behavior. Moshe was in a foreign environment with no connection or national sympathies. The shepherds and the shepherdesses were equally "well known" to him. Moshe merely acted to "save the oppressed from their oppression" because it was the right thing to do (Seforno 2:17 s.v. "*Vayakom Moshe Vayoshi'an*").

Overall, Moshe's strong moral character makes him more than fitting to be God's representative for the Exodus. His desire to save the oppressed from their oppressor aligns perfectly with God's aim to remove the Bnei Yisrael from Egyptian slavery. In addition, in the first story Moshe demonstrates fraternal responsibility and, of course, courage when he risks his own life in killing the Egyptian. Moshe possessed the qualities one needs to be a leader: he identified strongly with the people he was to liberate, he was brave, and he was firmly moral. Finally, Rashi suggests even further proof for Moshe's moral excellence. He explains that the reason Moshe ventures into the wilderness to feed Reu'el's sheep (3:12) is to avoid stealing by grazing the sheep on others' land (3:1 s.v. "*Achar Hamidbar*"). One cannot neglect the significance of these events

demonstrating that Moshe possesses the qualities required of a leader.

### THE THREE HOMES – NURTURE NOT NATURE

One must then ask: Where did these human and spiritual traits emerge from? It is hard to fathom how this man raised in the Egyptian palace achieved such spiritual heights as to encounter the manifestation of God in the physical world. How was Moshe able to cultivate this sensitivity to holiness? Furthermore, where did he learn to be moral and why did he identify so strongly with the Bnei Yisrael?

Perhaps the answer stems from the three roofs Moshe lived under prior to his selection at the Burning Bush. These are: his birth parents, the palace of Pharaoh's daughter, and finally that of his father-in-law, Reu'el. From each of these environments, whether actively inculcated or unconsciously absorbed, Moshe adopted important values and traits of morality, dignity, national responsibility, and spirituality.

From his first home Moshe gained kindness and the bond he felt with the Bnei Yisrael. His family's actions exemplify both values: his parents risked their lives to hide him (2:2), his sister watched over him in the Nile (2:4) and his mother breastfed him even under another woman's authority.<sup>4</sup> The risks his family took to protect him are mirrored by Moshe's actions only a few verses later. Upon seeing the Egyptian taskmaster beating the Hebrew, Moshe risks his own life to save that of the Hebrew. This parallel is deliberately highlighted. When Moshe saves the Hebrew the double usage of the word "*echav*" – "brethren" (2:11) echoes the two times Moshe's sister, Miriam, is referred to as "*achoto*" – "his sister" (2:4,7) when watching him in the Nile. Just as his sister watched over him, so too Moshe watched over the Hebrew as one of his brethren. From his family home Moshe absorbed the importance of

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<sup>4</sup> Although Moshe's mother acted as his wetnurse while he dwelled in the royal palace [Shemot 2:9], this act of breastfeeding must be associated to his initial home – that of his birth-mother.

brotherhood and being part of the Bnei Yisrael, regardless of the environment in which he may find himself.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps one could also argue that Moshe also garnered some level of spirituality from his birth-family via their influence on his survival. The Ramban references a Gemara (Sotah 12b) which describes Miriam as a prophetess even before Moshe was born (2:2 s.v. “*Vateireh Oto Ki Tov Hu Vatitzpneihu*”).

Commentators are divided on what Moshe gained from his second home, the palace of Pharaoh’s daughter. One can argue that it was here that Moshe gained the trait of universal morality, caring for even those who were not a part of his brethren. When Pharaoh’s daughter saw Moshe in the Nile she realised that “this must be a Hebrew child” (2:7) who was subject to being drowned due to Pharaoh’s decree (1:22). Despite this, she saved his life and took him into her home. Once again, Moshe demonstrates the internalization of this characteristic. On arriving in Midian, he immediately came to the aid of Reuel’s daughters (2:16-17), saving them from the harassment at the well and then watering their sheep. The Seforno suggests that the very name Pharaoh’s daughter gave him reflects this idea. The root of the name “Moshe” is “to pull”. Moshe was destined to “save others by pulling them out of their calamity (2:10 s.v. “*Vatikrah Shemo Moshe*”). The Seforno understands that Pharaoh’s daughter hoped Moshe would become an agent of good and save others.

Ibn Ezra views the significance of Moshe’s time spent in the royal palace as helping him develop dignity, stature, and ethics. He posits that perhaps God arranged the hiding and finding of Moshe

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<sup>5</sup> The strength of this national identity can be easily scrutinized; on being rebuked by the quarrelling Hebrews (*ivrim*), Moshe seemingly abandons his Hebrew identity and flees to Midian. When in Midian, Moshe is referred to as an “*ish Mitzri*,” “Egyptian man,” (2:19) by Reu’el’s daughters. Regardless, this national identity was strong enough to motivate him to save the Hebrew man, and Moshe’s desertion and assumption of an Egyptian identity can be viewed as only temporary. Ultimately, he returns to liberate the Bnei Yisrael.



specifically so that he would be raised in “the royal household, such that his spirit would be raised to a higher level through learning and practice, and so that he would not be base and accustomed to living in a house of slaves” (Ibn Ezra 2:3 s.v. “*Vatachmrah*”). Instead of feeling lowly or living a pressed existence, Moshe would understand proper ways to live and behave. It was this sense of right conduct that motivated Moshe to kill the Egyptian on seeing his violence and also to intervene at the well in Midian.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, while he had to connect with the cause he was to represent, there had to be some divide between Moshe and the people to foster respect. According to Ibn Ezra, had Moshe grown up in slavery with the nation and been known from his youth, the people would not have feared him because they would have seen him as one of themselves.

In a similar vein, Ramban sees Moshe’s time in the palace as preparing him to be a leader, someone of a higher status than the regular population. He comments that after Moshe finished weaning, “his mother brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son, for he was to stand in the presence of kings” (2:11 s.v. “*Vayigdal Moshe Vayetze El Echav*”). The clause “for he was to stand in the presence of kings” seems extraneous. But for the Ramban, a necessary detail of Moshe’s backstory is that he grew up around royalty. Moshe was ultimately to stand before Pharaoh and convince him to release the Bnei Yisrael from slavery. Since this was a negotiation and not a rebellion, the representative of God had to be level to Pharaoh. He had to be someone who “stood in the presence of kings” rather than a slave.

Perhaps this aristocratic characterisation of Moshe also accounts for why the Midianite shepherdesses originally see him as an Egyptian man rather than an Israelite (2:19). Despite inwardly identifying with the Jewish people, his brethren, on the outside Moshe resembled part of the Egyptian nobility. Therefore,

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<sup>6</sup> This is based on a somewhat medieval belief that the nobility’s practices and way of thinking were of a superior quality to that of the peasantry. Moshe’s development into a member of the aristocracy gave him this moral core that perhaps a slave would not have.

strangers naturally would identify Moshe as an Egyptian rather than a Hebrew. Further, the land of Midian was subservient to Pharaoh<sup>7</sup> which meant the shepherdesses likely knew of the Hebrews' plight and visualized them only as slaves. Accordingly, it makes sense they concluded that the noble man coming to their aid was an Egyptian.

Finally, in his third home – that of his father-in-law Reu'el, Moshe fostered his religious sensitivity. The text introduces Reu'el as being a “Priest of Midian” (2:16), a religious man whom Rashi and Chazal say had denounced idol-worship (2:16 s.v. “*Ulekohein Midyan*”). Indeed, later on in Shemot, Reu'el, also called Yitro, deduces the greatness of God from the miracles in Egypt and praises him (18:10-11). Moshe's ability to find God at Chorev can be explained by the role Reu'el's house played in molding Moshe's character and religious consciousness. Note that Moshe does not display any spiritual motivations in the events of the second chapter. Perhaps this is proof that Reu'el engendered the growth of this sensitivity in Moshe. Moshe's spirituality only becomes apparent once he had been exposed to Reu'el for an extended period of time.

## **THE BLEAK REALITY OF SLAVERY AND MOSHE'S BIRTH**

It is possible to argue that the stylistic contrasts between chapters one and two convey that Moshe was the only person amongst the Bnei Yisrael capable of leading them to redemption.

It is possible to see the first two chapters of Shemot as totally unrelated tales. The first chapter details the Bnei Yisrael's descent into slavery and the threat of genocide on a national scale. And the second provides a close look at the birth and early life of an individual character named Moshe. Further, the second chapter avoids explicitly detailing the wider environment of tyranny the Bnei Yisrael live under as Moshe grows up.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibn Ezra on Shemot 2:15, s.v. “*Vayishma*”

Despite the different perspectives, it is clear Moshe's narrative in the second chapter is linked to the national context established in the first chapter. Being hidden by his mother and placed in the Nile are both key events in Moshe's early life. Though not linked explicitly, this is a direct result of Pharaoh's decrees against newborn males in the first chapter (1:22). As Moshe grew up, he "saw his brethren in their burdens" (2:11), suffering the slavery and hard labour imposed on them by Pharaoh in chapter one. After Moshe's life has continued with a wife and child in Midian, the narrative returns again to the Bnei Yisrael in Egypt. The last three verses of the second chapter (2:23-25) serve as a reminder and echo of the events of the first chapter. A new Pharaoh rises in Egypt, increases the Bnei Yisrael's workload, and God hears their outcry.<sup>8</sup> Both chapters portray a similar time frame and identical climates – the differences between them emerge as a result of the perspective from which they are written.

The first chapter portrays the Hebrews as a singular unit with no individuals. They are a people persecuted on a distinctly national level. When Pharaoh begins his plot to subdue the Bnei Yisrael, the text reads:

(י) הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה  
וְנוֹסֶף גַּם הוּא עַל שְׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחָם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ:

(10) Let us deal shrewdly with **it**, so that **it may not increase**; otherwise in the event of war **it** may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.

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<sup>8</sup> In these three verses the "old King of Egypt dies" and is replaced by a new Pharaoh following which the Bnei Yisrael "groaned under their bondage." While the Pharaoh that dies in the second chapter is the one that led the persecution in the first chapter, this could be a deliberate textual parallel to 1:8. There, too, the old Pharaoh dies and the new one who rises in 1:11-14 imposes the backbreaking labor on the Bnei Yisrael. Either way, this echo anchors the close of the second chapter in the first chapter's context of oppression and slavery.

Pharaoh refers to the Bnei Yisrael as "lo" and "hu" – "it"; singular pronouns which lack identity. The first chapter is a historical, factual overview – a new Pharaoh rose, one whom "did not know Yosef" (1:8) and who decided to brutally persecute the Bnei Yisrael, passing through harsher and harsher levels of oppression. This culminates with him openly encouraging the Egyptian people to turn to genocide, throwing every newborn boy into the Nile (1:22).

Chapter one portrays a bleak picture for the people who lack the individualism required for someone to rise from the ranks and lead them to freedom. They are bereft of hope and seem to accept the developing reality of eternal slavery, misery, and genocide. There is no one among them who can save them.

This lack of individual identity and uniqueness of some or any individual lies in stark contrast to the second chapter which revolves entirely around Moshe. While chapter one constitutes a bird's eye view of Egypt oppressing the collective, chapter two allows for a first-person account through Moshe's eyes: the Egyptian man smiting the individual Hebrew.

The two chapters complement each other well, each providing details that the other cannot. Chapter one portrays the Jews as a unit facing persecution and servitude. But chapter two is able to reveal the individual distinctions and experiences of that oppression. Other than Moshe, there are four Hebrew men of significance in the second chapter. There is Moshe's father regarding whom there are few details given; the second is the "Hebrew man" who suffers a beating at the hand of an Egyptian (2:11), and the two "Hebrew men" who fight amongst themselves (2:13). Nevertheless, the first chapter shows a powerless nation, and the second chapter develops further that there are no individuals capable of liberating their people. They are all either powerless at the hands of Egyptian taskmasters or fight and bicker amongst themselves.

When Moshe saw the Egyptian beating the Hebrew man, his reaction is detailed in the following verse:

(יב) וַיִּפֹּן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ אֶת-הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ  
בַחֹלִי:

(12) He turned this way and that, and seeing no man about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

(2:12)

R. Yaqov Medan acknowledges that the "man" in question might have been an Egyptian informer; when Moshe did not see such a person, he struck the Egyptian. However, he continues, "the matter can be understood differently: Moshe checked whether there was anyone who might save the battered Hebrew man." The "man," a term which in Scripture denotes importance, could have been a man of Israel. There were many Hebrews standing alongside their beaten brother, but no "man" was willing to confront the Egyptian taskmaster and stop him from beating their brother."<sup>9</sup>

The one exception is Moshe, who acts in the face of what he deems unjust. Overcome by the Bnei Yisrael's servitude and torment, his instinct is to react. The Hebrews of chapter one, by contrast, did not have the will to react or fight back. They had accepted the reality that Pharaoh had created for them. The three men described as "Hebrew" in the second chapter really belong among those Hebrews of the first chapter, the group lacking individuality and initiative.

Until the emergence of Moshe, there was no one else with the faculties capable of the task that Moshe ultimately completes. In addition, Moshe's selection was also driven by the fact that prior to his birth, there were no suitable alternatives. As mentioned above, at the end of the second chapter, the Bnei Yisrael cry out and thereby catalyze Divine action. After the culmination of the Bnei Yisrael's cries to God and, more crucially, the rise of the leader ca-

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<sup>9</sup> Medan, R. Yaqov. "Moshe Rabbeinu at the Beginning of His Mission." VBM, [www.etzion.org.il/en/moshe-rabbeinu-beginning-his-mission](http://www.etzion.org.il/en/moshe-rabbeinu-beginning-his-mission)

### *The Election of Moshe*

pable of leading them to freedom, “God looked upon the Bnei Yisrael, and God knew” (2:25). It was time to start the Exodus.