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**MIDRASH PETIRAT MOSHE**  
**A Structural and Thematic Analysis**

**Jeffrey J. Sirkman**

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To my wife  
Susan,  
an ever present source  
of strength and support,  
my greatest joy

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## **Introduction**

**"Ben Bag Bag said: Turn it over and over and over again,  
for everything lies within it...." <sup>1</sup>**

**It seems to me that Ben Bag Bag was speaking about the world of Midrash when he made this declaration regarding the nature of Torah. The power of each word of the sacred text contains worlds of meaning, stories hidden beneath the layers of letters, just waiting to be discovered. The Rabbis knew this; they understood that the eternal word of Torah anticipated, encompassed and transcended every possibility that the future might bring. <sup>2</sup> For them, the word was their world; it was the domain within which they lived.**

**For most Jews today, the words exist outside of them. Words are spoken and read, seldom felt, seemingly never experienced. Yet the vehicle that the Rabbis created remains with us, giving us the ability to go beyond the written word, beyond the analytical process. Midrash allows us to climb inside of the text, to live the words that once seemed so stagnant, so unidimensional. Midrash enables us to bring the words to life, challenging us to allow them to address us, to let them affect our lives.**

**But what can be gained from such an endeavor? Why journey into a text which is centuries old, worlds away from our present day lives? Perhaps, because such a venture could reveal a great deal about you and your world. In its essence, midrash isolates a Biblical moment for explanation and expansion. In so doing, it seeks to provide an answer to a very real life conflict-situation within a given historical setting. The daily problems of Jewish life in the galut, the pressures of maintaining the halachah, the questions which arose as the Jew became a part of non-Jewish society; these are but a few of the life-conflicts which the midrash addresses. In reality, however, the answers which the midrash offers are timeless, they speak to us today of our lives as Jews and as human beings. They can provide a sense of direction, enabling us to work out our problems through the text itself. Most importantly, the Midrash allows us to gain a sense of "kedushah" (holiness), a sense of perspective on our purpose in life. Through immersion into the text, we emerge cleansed and renewed, with greater insight into the nature of our world and ourselves.**

In my opinion, there is no other field of textual study so vibrant, so filled with life and emotion, as the study of Aggadah. More than that, however, Aggadah, the world of Midrash, is itself but an altered form of the Halachah, and vice-versa. The two are not in opposition to one another, rather they exist on a continuum, wherein Aggadah becomes Halachah and, with the progression of time, turns once again back to Aggadah. Beginning and end are inextricably interwoven. As the great Hebrew poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik attempted to show us: "Like ice and water, Halachah and Aggadah are really two things in one, two facets of a single entity."<sup>3</sup> That entity is the power of the word, the driving force of the text. Whether in its concrete state of Halachah, or in the fluid, free-flowing state of Aggadah, it serves to motivate the reader, the listener, to climb inside of the text, to find meaning within the text so as to make it his own.

Midrash is not simply the poetic word, the stirring of the heart. Just as Halachah, the Aggadah can provide a sense of duty. Though it remains an artform of the highest quality, it too can shape and ennoble life itself.<sup>4</sup> The sense of "kedushah" which the Midrash provides is one which motivates the individual to a sanctify the world, to make life holy through thought and deed.

The words of Ben Bag Bag continue. "Immerse yourself through studying it. Never budge from it; for there is no better way than this."<sup>5</sup> This is the way of Midrash. It requires a commitment on the part of the student to step into the intuitive world of the text and find meaning from within. It is demanding, at times even confusing, yet its rewards are great. When approached with true conviction, the study of Midrash integrates past present and future into a single moment, thus enabling the student to revive the words, and through them, to renew himself.

Though many options for study exist within the field of midrash, I chose to explore Midrash Petirat Moshe for a number of concrete reasons. Recognizing the vastness of available literary material, I sought to find a relatively small, self-contained, unified work which existed in a number of variant versions. To my surprise, I discovered that many such works existed. My next objective was to locate a work which had heretofore never been translated into English nor analytically studied at great length. Realizing that many works were seemingly untouched, I sought to find a text which would allow me to do comparative textual study, while focusing upon thematic analysis relating to some aspect of the Biblical text. Petirat Moshe was the logical choice for me, since it allowed me to do just that, and more. Yet the deciding factor in my selection of this midrash was the nature of its content. Over and above the other works, Petirat Moshe focused upon what I understood to be crucial issues, highly relevant to my life as a potential leader within the Jewish community. I saw within this text a guide which might help me to understand my role as leader and teacher, and my relationship to the community. Moreover, the text seemed to present a paradigm for covenant living as represented in the personage of Moses, one which I felt compelled to explore as a part of my own continuing struggle in my relationship with God. Both the structure and content of this midrash were very attractive to me, and so addressed my needs, thereby motivating me to explore it.

The study process which I engaged in had five basic steps. After reading over the extant versions of the midrash, I selected the one which was most unified and flowing as a literary piece, and proceeded to do a close translation, labeling it my "Choice version." As I translated, I attempted to look for clues which might help me in structuring the work. My next step was to survey the other versions of the midrash, as well as other relevant narrative midrashim, which might aid me in better understanding the "Choice Version." In this way, I was able to compile a listing of parallel materials as they related to various sections of the midrash. With these supplementary texts in hand, I proceeded to critically analyze the "Choice Version," breaking it down into its structural components based upon dialogue patterning within the midrash and data compiled from my study of variant texts.



The next step was to gain a basic understanding of the contextual backdrop within which the midrash arose, thus I researched the historical setting of the geonic period. With a greater sense of perspective on the text as a whole, I attempted to discern the basic themes as they developed within each section of the midrash. Subsequently, I sought to identify the relationship of thematic elements, so as to recognize the major motifs which were present in the text. With this information in hand, my final step was to attempt to formulate overall conclusions as to the impact of Moses' life and death, the nature of the transition of leadership and the relationship between the community and its leader. In so doing, I sought to understand the impact of the midrash in its historical setting, as well as the many messages which the text could convey to the Jewish people fast approaching the twenty-first century.

After structuring and restructuring, the final product of my research is presented in five component parts. Following this brief Introduction is Part One: A Preliminary Overview of the Midrash, which seeks to give the reader some basic background as to the time, date and setting of Petirat Moshe.

Part Two: Translation & Analysis, enables the reader to progress at his or her own rate through each section of the text, providing parallel materials and comments, which aid in the understanding of thematic development and textual structuring. Part Three: A Perspective on the Midrash, presents the overall thematic progression of the text and the motifs which develop therein.

Part Four: the Conclusion, attempts to assess the impact of the midrash upon the eighth century Jewish community in Palestine and Babylonia, as well suggesting the basic messages which the midrash offers to our contemporary Jewish community.

**Notes to the Introduction**

1. M. Avot, 5:25.
2. N.N. Glatzer, Hammer On The Rock: A Short Midrash Reader, (Schocken Books, New York, 1948), p. 6.
3. H.N. Bialik, Halachah and Aggadah, (London 1917) transl. by L. Simon, p. 4.
4. Ibid., p. 5.
5. M. Avot, 5:25.

**PART ONE:**

**A Preliminary Overview of the Text**

Midrash Petirat Moshe is primarily a narrative-historical work, focusing upon the events surrounding the death of Moses. The Biblical basis for the work spans three Torah readings and four chapters, from Deut 31:1-34:12. Unlike many other narrative-historical works, such as Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer or Midrash Seder Olam, Petirat Moshe does not move chronologically through the Biblical text, yet it does attempt to expand upon the aforementioned chapters at the close of Deuteronomy. In keeping with other works of this genre, Petirat Moshe sews in bits of information so as to instill its own authors' worldview within the text. Oftentimes, it is the expansion of details, the explanation of names and places, and the creation of stories, which aids the Rabbis in establishing a Biblical basis for their own perceptions.<sup>1</sup> This is certainly true of Petirat Moshe.

#### **A. The Major Questions Concerning the Text**

The free-flowing format of the midrash, which involves a great degree of folkloristic, aggadic expansion, raises similar key questions to those considered when dealing with any narrative-historical piece.

A primary consideration is the use of source materials, which involves many points of concern. How are the specific Biblical texts treated? Are they integrated into the storyline, or are they appended to the text for additional reinforcement? What is the general function of the Biblical material? Are there patterns of prooftexting which might convey an overall structural message?

Beyond the use of the Biblical material, we must consider the structure of Petirat Moshe itself. Are there natural divisions within the text, and if so, what constitutes the lines of demarcation? As it happens, the "Choice Version" of Petirat Moshe has been divided into six sections, based largely upon shifts of dialogue, change of scene and patterns of Biblical prooftexting.<sup>2</sup>

The next logical consideration in light of the structural breakdown of the midrash, is that of thematic development. What is the extent of thematic development within any given section? Is there a thematic progression that weaves the entire piece together as one? Are there recurring themes which build to form overall motifs? Are there themes which seem to be in opposition to one another? The prospective answers to all of these questions will enable the reader to gain insight into the

major message(s) which the midrash seeks to convey.

The format of our text, which is explained in detail in the "Preface to the Translation and Analysis,"<sup>3</sup> attempts to address these crucial literary and structural concerns. The presentation of the text in its component parts, along with relevant parallel and supplementary materials, will enable the reader to undertake his or her own comparative study. Moreover, the running commentary segment, which attempts to focus on the thematic development and the unique structural elements within each sub-section, is intended to serve the reader as a basis for drawing overall conclusions as to the primary messages of the midrash.

## **B. Sources Utilized**

In approaching the text, we must be aware of the range of source materials which the author(s) utilized. As previously noted, the primary Biblical source extends from Deut 31:1-34:12. In addition, there is a heavy reliance on Psalms and Deutero-Isaiah within the midrash, quite possibly due to the nature of those materials, which focus on the justice of God and Israel's responsibility to the covenant. The midrash also made use of many talmudic allusions, often utilizing these sources as a basis for midrashic expansion.

The parallel sources are taken largely from alternate versions of the same basic midrash.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Deuteronomy Rabbah and Yalkut Shimoni provide much narrative material which is helpful in the discernment of the thematic thrust of a given sub-section. Moreover, certain supplemental sources from Sifrei to Numbers and Deuteronomy aided in understanding references to the historic experience of the wilderness community of Israel.

It is clear that the author(s) of the midrash made use of the Babylonian Talmud, as well as other narrative-historical works dating from the third to the eighth centuries of the Common Era. Midrash Petirat Moshe also seems to have been influenced by early apocalyptic, pseudoepigraphic works, such as Enoch, building upon their mystical traditions, as well as by general trends in Islamic folklore, prevalent in other narrative-historical works of the period, such as Pirkei d' Rabbi Eliezer. From an overall perspective, the narrative of Petirat Moshe combines many variant sources into the flow of the text, forming a quasi-unified, fully integrated, coherent whole.

### **C. Contextual Background of the Text**

In order to comprehend the full contextual impact of Midrash Petirat Moshe, one must have a general understanding of the historical backdrop within which it arose. Though little information regarding the actual date of the midrash is available, we can place the text in the "middle period" based on language and style of presentation, somewhere between 640-950 C.E.<sup>5</sup> This then suggests that the work originated as an outgrowth of the geonic age. Though most scholars regard Petirat Moshe as a product of Palestinian Jewry, I find little conclusive evidence which confirms that the midrash did not, in fact, originate in the academies of Babylonia. We must then consider the historical environments of both centers of Jewish learning, as well as the relationship between them, in order to formulate our own opinion as to the precise contextual backdrop of the midrash.

The continual decline of the Graeco-Roman Empire in the east was accompanied by a gradual shift in the center of Jewish leadership. Palestine no longer occupied the prime space on the Jewish map. The developing diaspora and subsequent migrations, coupled with the rise of Christian sects, took their toll on the once thriving center of world Jewry. The academies of learning in Sura and Pumbedita, which had spawned the Gemara, laid the foundation for the future leadership of the Jewish world.

The center of Jewish learning and legislation was gradually shifting from Palestine to Babylonia. Certainly Jews still lived in Palestine, yet the great academies which once flourished there had been transplanted to foreign soil by the students of Judah HaNasi, the codifier of the Oral law, the Mishnah.<sup>6</sup> With the close of the Babylonian Talmud, around 500 C.E., the majority of Jews lived outside the Land of Israel, and looked to the leadership of the Babylonian Jewish community for halachic guidance. The Palestinian Talmud was a minority text, used only by Jews in the Land of Israel. It was within this context that the Gaonate arose. Babylonia now took the lead role in the maintenance of Jewish life in the diaspora, and to an extent, in the Land of Israel itself.<sup>7</sup> Simultaneously, a new world power was gradually taking hold of the lands from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean.

It was during this period of religious ferment, with Jewish syncretism on the rise and the transfer of leadership barely in effect, that Mohammed appeared on the scene, around 610 C.E.<sup>8</sup> Met with skepticism by a majority of diaspora Jewry, Mohammed decided promptly that the new teachings of Islam and

the age-old wisdom of Judaism could not peacefully co-exist. Thus, the initial response of the conquering armies of Islam was one of hostility towards the Jews and Christians alike. As time progressed and the rule of Islam stabilized, the repressive policies subsided and Jewish autonomy was fully reinstated. The Arab rulers, following the policies of the Sassanids before them, maintained the place of the exilarch as head of the Jewish community, and added the official position of Gaon, the religious leader and head of the Talmudic academy.<sup>9</sup>

The geonim were, in essence, the spiritual descendants of the Amoraim and the Tannaim, the figures whose viewpoints and knowledge comprise the Talmud. The role of the gaon was to maintain Jewish life in the diaspora through fostering the spread of talmudic law. To this end, the Gaonate was equivalent to the Supreme Court of the United States, yet its jurisdiction extended not only to every court in and beyond the land, but to every Jewish home in the diaspora. The chief task of the Gaonate was to interpret the Talmud, to adapt the laws to the situational needs of the ever changing Jewish community. Since the Jews were spread far and wide, requests for halachic advice came to the geonim in writing. Likewise, the geonim responded to the many Jewish communities in writing with teshuvot, talmudically based legal decisions regarding their individual problems. The ordinances (takkanot) which the geonim enacted in this manner were regarded as fully valid and binding by the overwhelming majority of diaspora Jewry. Thus did the Gaonate put a "mail order government" into effect, uniting the Jewish world through their authoritative application of Jewish law.<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, in order to maintain such an operation, enacting laws and reinterpreting Jewish practice for the entire diaspora community, the geonim needed a large organizational structure. Indeed, the major academies of Babylonia employed hundreds of people, scribes, couriers, officials of all sorts whose task it was to aid in the transmission of halachah, as the gaon saw fit. The legal institution of the Gaonate was actually supported by mandatory taxes levied against Jews in every province of the Islamic empire.<sup>11</sup> In addition, funds were collected from donations made by various communities, showing their gratitude for the legal advice given to them by the gaon. By the mid-eighth century, the Gaonate was financially stable, viewed by many as not merely a legislative body, but as an economic power within and beyond the Jewish world. In this sense, the geonim were, in

actuality, the socio-political leaders of the times, guiding the course of nearly every aspect of Jewish practice and belief. <sup>12</sup>

Initially, the centralizing efforts of the geonim were met with little resistance. Through their responsa, (letters which came in response to specific queries, detailing legally accepted adaptations and options for Jewish practice), they offered invaluable guidance for a scattered diaspora communities which were in need of their expertise. As time passed, the changing historical scene of the eighth and ninth centuries began to pose a threat to the overall unity of the Jewish community. Indeed, many were the factors that contributed to the general instability of the mid-late geonic period.

Just as the intellectual leaders of Babylonia inherited the Babylonian Talmud, the product of their predecessors, so too, the Rabbis of Israel had produced the Palestinian Talmud (which was finalized some two hundred years prior to that of the Babylonian Talmud), handing it down to the heads of the academies as an inheritance. Needless to say, this divergent foundation of authority put the two centers of Jewish learning and leadership at odds with one another. Indeed, as Babylonia assumed the leading role in the maintenance of the diaspora Jewish community, it also sought to minimize the distinctions in practice between itself and the Land of Israel. Clearly, one of the aims of the Babylonian Gaonate was to impose the Babylonian Talmud wherever and whenever it could amongst the inhabitants of the Land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Thus, the geonic leadership of Israel did not look favorably upon the "central" leadership of Babylonia. Conflicts between the two major centers of Babylonian Jewish scholarship, Sura and Pumbedita, also undermined the vitality of the gaon's power structure.

As Talmudic scholarship began to spread, new centers of Jewish learning arose outside of Babylonia. The "mail order government" of the gaonate had fostered the growth of many rival academies, each serving the halachic demands of its own district. As a result, the Jewish communities of the diaspora began to rely less and less upon the centers of Babylonia. In fact, certain governments actually encouraged their local Jewish communities to break away from the central leadership. In an official communication of the caliph we read: "The King was delighted by the fact that the Jews of his domain no longer had need of the leadership of Babylonia." <sup>14</sup> Total dependence on the geonic system was a thing of the past by the middle of the ninth



century. The decentralization of the Gaonate was surely in process.

Internal dissension also threatened the stability of the central leadership. Certain factions within the scope of the Babylonian Jewish domain questioned the Talmudic authority of the Gaonate. At the outset of the ninth century, a certain Serene of Syria proclaimed himself to be the messiah and absolved his followers of all halachic obligations. Though his uprising was eventually quenched, there were many others like him who did not comply with the wishes of the geonic leadership.

The most formidable schism of the period was that led by Anan ben David of Baghdad, in the heart of the gaonate itself, which led to the rise of the Karaites. Though the stories vary, we know for certain that Anan ben David was heir to the seat of the exilarch, yet his brother was chosen over him to carry on the royal line. This prompted Anan ben David to proclaim himself the counter exilarch, for which he was imprisoned. After managing to secure his release, the ousted leader fled to the Land of Israel, where the Karaite movement took shape. In essence, the movement denied all Talmudic law, claiming, on the word of the prophet Elijah, that the literal reading of the Bible was the only true basis for continued Jewish existence.<sup>15</sup> As the movement crystalized, many small groups of "B'nei Mikrah," Karaites began to spring up in and around Palestine. After the death of Anan ben David, the movement was given a firm foundation by Benjamin Nahavendhi, who recorded and disseminated the basic principles of Karaite belief.<sup>16</sup> Viewing the Talmudic authorities as a veil between the people and the Torah itself, Nahavendhi reshaped the Karaite revolt into a potentially viable anti-authoritarian movement, seeking to turn the decision making process over to the people Israel themselves. Indeed, some scholars today view the schism as the first "reform movement" within Judaism.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of its present day impact, the Karaite revolt forced the Talmudists to re-evaluate their legal conservatism, and threatened the very foundation of geonic authority.

The aforementioned sources of conflict combined with the struggles over the issue of dynastic succession, lead to a greater imbalance in the leadership base of the geonim. Moreover, the decentralization of the Caliphate made it all the more difficult for the gaonate to maintain its hold as the Talmudic interpreters of the entire Jewish people. It is clear that by the middle of the eleventh century, with the death of Hai ben Sherira Gaon in 1038

C.E., the gaonate found itself in a state of turmoil. The Jewish centralized leadership of Babylonia had begun to crumble.<sup>18</sup>

As we view the text of Petirat Moshe, this historical backdrop must be kept in mind. To what extent does the context impinge upon the Rabbis' portrayal of the Death of Moses? Where do the contextual conflicts enter into the presentation of the midrash? For example, is the portrayal of Sammael to be associated with the ruling Islamic powers of the eighth and ninth centuries? Is there, perhaps, a hidden agenda which the Rabbis are addressing through their presentation of Moses questioning God's justice in the face of the decree of his death? Do the Biblical sources which the midrash focuses upon carry additional messages for groups beyond the parameters of the text? Such are the considerations which shall remain with us as we approach the text.

#### **D. The Extant Versions of Petirat Moshe**

1. "Divrei Hayamim L'Moshe Rabbenu," L'vov, 1664.
2. "Petirat Moshe Rabbenu," as taken from Bet HaMidrash, Vol. II, A. Jellinek, Leipzig, 1870.
3. Midrash petirat Moshe Rabbenu," (Version B), as printed in Notes on the Commentary to the Pentateuch, Abu Manzur Al-Damari, edit. A. Kohut, New York, 1892.
4. Darsh L'Petirat Moshe," Paris, 1629.
5. Petirat Moshe Rabbenu," (Version B), as it appears in Bet HaMidrash, Vol VI, A Jellinek, Vienna, 1876.

One should note that all of the aforementioned works appear in Otsar Midrashim, Vol. II, J.D. Eisenstein, pp. 357-386. Moreover, it is important to note that the "Choice Version," as selected from among the five texts listed above, is #3. Version #2 is referred to within the body of the thesis as PM 2, while version #4 above is referred to as PM 3. Other versions were used only as background and reference materials, and were unable to be integrated into the comparative study directly due to their divergent nature.

**Notes to the Overview, pages 1-4.**

1. I. Heinemann, Dorchei ha'Aggadah, (Jerusalem 1954), pp. 19-23.
2. See "Preface to the Translation & Analysis," p. 6, where a further discussion of the keys to transitions within the text may be found.
3. Ibid., p. 7.
4. See "Appendix B," a listing of extant versions of Midrash Petirat Moshe.
5. M. Herr, "Midrash," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol.11, 1510.
6. M. Dimont, The Amazing Adventures of the Jewish People, (New York, 1984), p. 71.
7. S. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, (New York, 1957), Vol. I, p. 310.
8. Herr, "Midrash," Vol. 11, 1512.
9. Cf. Ps. 47:14 on the textual origin of the title "Gaon."
10. M. Dimont, The Indestructable Jews, (New York, 1971), pp. 140-142.
11. Editor, "Gaon," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 7, 317.
12. Baron, A Social and Religious History, Vol I., p. 142.
13. "Gaon," Vol. 7, 321.
14. Ibid., p. 320, (Ibn Daud, Tradition 66).
15. M. Dimont, The Amazing Adventures of the Jewish People, (New York, 1984), p. 79, where the Karaite revolt is described as a "...revolt of Torahism versus Talmudism."
16. Baron, A Social and Religious History, Vol. I, p. 330.
17. Dimont, The Indestructable Jews, p.143.
18. Baron, A Social and Religious History, Vol. I, p. 332.



## Preface to the Translation & Analysis

The body of the thesis, which follows, consists of three major rubrics. Taken together, their aim is to present Midrash Petirat Moshe so as to explore its structure and content. Thus, to fully comprehend the overall impact of the midrash, one must be aware of the specific form and intent of each of these rubrics.

1. The Translation of Petirat Moshe will be referred to throughout this work as the 'Choice version,' since it was the version chosen from among the five extant alternative texts. (Cf. Otsar Midrashim, R. Eisenstein, pages 357-386). Other versions of the midrash are herein referred to as Petirat Moshe 2, 3, 4 and 5. See the Preliminary Overview, page 7, for the individual correlaries to these numerical references. The 'Choice Version' is divided into six "sections," based largely upon proof-text references, thematic shifts and dialogue breaks within the text. Each "section" is further divided into "sub-sections," which, in turn, may be broken down into "parts." Sections receive roman numerals [I-VI], sub-sections receive letters [Ia, Ib, etc.] and parts are noted in parenthesis, following the sub-section notation [Ib: (Part 2)]. In order to set off the 'Choice version' from the remainder of the text, it is double-spaced. Furthermore, each "section" has been titled, alerting the reader as to the general focus of that specific segment of the midrash. Each of the six major sections begins a new page. Sub-sections do not begin new pages, but are set off from the previous text by a blank space.

The intent of this component is to provide a smooth flowing, clear translation which is textually accurate to this version of the midrash. To this end, modern phraseology is employed wherever possible, without destroying the tenor and flavor of the Hebrew original. Furthermore, the speakers are identified at the edge of the margin with their respective remarks indented, in order to clearly present the changing pattern of discourse within the text. This should also aid the reader in distinguishing between dialogue and other portions of text. Quotation marks are utilized only when Biblical texts are cited. All Biblical sources follow the new translation of The Holy Scriptures, published by the Jewish Publication Society of America, (1973).

2. The second major rubric are the parallel texts. Directly following a segment of the translation, these select supplemental texts serve to aid the reader in comprehending the "Choice version" sub-section in question. Drawn largely from alternate versions of Petirat Moshe, Deut Rabbah, Yalkut Shimoni and Talmudic sources, the texts will highlight differences that distinguish the "Choice version" from other alternatives. At times, these materials will not be directly linked textually, but rather thematic parallels, serving to underscore the thematic thrust of the (translation) sub-section which preceeds it. The heading for each parallel, which appears in brackets, notes the source of the text and the specific location of that piece of material within that source text. Parallels are separated from one another by a three line blank space, and are set off from the sections that follow and preceed them by solid lines.

3. The third and final major rubric is the commentary section. Directly following the parallel texts, the comments are lettered (A, B, C...), the sequence of which starts anew as a different piece of the translation is presented for consideration.

The function of the commentary section is threefold. Comments seek to explain aspects of the "Choice" text in question, or they attempt to interpret the parallel texts, explaining their focus and relation to that section of the translation. In addition, comments will consider linguistic concerns and Biblical source materials employed within the midrash, attempting to discern patterns of usage and key terms in the "Choice Version." Taken together, these functions serve a single purpose, that being the thematic and structural analysis of Midrash Petirat Moshe.

The aforementioned rubrics combine to form the body of this thesis, the overall purpose of which is to explore the structure, content and composition of Petirat Moshe. With this objective in mind, it will then be possible to formulate general conclusions as to the impact of the life and death of Moses on the community of Israel. Moreover, the thematic development of the midrash shall offer a valuable perspective regarding the difficulties in the transition of leadership, the relationship between the leader and the community and our own relation to God, the Eternal Leader of Israel.

**Note: All notes within the "Translation & Analysis," are cited by numerical references, and are located at the conclusion of the body of the thesis, preceeding Part Three, the "Analytical Perspective."**

**PART TWO:**  
**Translation and Analysis**



**Section I:**  
**The Ultimate Justice of God**

## **SECTION I: The Ultimate Justice of God**

**"Behold, the time for you to die is drawing near." (Deut 31:14)**

**Moses said unto the Holy One:**

**In the same manner ["Hen"] which I praised You in the presence of sixty myriads, as I said to them:**

**"Behold, ["Hen"] the heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to Adonai, your God; the earth and all that is on it" (Deut 10:14).**

**Would You (then) sentence me to death?**

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**[Deut Rabbah 11:9]**

**"Behold, the time for you to die is drawing near" (Deut 31:14).  
(Moses said to God:)**

**In all Your acts, one can discern a measure for a measure;  
(but you repay me) a bad measure for a good one, an incomplete  
for a full, a grudging measure for an ample measure.**

**The Holy One, Blessed be He, answered:**

**Moses, my use of the term "behold" is also for good measure,  
as it is said:**

**"Behold, I am sending an angel before you..." (Exod 23:20);**

**"Behold, the righteous shall be requited on earth..." (Prov 10:31);**

**"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet..." (Mal 3:23).**

**[Deut Rabbah 9:6]**

**Why was death decreed upon Moses with the expression,  
"Hen" (behold) ?**

**The Rabbis say:**

**It is as if a man, in order to pay honour to the King, brought him  
as a gift a very sharp sword, and the King exclaimed:**

**'Behead him with it!'**

**Thereupon, the man retorted: 'My Lord, will you behead me with  
the very object with which I honoured you ?'**

(After Moses restated his own claim to God...)

Then God replied:

A bad neighbor observes his neighbor's earnings, but not his expenditures. <sup>1</sup>

---

- A. "Sixty myriads" recurs throughout the midrashim associated with the Death of Moses, always symbolizing an aspect of Moses' unparalleled greatness. For example, unable to retrieve the soul of Moses, Gabriel claims that he is equal to "sixty myriads" (Deut R. 11:10) From the first of Shevat until the day before his death, Moses served Joshua in hopes of prolonging his life. During this period, Moses taught Torah to "the sixty myriads of Israel" (P.Moshe 2, 365b). In this light, Moses' "praise" of God is equivalent to his transmission of God's word.
  
- B. The first parallel passage puts God in the position of defending Divine justice, making explicit the concern implied by Moses in Section I. The very fact that the Rabbis portrayed God as having to defend His actions, attests to the seriousness with which they considered Moses' claim, and to the weight of the question which still burned in their minds.
  
- C. The second parallel text is one of many similar explanations offered by the Rabbis. The implication herein, (and throughout midrashic literature) is that every word of Torah carries with it layers of meaning, hidden messages which can only be discerned through searching the text itself. Considering Moses' claim of God's "betrayal" of His faithful servant, the Rabbis seem to view the force of "hen" as an equalizer of sorts. Recounting the deeds, both positive and negative, which Moses performed in his lifetime, this single term calls forth the scales of justice, urging Moses himself to view 'both sides of the coin.' <sup>2</sup> In the final analysis, God's justice is upheld, or so the Rabbis maintain. Even Moses would confirm this if he could but step back and view his life-deeds objectively. Through "hen," all things ultimately balance out.

**SECTION I: (Part 2)**

**The Holy One said to him:**

**That is not so, for when I sent you to pharaoh, king of Egypt,  
to bring My people out from under his control, you said to Me:  
"Please ["Hen"], Adonai, 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" (Deut 4:10).  
And yet ["Hen"] is preserved/reserved for you.  
For just as you praised Me before sixty myriads, saying:  
"Behold, ["Hen"], the heavens...belong to Adonai..." (Deut 10:14),  
so, too, will I exalt you over fifty five truly righteous ones  
inside the Garden of Eden after your death.**

---

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 364 b]**

**After alluding to the reward of "the righteous ones who uphold and  
establish the Torah out of love," God reveals the specific nature of  
the uniqueness of Moses' reward:**

**Moses! Though your life is ending, your glory shall not cease.  
You will have no need of the world as it is,  
not of the sunlight, nor of the light of the moon and the stars,  
nor of food, nor drink, nor even clothing...  
For I will enlighten you through My glory,  
with My presence shall I clothe you,...and My radiance will  
brighten your face....**

---

- A. "Nun + "Heh" taken together have the numerical value of fifty  
five, the number of myriads over which God will exalt Moses.**

**Section II:**  
**Moses' Plea for Life**

- B. The parallel text seems to suggest that the nature of Moses' reward will indeed be special, even beyond that of the "truly righteous ones" who enter into the World to Come. Moses shall share directly in the glory of God, and the Holy One, Himself, shall bestow the honor upon Moses. This expansion points to the underlying counter-argument to Moses' plea for justice and continued earthly existence, implying that the rewards in store for him far outweigh the future possibilities of life with Israel. Moses' reward in the 'world to come,' a theme which is developed only at the conclusion of the Choice version, recurs consistently throughout the alternate versions of this midrash. The death of the righteous is justified on the basis of their future compensation. As the life of Moses was a model of righteousness, so shall his reward in the 'world to come' be of the highest quality. (See the comments on Section VIb, page 67, where the ramifications of this sub-theme are discussed at greater length.)

#### SECTION IIa: Let Me Enter the Land

Moses said:

Master of the Universe,  
if you will not let me enter the Land of Israel,  
then at least allow me to remain in [this] world alive.

The Holy One said to him:

If you do not die in this world, you can't be resurrected  
in the World to Come. Moreover, I've already written in Torah:  
"...No one can deliver from My hand" (Deut 32:39).

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**[Deut 32: 48-52]**

**That very day the Lord spoke to Moses:**

**....You shall die on the mountain that you are about to ascend,  
and you shall be gathered to your kin, as your brother Aaron...  
For you both broke faith with Me among the Israelite people,  
at the waters of Meribah-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin,  
by failing to uphold My sanctity among the Israelite people.  
You may view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it.**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 362 b]**

**Moses said:**

**Master of the Universe, let me enter the Land of Israel and live  
there for a few years, then I will die.**

**God said to him:**

**It is my own decree that you shall not enter it.**

**Moses replied:**

**If I don't enter the land during my lifetime, let me enter it upon  
my death.**

**He said to him:**

**No!**

**Then Moses said:**

**Master of the Universe,  
why is all of this anger directed against me?**

**God replied:**

**Because you did not sanctify Me.**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 363 a]**

**The Holy One said to Moses:**

**Whose son are you?**

**Moses replied:**

**The son of Amram.**

**God said to him:**

**And Amram, whose son was he?**

**Moses replied:**

**The son of Izhar.**

**Then God asked:**

**And Izhar, whose son was he?**

**Moses replied:**

**The son of Kohat....**

**And God asked:**

**From where did they all descend?**

**Moses replied:**

**From Adam, the first man.**

**Then God asked:**

**Are any of them still living?**

**Moses said:**

**They have all died.**

**Then the Holy One said to him:**

**And you want to live on!**

**A. The Choice version assumes the reader's awareness of the Biblical "pre-text" cited in the first parallel. Alternate versions of Petirat Moshe make no such assumptions, and attempt to illustrate the very real dialogue at work behind the Deut 32 passage. In this light, Moses' initial plea to avert death, as depicted in the Choice version, is actually the continuation of his extended conversation with the Holy One, a compromise of his original position, wherein he seemingly acknowledges God's decree regarding entering the Land of Israel. As Moses subsequent requests suggest, (cf Petirat Moshe 1, 368b-369a) he has not, in truth, submitted to God's decree. He is still asking, however indirectly, for God to compromise His own position, and thereby to permit him to enter the promised land.**

**B. God's two part response to the plea of Moses reveals the rationale which pervades most all of the midrashim associated with Moses' death. Part one, already alluded to, intimates that death is the natural prerequisite to reward in the 'World to Come.' The proposed alternative of Eternal life on earth is not an acceptable substitute. God's response illustrates the underlying theme that substantiates His rationale, that death is our common destiny.<sup>3</sup> The final supplemental text cited above clearly develops the point, hinting, once again, that Moses' plea is unfounded, even illogical. In a sense, death is the ultimate equalizer, thereby uniting all humankind as God's creation. No one, even the most righteous of the generations, escapes death, for to do so would**



run counter to the Divine plan. Herein lies the dual nature of God's response, and the multi-dimensional force of the proof-text. To grant Moses his request for continued earthly existence would not only deny him of the great glory in store for him, but would invalidate the very Torah which he dedicated his life to transmitting. Moses' final plea in Petirat Moshe 2 is met with God's convincing retort:

"Do you want to make My Torah a fraud?" (P. Moshe 366a)  
 Moses must die in order for his life-teachings to continue to live. Further still, the full proof-text points to the compelling force of the Holy One's argument. "There is no God besides Me, I deal death and give life, I wounded and I will heal; none can deliver from My hand" (Deut 32:39). Eternal life would throw God's uniqueness into question, putting creation on par with the Creator. Thus, the death of Moses affirms the ultimate power of God, the sole Author of life and death.

- C. The specific portrayal of God as the One who wrote the Torah seems to serve as a subtle reminder to Moses of his finitude. His "servant of God" status does not afford him privileges which would transcend his humanity. This balance between majesty and humility is a tension ever present in Moses' leadership of Israel. Indeed, the question of Moses' status and the ramifications of his struggle constitute a sub-theme which will be developed in various manifestations throughout this midrashic work.

#### SECTION 11a: (Part 2)

Moses said:

Master of the Universe,  
 I will live as the rams and the deers in the mountains,  
 eating vegetables and grass, and drinking rainwater,

and seeing the world. Let me live as one of them.

The Holy One said to him:

Enough! Don't say another word to Me about the matter.

---

[Petirat Moshe 2, 366b]

Moses petitioned the Holy One:

Master of the Universe,  
give me permission to live as a bird who flies in the wind...  
or make me like a fish,...then I'll jump in the Jordan and see the  
land.

The Holy One said to him:

If I do that for you, I'll break My vow.

Moses continued:

Master of the Universe,  
place me upon the wings of clouds...and I'll see the land.

The Holy One replied:

That too would be considered as if I'd broken My vow.

Then Moses said to Him:

Master of the Universe,  
Cut me limb by limb and send me over the Jordan, then resurrect  
me so that I can see the land.

The Holy One replied:

But this too would be like breaking My vow.

[Petirat Moshe 2, 366b]

Moses said:

Master of the Universe,  
place me with the children of Gad and Reuven,  
and let me be just like one of them. Joshua will rule,  
and I'll enter the Land of Israel along with (the people) Israel!

The Holy One replied:

Do you want to make My Torah a fraud?

---

- A. The citations give weight to the opinion that Moses' request to  
"see the world" was really equivalent to seeing the Land of

Israel. It was not an extended earthly existence which Moses sought, but a chance to see firsthand the home which God had promised.

- B. The additional petitions attest to the urgent nature of Moses' request. He would take on the lowliest of forms, even suffer death, just to see the Land of Israel. His final plea, cited in the second parallel, brings into question the nature of his motivation. It is not the leader, the prophet and teacher of Israel, who must see the land, but Moses, one of the people. Moses does not seek the glory of leading his people into the land which God has long promised to give to them. His request is a very personal one. The Rabbis suggest, in the spirit of their worldview, that Moses wished to enter the Land solely for the purpose of fulfilling all of the commandments, some of which could only be performed on the sacred soil.<sup>4</sup> I would offer a different interpretation, one which points to a major theme in Petirat Moshe. Moses devoted his life to the fulfillment of a dream; the establishment of the people Israel in their homeland. In leading the wilderness community, the dream became the source of his strength, the motivation for continuing the journey to forge the "slaves" into a "nation." More than that, Moses became a part of the promise that he preached. His personal fulfillment and the destiny of the nation were one and the same; they were inextricably bound. The authors of this midrash were keenly sensitive to this point. The portrayal of Moses as a desperate man, seeking to see his dream fulfilled in any way possible, speaks to us of the inner struggle which Moses experienced, not in the face of death, but at the thought of living an "unfinished" life.
- C. God's response to the plea of Moses in the parallel texts hints at the reasoning which guided the Divine decision not to grant it. In the first parallel, God consistently refers to His inability to break His vow. In the other parallel, God's concern is that the Torah not become a fraud, a half-truth. Taken together, the responses of the Holy One affirm what was suggested earlier, that Moses' request would, if granted, invalidate the words of

God's Torah. <sup>5</sup> In a dramatic dialogue, wherein the Holy One attempts to impress upon Moses the fullness of his life accomplishments, the ultimate rationale behind God's decision is revealed. (*see* Petirat Moshe 2, 364b-365a) After God enumerates the great honors and the prestige which He has bestowed upon His "servant" during his lifetime, Moses responds, thanking God for the bountiful goodness he has enjoyed, concluding with just one additional request: "That I might cross the Jordan..."

God's response is crucial to our understanding of the sub-section in question: "Moses, two oaths have I vowed. First, that you will not enter the Land of Israel. Second, that the people Israel will not be consumed. If you want Me to overturn the (first) oath and allow you to enter the Land of Israel, so too will I transgress the other and destroy the people."

The correlation seems to apply. God breaking His vows is equal to invalidating the Torah, which is in turn equivalent to the destruction of the people Israel. Granting Moses his request would be tantamount to destroying the people, for to do so would "destroy" their lifeblood, the Torah. The underlying message which the authors seek to convey is clear. Torah, the perfect truth which God has revealed to us, is the very basis of our existence as a people. Without Torah, as such, we cease to exist.

#### **SECTION 11a: (Part 3)**

**And Moses said:**

Master of the Universe,  
take one of my two eyes and place it beneath the door-step  
of Your dwelling place, and let them shut the door on it.  
That way I'll see the Land of Israel with only one eye,  
and I won't die.

**The Holy One said to him:**

**Didn't I tell You not to say another word to me about it!**

---

**[Yalkut Shimoni, Vol I, Remez 31; Par'shat Vayelech]**

**Moses pleaded before Him:**

**Master of the Universe,**

**Place one of my eyes under Your door(step) and shut the door on it three times a year. Thus I'll be able to live...**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 366a]**

**Moses said to Him:**

**Show me a vision of the land at a distance.**

**God replied:**

**With such a request I can comply, as it says:**

**"You shall see the land before you, but you shall not cross over to enter it" (Deut 32:52).**

**Then the Holy One showed him the land, four hundred parsangs by four hundred parsangs, from about the distance of a garden-bed within an orchard. God strengthened his (Moses') eyes so that he could see it all. The hidden was revealed and the distant was brought close, just so that he might view every bit of it.**

**And with this, God said to him:**

**This is the land which I promised to Abraham...**

---

- A. The variant text of Yalkut Shimoni is intriguing. Why was it necessary for Moses to specify that God shut the door "three times a year"? Surely, three was a commonly used "round number" in the ancient Near East, as our own biblical sources confirm. Yet, I wonder whether the choice of "three" might not point to a greater symbolism at work? Could it, perhaps, be an allusion to the three pilgrimages to the Holy Temple? Was it an intended reference to the three patriarchs? At any rate, the implication of Moses' request remains the same, though it is not fully verbalized herein. With but one eye, Moses could see the Land, yet not with his total vision, and thus continue to live. Clearly, this proposal too is unacceptable to the Holy One, for it does not uphold Gods' oath.**

**B. The creative compromise suggested by Moses in parallel 'B' is the first and only proposal to which God agrees. It would indeed seem that the validity of God's word is maintained, and that Moses' plea is finally answered. Moses does not enter the Land, but only views it a great distance, in keeping with the oath of Deut 32:52. Yet, in the very next passage, Moses returns to his original plea. "Place me with the children of Gad and Reuven,... and I will enter the land of Israel..." (Petirat Moshe 2, 366a) Moses compromise was, in reality, a step towards the realization of his actual objective. Not satisfied with merely "seeing," Moses had to "enter the land," to walk on the sacred soil. Though the wording may vary, implying that Moses wishes merely to live on, the Choice version sub-section in question, as well as the remainder of Section II maintain this position. Part and parcel of Moses' request to "see the land" is his desire to enter it. The Choice version suggests no compromise on this point, perhaps because both God and Moses understand that, in this case, a glance in the distance will just not suffice.**

#### **SECTION IIb: Moses Petitions the Objects of Creation**

**Immediately, Moses began to praise God, saying:**

**"The Rock whose deeds are perfect,  
for all God's ways are just" (Deut 32:4).**

**Then his voice turned to a crying plea, as he called out to the Land, saying to her:**

**Petition the Holy One on my behalf, perhaps He will deal  
mercifully with me on your account, and allow me to enter the  
Land of Israel.**

**The Land responded, saying:**

**I am but waste and desolation, as it is said about me:**

**"And the land is a defiled garment..." (Isa 51:6)**

**How can I stand before the King of kings?**

**God's judgement is the same for both of us, as it says:**

**"For dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19).**

---

**[Deut Rabah 11:10]**

**When Moses saw that no creature could save him from the path of death, he thereupon exclaimed:**

**"The Rock whose deeds are perfect, for all God's ways are just;  
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and righteous is He" (Deut 32:4).**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 362b-363a]**

**God said to Moses:**

**...And furthermore, up until today, the hour of your death was under your own control!**

**Immediately, Moses began to offer prayers of supplication and petition.**

**Concerning this Solomon said:**

**"The poor speak with supplications,  
but the rich answer with impudence." (Prov 18:23)**

**A story was told:**

**To what is this comparable?**

**To a wise man who taught the king's son. All of the people of the palace revered him...and did according to his will...**

**After a short while, the king's son died. With his death, his teacher lost all of the respect afforded him by the palace dwellers, and he had to take to begging.**

**When the king's son was alive, everything was under the wise man's authority; but since the king's son died, he lost it all.**

**So too with Moses:**

**All of his life, everything was under his control...**

**but when the time had arrived for him to die, he turned into one who begged for mercy.**

---

- A. The use of the Deut 32:4 proof-text reveals a key insight into Moses' self-perception vis-à-vis God. The first parallel utilizes**

the prooftext as a confessional in the face of death. There, Moses accedes to his inescapable destiny as preordained by the Eternal. He petitions no one, accepting the fate that awaits him. In this sub-section, Moses affirms the ultimate justice of God, and in the same breath, he pursues what he believes to be Divine justice. Herein, the Deut 32 passage functions as the basis of his supplication. Moses praises God as "just and righteous," assuming that true justice is on his side. A truly just God would not allow such an injustice as the premature death of "His servant" to occur. This sharp contrast between the two settings of this prooftext underscores the intensity of Moses' drive to alter God's decision, (in accord with what he believed to be truly just). From this perspective, the Choice version portrays Moses, the fighter, ready to struggle with the Holy One in the face of his impending death. The sub-theme which thus arises focuses on the question of our relative power in relation to the Almighty. Can we vie with the Eternal, and if so, on what basis? Moses' egocentrism fueled the strong motivation to defend his own sense of fairness. As the text unfolds, we shall attempt to test the consistency of this firm stance Moses assumes, while seeking to comprehend the factors which reinforced his position.

8. The parable of the wise man and the King provides insight into the nature of Moses' praise of God, as well as a perspective on the entire Section IIb. The story is clear and the symbolic extension to the life of Moses is apparent. The message which the parable conveys is a bit more subtle, yet crucial to understanding Moses' running dialogue with the cast of characters of Creation. The Prov 18:23 prooftext is the key. In a sense, it is an expansion of the response of the Land to Moses, (Gen 3:19). Not only do we return ultimately to our original source, the "dust of the earth," but we leave the world as we entered it, "poor" in the eyes of the Holy One. The implication is that all humanity shares a common destiny, an ultimate end which we can not control. Death is the equalizer. The major theme herein, which recurs throughout Petirat Moshe, is that God is the sole author of life and death. Moses is reduced to begging for mercy, since neither he, nor anyone else, has any authority in the face of death. The question which arises, and which the text will bring into play again and again, is this: Is not the life Moses led, the



unparalleled accomplishments he attained, worthy of special consideration by God? And concurrently: Are we all truly equal in God's sight, in our life as in our death? Though neither question can be fully answered, both sub-themes shall be addressed in a number of varied contexts as the midrash progresses, so as to offer a variety of possible alternatives.

### **SECTION 11b: (Part 2)**

**Moses went to the heavens and said to them:**

**Petition the Holy One on my behalf, perhaps He will deal mercifully with me, and allow me to enter the Land of Israel.**

**The heavens said to him:**

**Before we go and ask for mercy for you, we'll do it for ourselves;**

**For it is indeed written concerning us:**

**"Through the word of God the heavens were made" (Ps 33:6);**

**and it says: "...For the heavens shall melt away like smoke,...and**

**they that dwell therein shall die in a similiar fashion..." (Isa 51:6);**

**and it says: "...But the heavens were not meritorious in His sight"**

**(Job 15:15).**

**Then Moses went before the sun and the moon, begging them to seek mercy on his behalf. They said to him:**

**We are insufficient in number, as it is said:**

**"He numbers the stars and calls each one by name" (Ps 147:4).**

**And the Holy One also said of us:**

**"My hands established the heavens; all of their hosts did I**

**create." (Isa 45:12)**

**Then Moses went to Mount Sinai, pleading that it seek mercy on his behalf. Mount Sinai said to him:**

**Did you not see me with your own eyes as you wrote in the Torah:**

"And Mount Sinai was totally ashen, since God had descended upon it in fire" (Exod 19:18).

And it says: "...For the mountains may depart, and the hills be obliterated..." (Isa 54:10).

Moses went before the rivers, begging them to seek mercy on his behalf. They said:

Don't you know that it says: "...And the waters shall gather unto one place..." (Gen 1:7).

And it is written: "Thus says Adonai, who makes a way in the sea, and a path through the mighty waters..." (Isa 43:16).

Who will save us from the Holy One?

He (Moses) went before the "objects of creation" (Sidrei B'reishit),<sup>6</sup> but each and every one responded to him that they did not possess the power to save him from the (hand of) the Holy One. As it is written: "None can deliver from My hand" (Deut 32:39).

[Petirat Moshe 2, 366b]

Moses said to Him:

Master of the Universe, "the Rock whose works are perfect !..." (Deut 32:4)

And Moses cried out, weeping, as he said:

To whom can I turn to pray for mercy on my behalf?

He went to all the works of Creation, and asked:

Seek mercy on my behalf.

They said to him:

Even for ourselves we are unable to petition (God) for mercy, as it is written: "He made everything in its due time" (Eccl 3:11).

[Petirat Moshe 2, 364a]

When Moses realized that the decree against him was finalized, he declared a fast and got ready to pray, saying:

**I am not moving from this spot until the decree, in its entirety, is annuled.**

**Then what did he do?**

**He dressed in sackcloth, covered himself with ashes and prayed fifteen times before the Holy One, until the heaven and the earth and all of Creation were moved, saying:**

**Perhaps the Holy One's desire to renew His world has begun? <sup>7</sup>**

**Then a Divine Voice came forth and answered:**

**It is not God's desire to renew the world, rather:**

**"In His hand is the soul of every living being, and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10).**

- A. The above sub-section of the Choice version poses the first major challenge to Moses' vision of ultimate justice. The personification of the 'characters' of Creation presents Moses with some convincing evidence that runs counter to his personal quest. Indeed, the highly structured pattern of proof texting woven throughout the passage links the characters' of Creation into a unified affirmation of God's sovereignty. Beginning with Deut 32:4, "For all God's ways are just...", the proof texts alternate between Pentateuchal references, Prophetic citations and the Writings. Genesis, Isaiah and Psalms are framed by two Deuteronomic references to God's omnipotence and supreme justice. The author may well have attempted to convey a specific message through such a structure; perhaps, as if to say, the Torah in its entirety, every portion, attests to the fact that God, the Creator, continues to control the destiny of every living thing.**
- B. The Deuteronomic proof texts, in framing this sub-section, serve to reinforce the major point that the author wishes to convey. Indeed, whenever the text resorts to the Deuteronomist for support, it is usually in order to summarize or re-emphasize the basic message which all of the other proof texts, taken together, hope to transmit. It is no accident that God's initial response to Moses' plea: "None can deliver from My hand" (Section 11a, pg 5; Deut 32:39), is the same response with which the 'objects of Creation' answer Moses' request for mercy, at the close of the**

sub-section. Moses' search has come full circle, and the answer which he receives, (thus far), is clear, due in large part to the force of the Deuteronomic "pillars" upon which the midrash rests.

- C. The first parallel is, in essence, the condensed form of our Choice version. The response of the 'Works of Creation' here is emphatic; the prooftext speaks for itself, as if to say: Moses, all of your pleading is for naught. The Divine Plan is unchanging, and more than that, it is far beyond our comprehension. Moses' plea for "mercy" in the Choice version as well as herein is not a one-time special request, but rather is tantamount to an altering of God's Eternal Plan. The outcome of Moses' struggle for "justice" thereby is linked to the destiny of every human being and to the ultimate redemption of the world.

4. In contrast to this sub-section of our Choice version, the second supplementary passage paints a different picture of the Works of Creation. Moses' words and actions move Creation to question God's purposes and intent.

Such a portrayal underscores the picture of Moses in the Choice version. Though he is unique among the prophets, the one chosen by God to transmit the Torah to Israel, Moses is unable to move even a single 'soul.' The 'servant of the Lord' is powerless before the Author of life and death.

The immediate response of the "Bat Kol" (Divine Voice) here, is the pervading attitude which is conveyed through the answers of the many characters of Creation. Indeed, this subtle message runs throughout the Choice version, warning: do not question God's Master Plan, nor attempt to subvert it in any way. As God's Creation, we are His instruments in the unfolding of history, an ultimate redemption which is far beyond us. To that end, it is our primary duty to comply with the Divine Will. Moses, however, has chosen to try and take matters into his own hands.

### **SECTION IIc: Moses' Plea for Israel to Petition God**

**Moses went before Joshua b. Nun and pleaded with him, saying:**

**My son, remember all of the kind things I have done for you in the past? Stand up for me now with a plea for mercy before the Holy One. Perhaps He'll deal mercifully with me on your account and permit me to see the Land of Israel.**

**At that moment, Joshua cried out, clenching his fist in protest, and began to pray.**

**But Samael came and clamped his mouth, saying to him (Joshua):**

**Why do you delay God's command?**

**Is it not said: "The Rock whose deeds are perfect, for all God's ways are just" (Deut 32:4).**

**Joshua went directly to Moses and said to him:**

**Master! Samael would not permit me to pray on your behalf.<sup>8</sup>**

**When he heard this, Moses began to cry. Joshua, too, wept bitterly.**

---

**[Talmud Bauli, Baba Batra, 17a]**

**Our Rabbis taught:**

**There were six (individuals) over whom the Angel of Death had no dominion. They were: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Aaron and Miriam. (The latter three) we know because it is written in connection with them: (That they died) "by the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 34:5).**

---

- A. Once again, the Deuteronomic prooftext returns, not merely to frame the sub-section, but to make the transition, thereby thematically linking it with the previous sections. Further, the placement of Deut 32:4 by the midrashist in the mouth of Samael, is the ultimate twist of irony, underscoring the message**

of the entire section. The very words which Moses spoke in defense of his quest for "justice" are turned upside down (or perhaps right-side up), and used against him by none other than the Angel of Death, who defends God's ultimate justice.

B. Thwarted in his efforts to move the 'Works of Creation,' Moses turns to those closest to him, to his fellow Israelites, so that they might "seek mercy on his behalf." As both Sections I and IIa confirmed, "mercy," in Moses' eyes, was equivalent to the delay of his impending death so that he might enter the Land of Israel.

C. The Talmudic reference suggests that Moses had dominion over the Angel of Death, due to the nature of his death.

Though Section IV would seem to confirm this tradition,<sup>9</sup> the present section suggests that no living being, not even Moses, can contend with the Angel of Death. The explanation could be offered that when Moses had others interceding on his behalf, they were no match for Samael. When he stood up for himself, however, even the Angel of Death was no match for him. Still, the two alternate perspectives stand. Here, in the present section, Moses' fate, like that of his fellow Israelites, is in the hands of the Holy One.<sup>10</sup>

#### **SECTION IIc: (Part 2)**

Moses went before Elazar, his brother Aaron's son, and said to him:

Remember the time when (God's) anger was aroused upon your father Aaron because of the calf incident; yet I stood up for him in prayer, and God spared him from death. as it says: "I will also pray on Aaron's behalf at this time"(Deut 9:20). Won't you pray on my behalf? Perhaps the Holy One will deal mercifully with me on your account, and permit me to see the Land of Israel.

Immediately Elazar began to pray, but Samael came and clamped his mouth shut, saying:

Is it your business to delay God's command?

Then Elazar reported the incident to Moses.

Then Moses went before Caleb ben Jephuniah and asked him (to pray on his behalf). But he (Samael) did to him as to the others.

He reported the story to Moses and they both wept.

Then Moses went before the chiefs of thousands and of hundreds, and (he went) unto the Tent of Meeting and before Israel, to the seventy elders and unto the Tabernacle of Adonai. Weeping, he petitioned each and every one, saying:

Remember all of those times that the Holy One was angry at your ancestors, untill I arose and annuled the decree, as it is written: "Let Me alone and I will destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven, and I will make you a nation far more numerous than they" (Deut 9:14). But in the end, Adonai relented, as it is said: "I pardoned due to your word" (Num 14:20).

So now, everyone, go before the Tabernacle of Adonai, and petition the Holy One for mercy on my behalf, so that He might bring me into the Land of Israel. For the Holy One never rejects the prayers of assemblies, as it is said:

"He saved my life...for there were many others with me" (Ps 55:19).

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 362b]**

**Moses said to Him:**

Master of the Universe,  
So many times Israel sinned, and I petitioned and prayed on their behalf before You, and You pardoned them. Why won't You pardon me?

**He said to him (Moses):**

A communal decree can not be compared to an individual decree. Moreover, until this day, the time of your death was under your own control. <sup>11</sup>

**[Petirat Moshe 364a]**

**Moses responded and said unto Him:**

...There is but one thing that I ask of You: that I might cross over the Jordan (and enter the Land of Israel).

**The Holy One said to Moses:**

Moses! Two oaths have I vowed.  
First, that you will not enter the Land (of Israel).  
Second, that Israel will not be consumed.  
If you want Me to overturn the first and allow you to enter the land, so too will I transgress the other and destroy Israel.

**Moses said:**

Master of the Universe,  
Cunningly You've come upon me, holding the rope at both ends.  
Let Moses and a thousand like him perish, but do not destroy a single soul of the people Israel.

- 
- A. Moses approached the people in his life, those for whom he had personally sacrificed, but their attempts at intercession were all in vain. The recurring retort of Samael, in our Choice version, summarizes the basic thematic thrust: "Is it your business to delay God's word?" Once again, the Divine Plan is portrayed as beyond human comprehension and concern. It is as if the Angel of Death is warning Moses through a series of intermediaries, saying to him: your prayers are for naught; the Holy One alone determines the nature of justice. He is the sole author of life and death.**



- B. The supplemental texts to 11c, part 2, combine to offer a partial answer to Moses' confident assertion that God could not reject the prayer of the assembly of Israel, (which indeed He does). In actuality, the prayer of Israel, since it was on behalf of a single individual, was nothing more than another plea for God to annul an individual decree. The relative value of the preservation of the community far exceeds that of the individual. Moses' response to God's ultimatum affirms that even he can not place his own fulfillment above that of Israel's. Moses acknowledges, perhaps, that the flourishing of his life's-work is more important than the realization of his personal life's-dream. <sup>12</sup>
- C. The very fact that God contrasts these two vows in the second parallel, points to the secondary theme still at work, even in our Choice version. When any single word of God is thrown into question, every decree, law, prohibition of the Holy One loses its compelling force, and in some instances, its validity. In a sense, it is not the future of a single soul which is at stake here, but rather the continuance of an entire people as a community of faith, bound by the word of God.

### **SECTION 11c: (Part 3)**

When they (Israel) heard his words they shouted and wept aloud, untill their cry rose to the Divine Throne and entered the Tent of Meeting, to intercede on Moses' behalf.

At that very moment, the ministering angel descended and swept away their words, in order that their prayer not reach the Holy One. And there were two great angels appointed over them; one whose name was "Tsikkun," and one whose name was "Lahash". And Lahash restored that which the (other) angels had

seized. Immediately, Sammael descended and bound him with a chain of fire, and brought him before the Holy One.

He was beaten with seventy lashes and was then cast out from the Divine Presence.

When Israel saw this, they said to Moses:

The ministering angel will not permit us to pray on your behalf.

---

[Petirat Moshe 2, 364a]

Ten times was the death of Moses decreed by the Holy One, in order that he would not enter the Land (of Israel).

Yet, it was not sealed until the Great Court revealed it to him, saying:

"You shall not cross over the Jordan..." (Deut 3:27).

Moses took the news pretty lightly; it didn't disturb him, for he said:

All of those times Israel sinned, yet whenever I prayed on their behalf, God would pardon them and annul the decree.

Seeing that I have not sinned from the time of my youth,

when I pray to the Holy One, will He not accept my plea!

When God saw that Moses was taking the matter lightly, not wishing to pray on his own behalf, He immediately sealed the decree against Moses...

[Deut Rabah 11:10]

(Following Moses' earnest attempt to move heaven and the works of Creation with his prayers and supplications before God...)

Then what did God do?

At that very same time, He proclaimed in every gate of the firmament, and in every court on high, that they should not receive Moses' prayer, nor bring it before Him, because the decree against him had been sealed.

At the same time, God anxiously summoned...the ministering angels, and commanded them, saying:

Go down quickly, bolt all of the gates of heaven, because the voice of the prayer threatens to force its way to heaven.

Then the angels sought to ascend to heaven because of the sound of Moses' prayer, for it was like a sword which tears and cuts its

way through everything, sparing nothing, seeing that it was of the nature of the Ineffable Name.

- A. Once again, Moses' intercessors fail to move the Almighty. Indeed, here more than in the previous sections, Moses meets his greatest resistance yet and his most resounding "defeat." All of Israel acknowledges its helplessness and God's sovereignty, further challenging Moses in his struggle to see the land and live. The structure of the text has succeeded in removing the protective layers surrounding Moses, bringing the reader to the stark realization. Moses now stands alone in his quest, with no one else to turn to for aid. We have now but to await the direct confrontation between Moses and the Eternal's decree of death, for which we have gradually been prepared.
- B. This sub-section of the Choice version raises many questions concerning the actions of God and the Divine retinue, to which the parallel texts may offer some possible explanation. Why was God so adamant in His rejection of Moses' plea? Perhaps, as the Petirat Moshe 2 supplemental text suggests, God was angered by Moses' self-righteous attitude. Not only did Moses consider his plea for the postponement of his death a sure thing, but he sent others to pray on his behalf. Didn't he care enough about the outcome to seek mercy before the Holy One for himself? For the most part, such an explanation could fit with our Choice version. Moses did not approach God directly, yet his attitude towards his impending death is anything but haughty. He is persistent in his efforts to alter God's decision, though it is by way of third party intervention. The parallel text points to a clash, once again, between God's perspective and Moses' understanding. God seeks only the prayer of His servant; while Moses seeks to petition all of Creation to pray on his behalf, thinking that his prayer alone is insufficient. Somewhere in the midst of the confusion, God's anger was aroused and the decree was sealed. The irony highlights one of the major sub-themes of the midrash: God's will and man's vision of the Divine will are often two entirely different things. Or, more succinctly, God's plan is far beyond human comprehension. Second guessing the Eternal leads to doubt. Our undying faith is the truest affirmation that we can offer in

complying with the will of God.

- C. The Deut Rabbah parallel proposes a direct explanation for the actions of the angels in this sub-section. From the outside looking in, it indeed seems that there is a Divine system in place, ready for operation.

The angels are on alert, acting in accord with a previously issued command: do not let Moses' prayer ascend! It is important to note the hierarchy at work amongst the Divine retinue. The ministering angels are the first line of defense, with the two great angels on special assignment, Lahash and Tsikkun, serving them as reinforcement. And when one of them fails, it is none other than Samael himself, the Angel of Death, who seizes him and brings him before the Holy One. God remains behind the scenes, yet the Holy One is the Commander in chief, fully in control of the actions of His retinue.

In this light, the punishment of Lahash serves to underscore the severity and the finality of God's decree against Moses. At the same time, Lahash's lapse attests to the power of Moses' prayer, formed with the very essence of the Ineffable Name Itself. <sup>13</sup>

**Section III:**  
**Awaiting the Inevitable Decree**

### **SECTION III: Awaiting the Inevitable Decree**

It happened that Samael, the wicked one, looked forward to the death of Moses every moment of every hour. As it is said:

"The wicked ones watch the righteous, seeking to take their life" (Ps 37:32).

There were none among all of the satanic forces as evil as Samael, the wicked one, and there was no one among the prophets as righteous as Moses. As it is said: "There has not yet arisen in Israel another prophet like Moses" (Deut 34:10).

At this very moment, Samael was rejoicing as Michael, the Prince of Israel, wept. Said Michael to Samael:

I am crying and you laugh!

As Israel says: "Do not rejoice, my enemy, for though I have fallen, I shall yet arise..." (Micah 7:8).

"I have fallen" at the death of Moses, but "I shall yet arise" at the success of Joshua in the future, when he shall have conquered thirty one kings. <sup>14</sup>

[Deut Rabah 11:10]

(The continuation of the prooftext is utilized as an added conclusion to Michael's monologue.)

"Though I sit in darkness" because of the destruction of the first and second Temples, "the Lord is still my light" in the days of the Messiah.

[Petirat Moshe 2, 365a]

R. Josiah said:

At that very moment, Moses showed Joshua great respect and abundant praise before the children of Israel.

His proclamation went out to every encampment of Israel, declaring:

Come and listen to the new prophet who shall be raised up over us today. All of Israel rose up to honor Joshua....

And then, Moses himself went to Joshua; he dressed him and gave him the royal cloak and sat him upon the throne and placed an interpreter by his side so that he could preach to all of Israel....

Then Joshua spoke before all Israel, and before his teacher, Moses: ...Give honor to the God of your deliverance...for He will uphold the promise made to our ancestors. He will establish the Covenant with us, and the kindness and the oath to which he swore through Moses, our teacher, who redeemed us with great wonders,...who split the sea and gave us 613 mitzvot.

[Petirat Moshe 2, 365b]

Thereupon, a proclamation went forth: Moses now stands in Joshua's tent, saying:

All who wish to welcome Joshua should come and do so, for Adonai has chosen him to be the leader of all Israel.

[Petirat Moshe 2, 366a]

...Then the two of them (Joshua and Moses) preached before all Israel as if they were one. And to the people, it appeared as if Moses' face was the sun and Joshua's face was the moon.

Whether Moses read and Joshua interpreted, or Joshua read and Moses interpreted, there was no distinction between them. Their words shared a single intention...

- 
- A. This section marks a new development in the progression of the text. For the first time, the theme of 'transition of leadership' is introduced. The death of Moses is spoken of as an impending reality, and the interchange between Michael and Sammael is one of the only attempts at dealing with the inevitable. Importantly, Michael affirms the loss of Moses, yet does not wallow in sadness. The 'Light in the midst of darkness' motif, adapted from the backdrop of the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem of Micah 7, enables Michael to affirm Israel's confidence in the future, with Joshua at the helm. The juxtaposition of Moses and Satan serves to paint a picture of the Angel as the epitome of evil, while further emphasizing the unparalleled righteousness of Moses, portraying him as

the "tsaddik" extraordinaire, in the face of death. 15

- B. The three Petirat Moshe 2 supplemental texts all serve to reinforce the importance of establishing the effective continuity of leadership, as alluded to in our Choice text. In the first of these passages, Moses not only affirms Joshua in the sight of all Israel, but includes himself ("over us") as a part of the people over whom Joshua shall rule. There can be but one leader of Israel, and Joshua is it. After Moses himself sets Joshua in place as the new leader, he delivers his acceptance speech to the people. Joshua's words, in essence, bear the same message as Michael's retort to Samael, wherein the Archangel grieves over the loss of Moses, yet still maintains a positive outlook on Israel's future. There is, however, one crucial distinction between the two passages. Joshua, in attempting to institute a smooth transition, does not affirm the reality of the loss of Moses, but rather utilizes Moses' guiding spirit to firmly establish the continuity of leadership for the future.

The second of these passages takes Moses' affirmation of Joshua's leadership one step further, giving it Divine sanction, a status which the Choice version saves for Moses alone.

The last passage takes the basic theme of this sub-section further still, displaying the unity of spirit and purpose of Moses and his successor, Joshua. Unlike the Choice section in question, which recognizes that the death of Moses is tantamount to the loss of his spirit, this text links Moses and Joshua as the two 'guiding lights' of Israel, inextricably bound and eternal. Though the sun and the moon may be out of view, Israel can be ever sure of their presence, confident of their guiding spirit both day and night.

- C. The above parallels, and countless others, (cf notes: Section III) point to the difficulty of the transition of leadership, which is scarcely considered in our Choice text. One must ask, why? Perhaps the author(s) realized that the devastating effects of Moses' death upon the people could not be lessened, or should not? It might well be true that the only way for the people to truly have accepted a change in leadership, was for them to first



acknowledge and cope with the loss of their former leader. 16

### **SECTION III: (Part 2)**

What did our master, of blessed memory, then do?

He took a scroll to write the Ineffable Name upon it, so as to transmit it to Joshua.

But he had not finished writing it when the moment of his death arrived.

**[Deut Rabah 11:10]**

What did Moses do?

He took a scroll and wrote down upon it the Ineffable Name, nor had the Book of Song been completely written down when the moment of Moses' death arrived.

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 367a]**

**A Bat Kol** (a Divine Voice) came forth and said to Moses:

You have but a moment of time left to live.

What did Moses do?

He took a scroll and wrote down the Ineffable Name, and also "Sefer HaYashar," and he went to Joshua's tent to give him the scroll.

- A. In reacting the way that he did, Moses' response might well be viewed as a partial acceptance of the inevitable decree. 17  
Moreover, though the placement of this sub-section is structurally questionable, it seems that Moses reacts, not only to the events which have recently transpired, but to those about to occur. In

this light, Moses' response constitutes the perfect transition, foreshadowing the command the Holy One has yet to give: "Bring Me the soul of Moses."

- B. The Petirat Moshe supplemental text draws the dramatic picture of Moses' last act, which our Choice text also intimates. As the potentially last "official" function of Moses, the transmission of the Ineffable Name symbolized the "Shalsholet Hakabalah" the first link in the 'Chain of Tradition.'

Moses was handing down, not the Torah alone, but the authority to be The teacher of Torah to the people Israel. Following this transmission in Petirat Moshe 2, the people seek out Moses and approach him, saying:

"Master, teach us some Torah." Moses replies: "I no longer have the authority." Israel retorts: "But we won't let you leave."

At that moment, a Divine Voice came forth and said:

"You shall learn from Joshua, who received the Torah from Moses" (P. Moshe 2, 367a). Passing on the Ineffable Name gave Joshua Divine sanction as the teacher and leader of Israel. <sup>17</sup>

Why then, in our Choice version, is the transmission of the Ineffable Name incomplete? Was Joshua not given Divine authority? Did God not choose him as Moses' successor?

It seems, rather, that the Name was intentionally left unfinished. I would suggest that the message lies in the very nature of the transmission itself. Moses was the first link in the chain; he alone received the Torah directly from the Holy One. His was a firsthand experience; he was God's instrument of revelation.

Hereafter, something was lost in the translation; the vitality of God's Presence in every word of the text could no longer be felt. And if the kabbalistic notion is correct, that every word of Torah, taken together, forms one long Name of the Divine, then, as a result of the Shalsholet Hakabalah, the key to its correct pronunciation was lost forever.

The underlying message is clear. As we are distanced from the event, we lose the sense of immediacy and vitality that once made it live. Sinai, for us, can never be the same.

- C. Though our Choice text does not include it, Moses is also to have written a "Book of Song" on this last scroll. However, the fact that one reference entitles the piece "Sefer Hashir", while the other identifies it as "Sefer Hayashar" is problematic. Ginzberg clarifies the contradiction, explaining that through a scribal error, "shir" became "yashar." <sup>19</sup> At any rate, the "Book of Song" is said to be synonymous with the poetic piece in Deut 32. (cf. Deut Rabbah 11:10): "And Moses came and spoke all the words of this song to the people..." (Deut 32:44) Why, of all things, was such a piece included, along with the Ineffable Name, in the scroll given to Joshua to initiate the transition of leadership?

In effect, this was Moses' final admonition to Israel, one which epitomized both the failings of the past and the challenge for the future. More than that, this warning to the people constituted a reaffirmation of the "b'rit," the mutually binding agreement of God and Israel. As the people faced the change of administrations, which was imminent, and the natural doubt which would accompany the loss of their leader, it was of extreme importance that their ultimate faith, their commitment to the Holy One, not be shaken. The Book of Song would serve Joshua as the flag of his administration, the foundation of his leadership, the 'battle cry' which would guide the people in their conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.

**Section IV:**  
**The Taking of Moses' Soul**

**SECTION IVa: The Taking of Moses' Soul; Sammael and the Archangels**

**The Holy One said to Gabriel:**

**Go and bring Me the soul of Moses!**

**Gabriel replied:**

**Master of the Universe,**

**How will I be able to witness the death and retrieve the soul of  
one who is equal in stature to sixty myriads?**

**He said to Michael:**

**Go!....**

**But he responded in the same fashion.**

**He said to Sangazel: 20**

**Prince of the world, go and bring Me the soul of Moses!**

**Sangazel replied:**

**Master of the Universe,**

**By way of Your command, I served as his teacher, and he was my  
student. How could I now witness his very death?**

---

**[Deut Rabbah 11:10]**

**At that hour, God said to Gabriel:**

**Gabriel, go and bring Moses' soul back.**

**He, however, replied:**

**Master of the Universe, how can I witness the death of him who  
is equal to sixty myriads, and how can I behave harshly to one  
who possesses such qualities.**

**Then God said to Michael:**

**Go and bring back Moses' soul.**

**But he replied:**

**Master of the Universe, I was his teacher, and he my pupil,  
and I cannot therefore witness his death.**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 367a]**

**The Holy One said to Michael and Gabriel:**

**Go and bring back the soul of Moses.**

**Gabriel replied:**

**How can I take the soul of one who is equal to sixty myriads...**

**Michael wept.**

**Thereupon, God asked the same of Zangazel.**

**Zangazel responded:**

**Master of the Universe, I was his teacher...**

- A. The overall message of this sub-section is clear and powerful indeed. The angels' refusal to take part in the death of Moses attests to his greatness, his unique status on earth. Though no human being is beyond death (Deut 32:39), Moses is above death by 'normal' means. Tradition relates that there were indeed six different angels who could execute the death of an individual.<sup>21</sup> In each of the versions, Gabriel was summoned first, probably since his was the task of taking the souls of kings and princes.<sup>22</sup> Gabriel's inability to even consider the task adds to Moses' stature; he was above all earthly kings. In fact, the nature of the angels' responses depict Moses as one of their own, a quasi-Divine being, an "angel" in his own right.<sup>23</sup>**
- B. The two parallel texts give us a greater insight into our Choice sub-section in question. Michael's response varies from silence to weeping to words. Gabriel's response, which remains constant throughout the versions, is expanded in Deut Rabbah, which more specifically defines "the one who is equal to sixty myriads" as 'the one who possesses such unique qualities.' Of greater significance is the conclusion of Gabriel's response in the Deut Rabbah parallel. Apparently, the angels knew that taking Moses' soul would be no simple matter. Any angel who agreed to undertake this task should anticipate a struggle, and ready himself to "deal harshly" with the "servant of the Lord." This bit of textual foreshadowing, combined with the immediate**

response of Sammael in the sub-section which follows, attests to Moses' power, which was surely known to the hosts of heaven.

- C. The picture of Sangazel/Zangazel/Zagzagel as Moses' teacher, (as cited in the parallel text on page 36, Petirat Moshe 2, 367a) in turn, depicts God as the loving parent, preparing His child for life in the world, by securing for him the best possible education.<sup>24</sup> Once again, the question of Moses' right to privileged treatment arises. Does the life that he led, the special education he received, not merit unique consideration by God in the face of his death? Was Moses' vision of Divine justice not molded by the special relationship which God chose to form with him? [This key issue is dealt with as Section IV continues to develop, and a compromise position, of sorts, is reached in Section IVc.]

#### **SECTION IVa: (Part 2)**

**God said to Sammael:**

**Go and bring Me back the soul of Moses!**

**Immediately, the wicked one rejoiced with great fervor.**

**Then, clothing himself with instruments of anger, girding himself with his sword and enveloping himself with ruthlessness, he went out to get Moses.**

**When he saw Moses writing the Ineffable Name, his image shining bright as the sun, as he resembled an angel of the Lord of hosts,**

**Sammael thought to himself:**

**Its true what the angels of old have said.**

**We are not capable of taking the soul of Moses.**

As Sammael looked at Moses, his eyes were blinded by the brilliance (shine) of Moses' eyes.

When Moses noticed Sammael opposing him, he said to him:

Sammael, Sammael, there is no peace for you from my God, nor to any of the wicked like you (Isa 57:21).

Why are you standing opposite me?

Get out of here, or I'll chop off your head!

Sammael was immediately overcome with fear, trembling as a birthing woman, as he gently/tenderly said to Moses:

Why are you so angry my master? Give me your soul.

Moses said to him:

On whose authority?

Sammael replied:

By the authority of the One who sent me, the King of Kings who created you and all of creation.

Moses said to him:

God forbid that you are a creation of the Holy One, that I should turn my soul over to you!

Then Sammael said:

But the souls of all living beings have been entrusted to me since the time of Creation.

Moses said to him:

Am I not indeed greater than other people,  
since I have a greater share of Divine Truth than you,  
or any other living being ?(!)



As he saw Moses...sparks of fire issued forth from his mouth,...  
his words brilliant as the sun...

As Moses lifted his eyes, Sammael was immediately blinded by  
the glory of Moses (his countenance), and he fell on his face.  
Fear gripped him, as a birthing woman, and he was unable to  
utter a word until Moses first opened his mouth to speak.

[Deut Rabbah 11:10]

Now before Sammael even showed himself to Moses,  
Moses knew of his coming, and when Sammael caught sight of  
Moses trembling, fear took hold of him, as of a birthing woman,  
and he had not the audacity to speak to Moses, until Moses said  
to him: "There is no peace..." (Isa 57:21).

[Deut Rabbah 11:10]

...Moses said to him:

You shall not take away my soul!

Sammael then replied:

The souls of all who come into this world are delivered into my  
hands.

Whereupon Moses retorted:

But I have greater strength than all who (have ever) come  
into this world. <sup>25</sup>

- A. The alternate Petirat Moshe selection is much more extensive in  
its description of Moses' brilliance. Indeed, here Sammael is  
blinded, not by Moses' "radiance" alone, but by his "glory."  
This parallel elevates Moses even above his portrayal in of our  
Choice sub-section, as Sammael's reaction to Moses' gaze attests.  
Sammael "fell on his face;" the Angel of Death prostrated himself  
before a 'mere' creature of flesh and blood. Moreover, Sammael  
lost his own power of speech; the glory of Moses rendered the  
"wicked one" mute. Clearly, this parallel further highlights the  
message of our Choice sub-section: the power of Moses

transcends even that of the angels; his "glory" is part and parcel of the "Divine Glory" itself.

- B.** In contrast, Deut Rabbah raises some key distinctions which point to a less deified image of Moses, the man. Moses was aware that the Angel of Death would soon call. Was this due to his great powers of "prophecy," or rather was Moses a man close to death, sensing and looking towards the inevitable which awaited him? Sammael is not blinded by Moses' radiance, as in the Choice version, but rather is overwhelmed at the sight of Moses' "trembling," the very human response of an aged leader. Such a picture of Moses, which is in direct contrast to that of of Petirat Moshe, underscores the quasi-divine, fully invincible image which the Choice version paints of Israel's founding father. Taken together, the two extremes present Moses as the consummate leader, an intermingling of divinity and humanity, a balance of God's majesty and his own humility. (See note 23 on "Ish HaElohim" for an extended discussion of Moses as the 'perfect' human being.)
- C.** It is exceedingly clear that Moses perceives himself to be superior, not only to all other people, but to the Angel of Death himself.<sup>26</sup> Whereas, in Deut Rabbah, Moses insists that he is endowed with greater "strength" than all humanity, it is only in our Choice version that Moses elevates himself above the hosts of heaven, claiming to possess a greater share of "Divine truth." Quite a claim, yet from this perspective, one begins to understand the 'rational basis' for Moses' plea for justice. The leader of Israel, having experienced the Holy One as no other being, should be treated with at least the same consideration as the angels on high, who operate in both the upper and the lower realms in a state of life eternal. The nature of his self-proclaimed greatness served as the foundation of his protest, and his unwillingness to die. After all, how could a "lesser being" take his soul? The nature of Moses' actual death, as described in section IVd, lends support to his claim and to the relative veracity of his self-image.

**SECTION IVa: (Part 3)**

**Sammael asked:**

**What is the source of your (great) power?**

**Moses said:**

**Don't you know that I am the son of Amram.**

**I came forth from my mother already circumcised, they did not touch me with the (circumsision) knife, my father had no need to do so.**

**I am the one who decreed the ten plagues upon Pharoah and Egypt, and I brought Israel out from their midst.**

**I am the one who split the sea and drowned Egypt within it.**

**Where were you that you did not take their souls?**

**I am the one who turned the waters of Marah sweet, and it was I who ascended to heaven and spoke to God, face to face. And I am the one who received the Torah from the right hand of the Holy One.**

**How numerous are the wonders and miracles which I performed!**

**I am the one who went to war with Sihon and Og, the two mightiest warriors in the world, who were born at the time of the flood, yet the waters did not even reach their ankles because of their height. And during their battle, I caused the sun and the moon to stand still in the horizon, as I struck them with my staff and killed them.**

**And in my youth I walked when I was just three days old, I opened my mouth and spoke with my mother and father, and even the mother's milk which I drank was intoxicated.**

At three months I prophecied, predicting that I would receive the Torah from the right hand of the Holy One.

At six months I entered Pharoah's palace and removed the crown from his head, to hint at what I would do to him in the future.

I brought sixty myriads out from under his control as all of Egypt looked on. I smote the Prince of Egypt with my staff and divided the sea of reeds into twelve paths.

I carved the two stone tablets with my own hands as the Holy One wrote the Ten Commandments upon them.

I ascended to heaven and dwelt beneath the Throne of Glory for forty days and forty nights, on three different occasions. One hundred and twenty days and nights (in all), I did not eat any food nor drink water, just as the ministering angels.

I was covered by the Divine Presence and I revealed secrets to man. I received the Torah from the Holy One and I recorded the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot as He spoke.

[Deut Rabbah 11:10]

...When I was eighty years old I wrought signs and wonders in Egypt...And I ascended heaven and trod out a path there, and engaged in battle with the angels...and prevailed over the heavenly hosts.

[Petirat Moshe 2, 363b-364a]

The Holy One said to him:

Are you like Me, causing death and restoring life?

...Moreover, I spoke with you directly,...I have no need to eat or

drink, and I made you similar to Me. Further, I am God and you are "god" (Elohim), as it is said: "I have made you a "god" unto Pharaoh." (Exod 7:1)

...I sent you to Pharaoh...and I gave you the Ten Commandments. I covered you in My cloud (of Glory), I gave you the two stone tablets and you broke them. I gave you My Torah as an inheritance.... I made you unique in this world,...honoring you over and above the seventy elders.

Moses responded, thanking God for it all, saying:

Master of the Universe,

You made me great....The whole world knows how You magnified and honored me....There is none like You; no one compares to You.

---

- A. Moses' pretentious presentation is quite a retort to Sammael's simple question. Structurally, we are given two quasi-parallel lists which are very similar in content, spanning the lifetime of Moses. The second listing, "In my youth," confirms that Moses was like no other prophet or leader of Israel. His unique status among all humankind was predetermined by God. The key phrase of the first listing, "I'm the One who," reveals the extreme nature of Moses' claim. Seeking not merely to show his great strength, but his sizeable share of Divine Truth, Moses portrays himself as much more than God's messenger. Indeed, this dual listing gives the Holy One little credit for the achievements of Moses. The "servant of the Lord" seems to lose perspective, attempting to take full responsibility for the wonders he performed without acknowledging their ultimate Source. In defending his claim on life, Moses places himself above the heavenly host, seemingly on par with the Eternal.
- B. The Deut Rabbah listing duplicates the contents of our Choice version, reorganizing the material into a more chronological progression. The key phrase "I'm the One who....," which highlights the self-elevating nature of Moses' response in our Choice sub-section, does not appear here, thus lessening the severity of Moses' claim. Still, the unique material in this parallel attests to the fact that Moses saw himself as superior to the angels, God's unique creation of both the lower and the upper realms.

- C. In the Petirat Moshe parallel, God rhetorically poses the same basic question which Moses answers in responding to Sammael: Are you (Moses) like Me? In essence, Moses' reply and God's response are one and the same: Yes! Here, however, God is fully recognized as the Source of Moses' greatness. If Moses was similar to the Holy One in any way, it was because God deemed it so. Moses' life-works, his greatest personal and communal achievements, are viewed as a gift from God. In this alternate text, Moses too acknowledges God as the source of his greatness, affirming that all humanity recognizes this basic truth. Moses' closing words in this parallel passage: "None can compare to you", stand in sharp contrast to the Choice sub-section in question, presenting a picture of humility and selflessness, a far cry from the Moses who places himself above all creation, earthly or divine. The diametrically opposed images present a "before" and an "after" picture of the leader of Israel, attempting to deal with his mortality. In coming to terms with his own death, Moses struggled to assert his uniqueness, hoping to avoid the inevitable. Once he recognized the finality of the decree, Moses could affirm his faith in the ultimate Source of all being, and accept the death that awaited him.

#### **SECTION IVa: (Part 4)**

**Moses continued:**

How then could you, o wicked one, possibly take from me  
my pure soul, which was implanted within me by the Lord of all  
souls, in holiness and sanctity.

Go away from me!

You have no right to remain in the place where I dwell.

**You have no right to stand where I'm standing.**

**You have no right to speak here with me.**

**Flee from me, for I shall not give you me soul!**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 367b]**

**(Moses closes his response to Sammael with the following:)**

**...Can it really be so that anyone in this world is as mighty as me?**

**You wicked one, flee from my presence!**

**[Deut Rabah 11:10]**

**(Moses closes his response to Sammael with the following:)**

**...Is there anyone amongst humankind who is able to do likewise?**

**Be gone from here, you wicked one.**

**Go! Flee from before me! I will not give my soul to you!**

- A. Both parallels pose the rhetorical question which Moses has just finished answering by reviewing his life-accomplishments. There is no one on earth as mighty, as powerful, as Moses. Why then does our Choice version not include such a similiar statement ? Perhaps, it has no need to do so, considering the nature of Moses' reply. The parallels assert the greatness of Moses' life, while the Choice text goes one step beyond, affirming the holiness of his soul. The parallels demand that the Angel of Death flee from Moses, since he refuses to submit. The choice text denies Sammael's very right to stand in Moses' presence. Moses reacts to Sammael as a King to a palace guard, with impatience, disrespect, even disdain. The implication, once again, is that Moses stands above the angels amidst the Divine hierarchy, in purity and sanctity, and this superior status assumedly puts him beyond the reach of Sammael's icy sword.**

**SECTION IVb: The Taking of Moses' Soul: Confrontation with Sammael**

When the Angel of Death, who is Sammael, heard all of this from Moses, he was greatly astonished and frightened, and he returned to report to the Mighty One.

Immediately the Holy One grew angry and said to him:

Go and bring Me the soul of Moses!

For if you do not, I will excommunicate you;

I'll annul your angelic status and confer it upon others!

Sammael replied to the Holy One:

It would truly be terrible if these things, which are in Your power, came to be. If you said to me: Go to Gehinnom and switch the upper and lower realms; bring down that which is up, and up that which is down below, in a moment's time I'd descend. I would not delay in fulfilling Your command. But I haven't the ability to stand up against the son of Amram.

Then the Holy One asked:

But why?

Sammael responded:

Because he resembles the angels of Your mighty chariot. Sparks, lightning and fire issue forth from his mouth when he speaks to me, just as they come from the mouths of the seraphim who exist to praise, glorify, exalt and magnify Your Name. The brilliance of his image is like the glow of Your Divine Presence. <sup>27</sup> I beg of You, please do not send me unto him, for I cannot stand up to him.

Immediately, the Holy One became more angry with him and said:

Go and bring Moses' soul back to Me!



And as he was leaving, the Holy One said to him (Sammael):

From the midst of Gehinnom you were created, o wicked one, and so unto Gehinnom shall you return. At first, you went out from before Me with great joy to take the soul of Moses. When you witnessed his excellence and greatness, you said: "I don't have the ability to stand up to him." It was perfectly clear from the start, that if you did not bring Moses' soul, you'd return to My presence in shame and rebuke.

---

[Petirat Moshe 2, 361b-362a]

"And this is the blessing wherewith Moses, the 'man of God' (Ish HaElohim) blessed the people Israel before his death" (Deut 33:1)

R. Shmuel b. Nahami said:

...'Ish HaElohim' signifies Moses, and 'Ish HaElohim' signifies the Holy One, for it is written: "The Lord is a man of war..." (Exod 15:3). But why so? In order to fulfill that which it (the Torah text) says: "...And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccl 4:12).

[Deut Rabbah 11:4]

R. Tanhuma said:

If Moses is referred to as 'God' why is he also termed 'man;' and if 'man', why also 'God?'...<sup>28</sup>

When he fled from before Pharaoh he was as man, but when he drowned Pharaoh (in the sea), he was as 'God'.

Another explanation:

When he went up to heaven, he was as man. And in what respect? Compared with the angels who are made entirely of fire.

When he came down from heaven, he was as 'God.' How so?

For it says: "And when Aaron and the people Israel saw Moses, the skin of his face glowing radiant, they were afraid to come near to him." (Exod 34:30)

---

**A. Deut Rabah, Yalkut Shimoni and P. Moshe 3 exclude any such explanation of Sammael's fear. On the contrary, the Angel of Death, after returning to report to the Holy One and receiving God's charge again, wastes no time in confronting Moses, this time ready for battle. The inclusion, in the Choice version, of Sammael's period of questioning, reinforces our perception of Moses as a uniquely superior being. Round one clearly belongs to Moses, and Sammael seems ready to concede altogether. In the face of Moses' greatness, Sammael loses all sense of duty. Even the threats of the Holy One, a loss of position and possible excommunication, don't seem to motivate him. Only after several exchanges and the threat of eternal exile, does God convince the Angel of Death to carry out his mission. The message is clear: Moses enjoys special status among all God's creatures, akin to that of the Holy One Himself. The thematic extension of such a statement revives the perpetual question: Is not The bearer of Divine Truth entitled to life eternal, or at least an extended earthly existence? Is death truly the common denominator, the equalizer of all, the common destiny of rich or poor, weak or strong alike? In part, the answer lies in the manner in which the midrash develops, in particular, the nature of Moses' death <sup>29</sup> and the eulogy he receives from God and all Creation. <sup>30</sup>**

**B. What specific status does the midrash intend to confer upon Moses by way of the discourse of Sammael? Why does the Angel of Death insist that he cannot stand against the might of Moses? Though Moses is an earthly creature, he resembles the angels of the Divine chariot. His image is blinding, as the glow of the Divine Presence itself. Sammael elevates Moses above himself, indeed, above all members of the heavenly host, perhaps confirming Moses' own claim that his share of Divine Truth is greater than that of any other. The key to understanding Moses' status might well be the title which is bestowed upon him in his last official act as the leader of Israel: 'Ish HaElohim.' The two supplemental texts attempt to address the nature of this title. Deut Rabbah elevates Moses above all humanity, yet seems to put him just under the angels in the Divine hierarchy. In the**

presence of man, he is as 'Elohim,' yet before the angels, he is 'Ish'; thus the dual title. Petirat Moshe 2, however, does not distinguish between the two names, 'Ish' and 'Elohim', and this, I believe, is crucial. It is not Moses alone who is 'Ish HaElohim,' but God as well. The two terms fuse into one Name, thus bringing to fruition the full weight of the proof-text employed above: "And the threefold cord is not easily broken" (Eccl 4:12).

The unique collaboration between Divine and human forces combines to produce Torah, the strand which binds both parts of the cord together tightly, as one. No other being, whether man or angel, has ever accomplished this feat: the perfect union of God and Creation. Thus, the title, 'Ish HaElohim,' does indeed elevate Moses as "master of the Angels".<sup>31</sup> Moreover, this name connotes the unique status that Moses was afforded by God. Having achieved the ultimate balance, Moses was the perfect being. "The perfect man is neither God nor man, but something between the uncreated, God, and the perishable, man."<sup>32</sup>

Sammael likens Moses to the Seraphim, to the angels who exist so as to magnify the Eternal One, for his life has been a continuous affirmation of God's Glory.

So, too, Sammael implies that Moses resembles the cherubim, the four-faced, winged creatures, possessing both human and divine attributes, who carry the Divine Throne. For indeed, Moses' image is that human form which sustains God's glory, representing the human ideal of spiritual achievement.<sup>33</sup> Moses is the tsaddik extraordinaire, the combination of angelic holiness and human perfection, never before equalled by another living being. In this light, Sammael's anxiety is easy to understand. The thematic concern which it raises, however, is not. How should God deal with an individual of such magnitude? Since there is no precedent in this case, could the Holy One not make an exception in executing the death of Moses? At this point in the text, it seems that God either underestimates the powers of Moses, or, recognizing Moses' greatness, (which He Himself bestowed), feels that the natural course of death must nevertheless be followed. In either case, it is Sammael who becomes God's guage for finding the appropriate method by which to end Moses' life, as we shall see in the remainder of Section IV.

**SECTION IVb: (Part 2)**

Immediately, Sammael drew his sword from its sheath, and stood up against Moses in anger, saying to himself:

I must kill him or he will kill me.

When Moses saw him, he grew angry and, with the staff in his hand, upon which the Ineffable Name was engraved, he beat Sammael until he ran from his presence. Then Moses pursued him, and, catching him, he struck him, taking away his crown of glory. He (Moses) blinded him, sending him off in shame and rebuke.

It was when Moses had nearly killed him that a heavenly voice came forth, saying:

Do not harm him further, for mankind needs him.

[Deut Rabbah 11:10]

(After the same basic exchange between Sammael and Moses, whereby Moses drives the Angel of Death away, strips him of his honor and then blinds him, the text continues:)

Thus all of this did Moses achieve, but at the end of that moment, a heavenly voice was heard declaring:

The end, the time of your death has arrived.

[Ginzberg, Vol III, pg 114: Midrash Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 20, 98a]

Moses thus stayed forty days in heaven to learn the Torah from God. But when he started to descend and beheld the hosts of the angels of terror...he forgot all that he had learned. For this reason, God called the angel Yefefiyah,...and all the other angels came too, bestowing upon him a remedy as well as the secret of the Holy Names, as contained in the Torah....Even the Angel of Death gave him a remedy against death.

- A. Sammael is soundly defeated in "round two," as Moses proves the superiority which he has been claiming all along. In truth, Sammael was destined to lose the battle. He convinced himself to pursue Moses as a last resort. Sammael's sword was no match for Moses' staff; it was never intended to be. The Pesikta Rabbati selection would seem to imply that which our Choice version affirms: Moses possessed more than sufficient power to combat the Angel of Death. Indeed, it was as if the Holy One was sending Sammael off to face certain defeat. Then why send him in the first place? In a way, this was Moses' final test before God could intervene in the affairs of his impending death. More than that, the irony of the "fight" underscores the message which the text wishes to convey to us, as well as to Moses himself. It was none other than God's Name which defeated God's emissary; both the sword and the staff were His weapons. There is but One Source of power and might, sanctity and holiness in the universe. Forgetting this, Moses temporarily lost his sense of perspective on life (and death). Perhaps the physical struggle with the Angel of Death would help to refocus Moses' vision.
- B. The "bat Kol," the heavenly voice, intercedes at the same time in both our Choice version and this Deut Rabah parallel, yet the message which it conveys differs greatly in each text. The Choice version underscores the power and status of Moses. Only the Holy One could save Sammael from Moses' hand. The parallel text, informing Moses that the moment of death is at hand, seems to imply the opposite, that his power was just not enough in the face of the inevitable decree. None could save Moses from the Hand of the Eternal. In either case, both instances serve the same basic function, initiating an opportunity for Moses to speak directly with the Holy One. The transition is a natural one. Interestingly enough, the nature of the "Bat Kol's" response sets the tenor for Moses' plea before God, which directly follows.

**SECTION IVc: The Final Plea; The Final Act**

**Having found an opportunity to speak, Moses said to the Holy One:**

**Master of the Universe,**

**Remember that day when You said to me:**

**"Go forth and I'll send you unto Pharaoh..." (Exod 3:10)**

**And remember that day when I ascended Mount Sinai and remained in Your Presence forty days and nights. I didn't eat any food or drink water until I received the Torah from You and gave it to the people Israel.**

**I beg of You, do not deliver me into the hand of the Angel of Death. Rather, here I am in Your Presence. Do what is good in Your sight with Your servant.**

**The Holy One replied:**

**Do not be afraid.**

**I myself will take care of you and bury you.**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 368a]**

**Moses began to pray, saying:**

**Master of the Universe,**

**Remember how You revealed Yourself to me in the bush, and remember how You brought me up to the heavens, and I didn't eat for forty days and nights. (?)**

**Gracious and Merciful One, do not deliver me into the hands of the Angel of Death.**

**The Holy One replied:**

**I have accepted your prayer; I Myself will take care of burying you.**

**[Deut Rabbah 11:10]**

**(After the same basic plea for God to remember the uniqueness of "His servant", Moses concludes, saying:)**

**...I implore You, do not hand me over into the hand of the Angel of Death.**

**Thereupon, a heavenly voice was heard saying to him:  
Fear not, I myself will attend to you and your burial.**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 362a/Deut Rabah 11:7] <sup>34</sup>**

**What was the special merit of Moses that the Holy One should busy Himself (with his burial)?**

**Because when God went down to Egypt and the time for Israel's redemption had arrived, everyone was busy gathering silver and gold. But Moses was circling the city, and for three days and nights was labouring to find Joseph's coffin, since the Israelites could not leave Egypt without Joseph's remains, as it is said: "And Joseph made the children of Israel swear, saying..." (Gen 50:25)**

**As Moses was searching for the coffin, tired and weary, he met Serah the daughter of Asher, who said to him:**

**What are you looking for?**

**He said to her:**

**I am searching for Joseph's coffin.**

**She said to him:**

**Come with me (to the Nile) and I'll show you where it is.**

**He went along with her and she said to him:**

**In this place lies Joseph's coffin. The magicians made it weigh five hundred talents and sealed it (and cast it in the river).**

**Thus they have spoken to Pharaoh: "The Israelites will never be able to leave Egypt..."**

**Moses cried out:**

**Joseph, Joseph you know that the time of Israel's redemption has come, but you made them swear not to leave Egypt until they had your remains. So now, show respect for the God of Israel, don't delay their redemption. Arise now from the depths!**

**Immediately, Joseph's coffin began to break through the waters and floated upon the surface. Moses took it, placing it upon his shoulders, and went on his way. The Israelites carried all of their silver and gold and Egyptian clothes. Moses thought nothing of this, except for how happy he was to be carrying Joseph's coffin.**

**The Holy One said to Moses:**

**Moses! Truly, this is no small thing which you have done,**

(this act of kindness is a great thing!) Because you were not concerned with silver and gold, so too shall I be the One, when the time arrives, to take care of your death (and burial), rather than anyone else in the world.

---

- A. The primary message of this sub-section is contained in the one statement that is unique to this particular text. Only in the Choice version of Petirat Moshe, does Moses plainly and openly submit to the Will of the Holy One. After reminding God of their special relationship in the past, Moses puts all of his faith for the future in God. Curtailing all pleas for an altered vision of what he perceives to be "divine" justice, Moses yields to a Higher Authority, the only One he knows he can trust. To be certain, this involved a great degree of compromise on the part of Moses, who had to adapt his perception of God and man to fit the Divine Plan. God too had to compromise, by agreeing that no intermediaries would be involved in Moses' death. The Angel of Death would not come near to Moses; only the Holy One would take his "pure soul."

The thematic structure which was set forth at the outset of the midrash is here reinforced, and seen as a part of the total picture. The greatness of Moses is apparent, yet it must be viewed in perspective. Even the "Servant of the Lord" was subject to the finite limits of human mortality. Death is the equalizer, yet the nature of Moses' death maintains his special status among God's creation. In the end, the Divine Plan is upheld. God reigns supreme as the sole author of life and death. We all share a common destiny, as players in the Divine Drama which only the Master of the Universe can control, and this, in turn, points to the ultimate order which rules the workings of our world.

- B. Note that in the Deut Rabbah parallel text, it is not God, but a heavenly voice which assures Moses that God would take care of his burial. Though the distinction is slight, it could indicate the reluctance of the text to attribute the promise directly to God. Perhaps the Holy One does not wish to enter into any more oaths which He might have difficulty in ultimately fulfilling.



- C. Why should God take care of Moses' death and burial?**  
 How did it happen that Moses would come to merit such special care? Was the fact that Moses was willing to compromise his position enough for the Holy One? The rabbis sought additional justification, and their explanation contains some key insights into the nature of Moses' death and the "mutually beneficial arrangement" that the Holy One and Moses finally settled upon. This midrashic extension is laced with subtle irony. Moses takes Joseph's oath very seriously; it is, for him, a matter of life and death, of survival or destruction. Thus, he goes to great lengths to fulfill the promise (cf Gen 50:25). On the other hand, Moses views God's oath as less than binding; it would be just fine for the Holy One to break His vow, in order that Moses might live and enter the land (cf Deut 32:49-52). Moses' vision of justice is selective, relative to his subjective relation to the matter in question. More ironic still is the thought that Moses' fulfillment of the Israel's oath to Joseph prompted God to do likewise; to uphold his initial vow and to see personally to the death of His "servant." Structurally, the parallelism is evident. As Moses took care of Joseph's remains, so God would take care of his. The critical difference is the final resting place. While Joseph enters the Promised Land to be buried with his fathers and mothers, the bones of Moses are left behind in the wilderness. Moses negated his own plea to God to see Israel and live, by fulfilling the plea of his forebear, thus affording Joseph an eternal resting place in the land which he would never enter.
- D. The text captures the irony of the situation in a short exchange between Moses and Israel, near the close of the midrash.**  
 "Moses said to Israel: I beg of you, when you enter the land of Israel, remember (to take) my bones/remains.  
 But Israel said: Poor Moses b. Amram! He ran in front of us as a steed, yet his bones must stay in the wilderness" (P. Moshe 2, 367a). Moses spent his life leading the people, in conquest as well as defeat, and yet, in their hour of greatest triumph, he could no longer lead, nor even follow the people. The community had to take precedence, even over the personal fulfillment of the leader's life-dream. Such is the nature of leadership, and it is this very tension which remains as the basic underlying motif, which runs throughout the Choice version.

- E. The great importance of "Kevod ha'mayt," honoring the dead, is one of the prime messages which the rabbis derive from this sub-section. In consenting to ward off the Angel of Death, and taking responsibility to see to Moses' burial, God is performing a primary mitzvah. Indeed, this was the greatest possible honor that the Holy One could bestow upon His faithful "servant." How much more so should we, as God's creation, strive to do likewise? <sup>35</sup>

#### **SECTION 10c: (Part2)**

Immediately, Moses fell upon his face and began to pray, crying out in supplication:

Master of the Universe,  
with the quality of mercy You created Your world,  
and through the quality of mercy You direct Your world.  
Treat me with Divine mercy.

Thereupon, a heavenly voice went forth and said:

Moses, Moses! Do not fear, for your righteousness preceeds you,  
thus God's Glory shall gather you in.

---

[Petirat Moshe 2, 368a]

Immediately Moses sanctified himself, as the Seraphim,  
then the Holy One revealed Himself from the Heavens on High, to  
take away the soul of Moses.

When Moses saw the Holy One, he fell upon his face and said:

Master of the Universe, with the quality of mercy You created the  
world...so treat me with Divine mercy.

The Holy One said to him:

I shall go before you; I shall lead the way.

- A. This interchange between the "Bat Kol" and Moses functions as a key transition into the next section of the Midrash, the departure of Moses' soul. One must ask, however, why does Moses question God, even after the Divine promise? Is it that he is doubting God's word? Most probably, it is not God but rather himself whom he is questioning. Are his life-deeds worthy of God's special attention? Though his faithfulness has waivered at certain points in Israel's saga,<sup>36</sup> has he remained true enough to be deserving of such a special privilege? The answer which he receives serves as a personal reassurance. Only God's Glory can gather in the brilliance of the glory of Moses. He is indeed one of the true "hasidim." (cf Ps 50:5)

The self-doubt which Moses expresses herein offsets the self-elevating defense which he mounted in pleading for God to alter His decree. In the end, Moses' humility shines through, and it is precisely that which enables him to achieve such a level of excellence. Once again, the importance of total life-perspective is apparent. Moses is one of the few who truly achieved and ultimately maintained the balance, in his role as leader of the community of Israel.

- B. It is noteworthy that Petirat Moshe 2 and 3 place this plea for mercy directly after the Holy One is revealed to Moses, rather than following God's vow concerning the execution of Moses' death and burial. In this light, the passage is not so much a reassurance of self-worth for Moses, as it is representative of the very human fear which he openly expresses in the face of death itself. So, too, God's response supports such a view, for in essence, the Holy One is saying: 'As you lead Israel into the wilderness, keeping them safe from real harm, I will lead you into the wilderness of the unknown which lies beyond earthly existence.' In death, as in life, God will continue to serve as Moses' Guide. Perhaps then, the message of the tale, "the Teacher of the King's Son", does not hold true after all.<sup>37</sup> The powerful teacher in the parable, was humbled in the face of death, begging for mercy just as the poor and the lowly. From this tale, it would seem that all people are equal in birth as in death. Yet, as the nature of the arrangement made by God concerning the death of Moses attests, we do not all share a

common destiny, nor are we all truly equal in the face of death. (Sections U and U1a will serve to underscore this basic hypothesis.)

### **SECTION IVc: (Part 3)**

At that moment, the Divine Presence descended, together with the three angels; Gabriel, Michael and Sangazel.

Michael prepared Moses' bed, Gabriel spread a fine linen sheet underneath his head, and Sangazel did the same under his feet.

**[Deut Rabah 11:10]**

(After detailing the same tasks which were performed by the ministering angels, the text continues)

Michael stood at one side and Gabriel at the other side.

Then God said...

**[Targum Yerushalmi to Deut 34:5-6]**

Michael and Gabriel arranged Moses' bed, while Metatron, Yofiel and Yefefiyah placed him upon it.

- A. Any question concerning the definitive 'status' of Moses is settled by the actions of the Holy One and His retinue. As Moses served God throughout his life, the heavenly host now serves Moses, in preparing him for his death. In a sense, they are his "cheurah kaddishah", his communal burial society.

**B. Why is it that these specific angels accompany God ?**

At the outset of Section IVa, God asked each of them to go and retrieve Moses' soul, but they could not comply with the Divine request. Due to their respect and even reverence for Moses, they regarded themselves as incapable of performing such a monumental task. The Holy One has taken them along this time so as to show them "how its done." The Deut Rabbah parallel suggests this, painting the picture of God, the 'master surgeon,' and the angels, His assisting interns standing by to observe. The fact that the second parallel includes more angels who place the body upon the bier, adds to the unique status of Moses, in his death as during his life.

**SECTION IVc: (Part 4)**

**Then the Holy One was revealed to Moses and said:**

**Shut your eyes, one after the other; and he did.**

**Then He said:**

**Place your hands one upon the other; and he did.**

**And put your feet one next to the other.**

**Then, in an instant, the Holy One kissed Moses on his mouth,  
taking away his soul with the kiss.**

**As it is said:**

**"Thus Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there, in the land of  
Moab, according to the word of the Lord." (Deut 34:5)**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 368a]**

**(After God takes Moses' soul with a kiss, the text continues...)**

**Then the Holy One wept for him, and began to lament him, saying...**

**[Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra 17a]**

**Our Rabbis taught:**

There were six people over whom the Angel of Death had no dominion, namely: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Aaron and Miriam....Moses, Aaron and Miriam because it is written in connection with them: (That they died) by the "mouth" of the Lord.

**[Deut Rabbah 11:10; (also P. Moshe 2, 368a in shorter form)]**

Immediately, the Holy One called the soul of Moses from his body, saying to her:

My daughter, I have fixed the time of your stay in the body of Moses at one hundred and twenty years; now your end has come, leave, do not delay.

The soul then replied;

Master of the Universe,

I know that You are the God of all spirits, the souls of the dead and the living are in Your keeping. You have created and formed me within Moses' body for one hundred and twenty years.

Now, is there a body in all of the world more pure than that of Moses?...Therefore I love him and do not wish to leave.

Then God exclaimed:

Soul, leave now, do not delay! I shall raise you to the highest heavens and place you under My Throne of Glory, next to the seraphim, cherubim and the other hosts of angels.

Thereupon the soul replied:

...I implore You! Let me remain in the the body of Moses.

**[Deut Rabbah 11:5]**

**R. Isaac said:**

The soul of Moses put up a struggle in departing.

Moses questioned her, saying:

My soul, perhaps you think that the Angel of Death is seeking to gain dominion over you?

Whereupon she replied:

God will surely not permit it, (as it is said):

"You have delivered my soul from death..." (Ps 116:8).

Moses said to her:

Do you think, then, that they have tried to thrust you into the netherworld (She'ol)?

Whereupon she replied:

"And my feet from stumbling..." (Ps 116:8)

Then Moses asked:

And where are you destined to go?

She replied:

"I shall walk before the Lord in the land(s) of the living."

(Ps 116:9)

When Moses heard this, he gave her permission to leave.

- A. It is more than the uniqueness of Moses which this sub-section of our Choice version wishes to underscore. The gentle words of the Almighty, the manner in which the Holy One behaves, display the true love which God felt for His "faithful servant." Though the angels made the preparations for his bier, it was God alone who prepared the body. The parting scene is laden with emotion, picturing them as two intimate lovers, embracing for the last time. The addition of P. Moshe 2 stresses the emotional effect which Moses' death has upon the Eternal. God weeps at the reality of His loss. The Holy One, who caused the death of Moses, cries out in despair, realizing the gravity of the inevitable act which He has executed. In this light, the "kiss" may be viewed as the final act of union between the two, an appropriate end to that relationship which can never again be duplicated.
- B. What is the nature of death by a "kiss" from God? Playing on the phrase "al pi Adonai," "by the mouth of the Lord," Baba Batra intimates that these figures have avoided the Angel of Death, meriting the "kiss of death" from God. Indeed, this parallel cites six who have been singled out, suggesting that their life commitment to God and Israel have made them worthy of this special privilege. Seeking to explain the "kiss," Sifre Deut #357 suggests that it merely refers to a "painless death." Certainly Moses' death was painless, yet, I would favor the non-rationalistic understanding of the "kiss" as representative of the eternal bond between Moses and the Holy One.

- C. The two Deut Rabbah parallels, in dealing with the struggles of Moses' soul in leaving his body, point to the fact that any such reference is missing from our Choice text. Herein, God takes the soul of Moses without a struggle; the Holy One is in total control of the course of events. God is again portrayed as the sole author of life and death, the One who is beyond question or doubt. The Deut Rabah alternatives do, in fact, highlight certain key sub-themes which are present in our Choice text. The dialogue between Moses' soul and God borders on blasphemy, implying that Moses' purity surpasses that of the Divine Presence Itself. It is not merely that the soul tarries in departing, but that she would prefer to stay permanently with Moses, rather than leave and be exalted with God's Glory. The soul of Moses knows nothing purer than the body which has housed her all of these years. Such a tribute underscores the sanctity of Moses, a holiness which is akin to that of the Divine. The dialogue between Moses and his soul is intriguing. In this case, it is Moses who does not want his soul to depart. Utilizing Psalm 116 as a backdrop, Moses questions the destiny which awaits him beyond earthly existence. It is only after he establishes that, in some way, his soul will live on ("in the land of the living"), that he permits his soul to depart. This exchange raises one of Moses' greatest fears, one which he must resolve as the leader of Israel. Will his teachings, his leadership, his accomplishments continue after he is gone? Once he is assured that his life-works will grow and flourish, through God's guidance and the commitment of the people, he can die (and rest) in peace.



**Section II:**  
**The Eulogy of Moses**

# **SECTION V: The Eulogy of Moses**

Thereupon the angels cried for him and eulogized him, saying:

"Where is wisdom to be found, and what is the place of understanding?"

The Holy One said:

"Who shall rise up for me against the evil-doers?" (Ps 94:16)

The heavens wept for him, as they eulogized him, saying:

"The righteous one has perished from the earth." (Micah 7:2)

The earth wept for him, as it eulogized him, saying:

"The righteous and upright among us is no more." (Micah 7:2)

The sun and the moon wept for him, as they eulogized him, saying:

"For him did the (bush) burn among us..."

The stars and constellations wept for him, as they eulogized him, saying:

"...You fools, when will you understand,...the Lord knows the thoughts of men are but futile." (Ps 94:8,11)

The objects of Creation wept for him, as they eulogized him, saying:

"The righteous one has perished..." (Micah 7:2)

The Holy Spirit howled, saying:

"There will never again arise in Israel a prophet like Moses."

(Deut 34:10)

And when Joshua sought Moses but did not find him, he wept, saying:

"Save us, O Lord; O Lord, let us prosper." (Ps 118:25)

Israel cried out and eulogized him, saying:

"Where is our leader?"

The ministering angels eulogized him, saying:

"He executed the righteousness of the Lord,

**And His judgements with Israel." (Deut 33:21)**

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**[Petirat Moshe 2, 368a]**

**...Then the stars and the constellations, the sun and the moon, and the Holy Spirit all said:**

**"There shall never again arise in Israel a prophet like Moses."**

**(Deut 34:10)**

**Joshua looked for Moses but could not find him.**

**Then Metatron came before the Holy One and said:**

**Master of the Universe,**

**Moses was Yours in his life as in his death.**

**The Holy One said to Metatron:**

**It was not for Moses alone, rather, I have allowed Myself to be comforted, (on his account,) for all Israel; since, many times they angered Me, but he prayed for them (Israel) and appeased Me.**

**As it is said:**

**"He executed the justice of the Lord,  
and his (His) righteousness is with Israel." (Deut 33:21)**

**[Deut Rabbah 11:10]**

**...And when Joshua looked for his master but did not find him,  
he too wept, saying:**

**"Help Lord, for the godly man has perished;  
for the faithful are gone from among... men.(Ps 12:2)**

**And the ministering angels said:**

**"He executed the righteousness of the Lord,  
and His judgements with Israel." (Deut 33:21)**

**Still others said:**

**"He, (the righteous one) enters into peace,  
they rest in their beds, each one who follows the path of  
righteousness." (Isa 57:2)**

**"The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing..."(Prov 10:7)  
And his soul for life in the World to Come....**

**[Petirat Moshe 2, 365b-366a]**

**When Israel saw Joshua leading them, they all trembled and  
stood still in their tracks. The two of them went to the place of  
honor, by the golden throne, and Moses sat Joshua down**

against his will. When Israel saw this, they all cried.  
 Joshua also wept, saying (to himself):  
 Such greatness and honor; why me ?

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- A. The litany of eulogizing statements of our Choice version is the lengthiest of all the collections, attesting to the tremendous affect of the loss of Moses on the world. Every aspect of Creation is diminished by his death. Moses is portrayed as the epitome of righteousness, unique among humanity. The general tone of the citations expresses the fear that Moses' death brings. The responses of Joshua and Israel convey the sense of utter dread which strikes them at the thought of going on without their leader. Joshua immediately correlates the loss of Moses with the destruction of the people. Israel is in need of being saved. Israel's statement, too, implies that there is but one who can lead the people, and with his departure, they are now lost. The same feelings are conveyed in the third supplemental text, as Moses attempts to initiate the transition of leadership, publicly, for the first time. Not only does Israel weep at the thought of losing Moses, but Joshua too weeps, knowing that he cannot replace their leader, and his teacher. Petirat Moshe 2 answers Joshua's self doubt and Israel's hysteria, as well as the feelings they expressed in the eulogizing statements above, by inserting a short dialogue between Moses and the people towards the end of the midrash. (367a) "Israel questioned Moses: Master, if you leave us, what will become of us? Moses replied: When I was with you, the Holy One was with you....And if you will trust in Him, He will surely fulfill your desires in the future..." Moses, the true teacher of Torah, gives Israel the key to continued well being and future development. The people must acknowledge that there is but One true leader of Israel, One who guides Israel's destiny, the Holy One, the God of the Covenant. Despite Moses' noble charge to the people for a renewed affirmation of faith in the actual face of death, even the Holy One expresses His sense of doubt. God's response is very "human," displaying the feelings of loss which seem impossible to mend. The Holy One not only views the greatness of Moses' life-works, but intimates that he is, indeed, irreplaceable. No one shall replace him; no one ever could.

Though the transition of leadership, (a central concern of the midrash throughout) , will indeed take place, there will never again be another leader like Moses. While the midrash affirms the future survival of the people , it implies that Israel (and its relationship with God) will never again be the same.

- B. The varied use of prooftexts, in particular, of Deut 33:21, points to the differing messages which the same text can convey. The Choice version and that of Deut Rabbah, place the text in the mouths of the ministering angels, utilizing it to affirm the importance of Moses' life-mission, as "servant of the Lord." On the other hand, Petirat Moshe 2 alters the focus of the passage, employing it to underscore the unparalleled righteousness of Moses. In a unique dialogue between Metatron, (possibly also known as Zagzagel, the designated heavenly teacher of Moses. Cf note 20 to page 35.) and the Holy One, God attests to the righteousness of Moses, for on his account was Israel spared. In this light, the prooftext functions differently: "He executed the justice of the Lord, and his (Moses' rather than God's) righteousness is with Israel."
- The intimation herein is twofold: that Moses indeed knew the true intent of Divine justice, and more profoundly, that we exist on the foundation of the merit of Moses. It is not God's judgements alone, but the righteousness of Moses which remains with Israel. Moses does indeed live on, even after his death, for his life-works enable Israel to survive and continue to grow, unto this very day.
- C. The Deut Rabbah parallel takes yet another step, transforming the righteousness of Moses into a life-model that we should all strive to emulate. If Moses has not here been deified by the midrash in this regard, he is surely viewed as nothing less than the head of the heavenly host. This eulogy passage, which serves as the conclusion of this portion of Deut Rabbah, ends with a textual allusion to the World to Come. Why is it necessary for the text to conclude in such a way. This is indeed significant, for it carries the "Moses as life-model" theory to its natural extension. It seems that lasting memory alone, after death, was not enough

to motivate Israel to strive to emulate Moses' righteousness. The possibility of the eternity of the soul and the assurance of future reward, however, could serve as a prime motivator for the people to be like Moses, the faithful servant of the Lord. Not only could they be remembered, for a blessing, here on earth, but their souls' would be granted eternal life in the shadow of the Divine Presence. It is of note that our Choice text concludes, not with any mention of the World to Come, but with a reference to this world, and Moses' lasting influence upon the people Israel. The thrust of the text is not apocalyptic, but clearly life-affirming. <sup>38</sup>

**Section VI:**

**Where Does Moses Lie?**

**SECTION 11a: In Search of Moses' Soul**

At this point, the Angel of Death was unaware that Moses had died. He feared God's decree, went to his place and inquired concerning him (Moses); but he could not find him.

He went to the earth and asked:

Where is Moses the son of Amram?

The earth said to him:

I don't know where he went.

He went to the sea and said to it:

Have you seen b. Amram?

The sea said to him:

Since the day he divided me into twelve paths, and he and the people Israel crossed me, I haven't seen him.

He went to Gehinnom and she responded, saying to him:

I have heard about him but have not seen him.

He went to She'ol, Perdition and the Deep and asked them:

Have you seen the son of Amram?

They responded:

We know the name, because we have heard it before from Pharaoh, King of Egypt, but we've not seen him. As it is said: "But wisdom, where shall it be found?...

The Deep says: He is not with me. And the Sea says: He's not in me....Destruction and She'ol say: We've only heard rumours about him..." (Job 28:12-14,22)

He went to the Depths and they responded:

We have not seen him but we have heard of him.

He went to the children of Korah, who dwell in the depths,



and said to them:

Have you seen the son of Amram?

They responded:

We haven't seen him since the day that the earth opened and swallowed us up on his account.

He went to the heavens and said to them:

Have you seen the son of Amram?

They said:

We haven't seen him since the day he came up to us by God's command to receive the Torah.

He went to the Garden of Eden, but when the guardian angels of the Garden saw him, they pushed him away, saying:

You may not enter the Garden of Eden, as it says:

"This is the gateway to the Lord; the righteous shall pass through it."

What did he (the Angel of Death) do?

He spread out his wings high above the entrance, the span of four thousand handsbreath, and he swooped into the Garden of Eden.

He said to her (Garden):

Have you seen Moses?

She said to him:

I haven't seen him since the day he came to me with Gabriel, to witness the reward of the righteous.

He went towards the Tree of Life, but when it saw him at distance of three hundred handsbreath, it spoke up, and said to him:

Don't come any closer to me!

The Angel of Death said to the Tree of Life:

Have you seen b. Amram?

The Tree said:

I haven't seen him since the day he came to me to get the staff.

He went to the Tree of Knowledge and said to it:

Have you seen the son of Amram?

The Tree said:

I haven't seen him since the day he took a reed from me, with which to write the Torah.

He went to the mountains, but they said to him:

Since the day he carved the two stone tablets from us, we have not seen him.

He went to the deserts who said to him:

Since the day he lead the children of Israel like a flock, we haven't seen him.

He went to Mount Sinai who said to him:

Since the day he received the Torah upon me from the right hand of God I haven't seen him.

He went to the beasts and the animals and said to them:

Have you seen the son of Amram?

They responded:

We have not seen him since the day he separated us into clean and unclean.

He went to the angel whose name is Dumah, who is appointed over all souls, and said to him:

Have you seen the son of Amram?

He said to him:

I heard that they were eulogizing him on High.

**He went to the angels and said to them:**

**Have you seen the son of Amram?**

**They said to him:**

**He's gone unto the people.**

**He went to the people and asked them:**

**Where is Moses?**

**They said:**

**Can it truly be that Moses is amongst the people?**

**Moses is nowhere other than amongst the Ministering Angels;**

**for he ascended to heaven and dwells on High, just as a**

**Ministering Angel, since God placed the Holy Spirit in the hollow of**

**his hands. The Holy One gathered him to His Holy Place.**

**What do you want from b. Amram anyway?**

**And about him (Moses) Scripture says:**

**"I gather My righteous ones to Me as an offering,**

**those who establish My Covenant." (Ps 50:5)**

- A. This section is unique to the Choice version of Petirat Moshe; it has no direct parallels in any other versions of the midrash nor in Deut Rabbah. Whereas all of the aforementioned works conclude with a flurry of citations, with God and the angels directly attesting to the greatness of Moses, our Choice version contains this lengthy dialogue following such a "eulogy section." Why?**

**This sub-section seems to serve three interconnected functions. First and foremost, it is a review of Moses' life; an affirmation of his greatness. The life of Moses touched all aspects of Creation. Moreover, through Moses' life-works, by way of the great tasks he accomplished, Creation, Revelation and Redemption are linked. Through Moses, the origins of humanity and its ultimate fulfillment are one. Past, present and future merge through the personage of Moses; he alone shares in the realization of the**

Divine Plan. Third, this section functions as the ultimate of ironies. The Angel of Death is in search of Moses, who has already died. The keeper of all souls, the one assigned to initiate the death of all the living, is unaware that one entrusted to him is no more. The Angel of Death undertakes what amounts to a "wild goose chase," only to find that Moses is already in heaven, an angel himself, dwelling alongside the Eternal. All of Creation unites in playing a little prank on Sammael, making sure that he is, indeed, 'the last to know.' Or more emphatically, as Israel's response implies: 'You have no right to know'. This lengthy discourse reinforces one of the major thematic motifs of the midrash. Moses is uniquely superior to all of Creation, in death as in life, and therefore bypasses the normal course of death, meriting God's personal care in departing this world.

- B. When viewed together, the final two responses to the Angel of Death's query form the basic position of the midrash as to the "true" whereabouts of Moses after his death. Finally coming full circle in his search, the Angel of Death is once again sent back to the people, only to find that Moses was amidst the heavenly host all along. In essence, this is the answer: Moses now dwells on High, yet he lives on amongst the people Israel. The eulogizing statement of the Ministering Angels, contained in Section V, seems to support this viewpoint. "He executed the judgements of the Lord, and his (Moses') righteousness is with Israel" (Deut 33:21). Moses lives on through Israel's faithfulness to the Covenant which he initially transmitted and sealed. It is no coincidence that in two of the three extant versions of Petirat Moshe, Moses' last act is to publically pronounce Joshua the new Teacher of Torah (to the people Israel).<sup>39</sup> By effectively instituting such a transition, Moses is ensuring for himself "eternal life," through the successive generations of Torah transmission to come. As long as Israel upholds the Covenant and studies Torah, Moses lives on in the hearts and minds of the people.<sup>40</sup> It is also significant, it seems, that the Angels on High perceive Moses to be "with the people," while the people insist that Moses dwells in the heavens above. The immediate response of Israel is to sing the praises of their leader, who must surely sit at the

right hand of God. The Angels, realizing the full effect of Moses' life, understand that his teachings will far outlast his earthly life-span. Taken together, the answer of the midrash is clear. Moses has indeed merited eternal life through his teachings on earth, and through his glory, which basks in the Glory of the Divine Presence.

- C. Why is it that throughout the Angel of Death's questioning, he refers to Moses as "ben Amram," the son of Amram, rather than by his first name? It is possible that Moses was so well known, that the Angel of Death merely had to call him by his father's name, and everyone would recognize to whom he was referring. A more likely explanation could be that the Angel of Death did not, in fact, wish to pronounce the name of Moses. Referring to the "servant of the Lord" by his father's name lessened his greatness, as if he was but the son of "so and so," distancing him from the actual identity of the man, Moses. Further, such a reference confirmed that Moses was human, the son of a mortal, mere flesh and blood. Certainly, Moses was not divine! More than that, the name carried with it the "power" of its bearer. If the Angel of Death did not pronounce the name "Moses," he might not be confronted, as he was on more than one occasion in the past, with the glory and the radiance of Moses. It is only when Sammael comes to the final stop on his frantic journey, to the people Israel themselves, that he indulges in pronouncing the name Moses. Maybe the Angel of Death knew that, amongst the people Israel, there was no other way to refer to Moses than by the name he'd established for himself. Or perhaps, in his haste, the Angel of Death dropped his defenses; desiring, at all costs, to ascertain the whereabouts of the "lost soul" which was in his keeping.

**SECTION VIIb: The Epitaph; Moses Lives On**

And no one (in the world) knows the burial place of Moses b.

Amram. As it is said:

"...And no one knows his burial place to this very day." (Deut 34:6)

Where does he lie?

To this, the Sages, of blessed memory, replied:

The Shechinah itself has been put to shame.

[Palestinian Talmud, Sotah 13b]

And where was Moses Buried?

In the portion of Gad, for it is written:

"And he provided the first part for himself..." (Deut 33:21)

Now what was the distance between the portions of Reuben and Gad? Four mil (Approx 9,000 feet).

And who carried him this distance?

It teaches that Moses was laid upon the wings of the Shechinah, and the Ministering Angels kept proclaiming:

"He executed the justice of the Lord, and His judgements with Israel." (Deut 33:21)

...It has been taught: R. Eliezer the Elder said:

Over an area of twelve mil square, corresponding to that of the camp of Israel, a Heavenly Voice proclaimed:

"So Moses died there," the great sage of Israel.

Others declare that Moses never died; it is written here:

"So Moses died there," (Deut 34:5) and elsewhere it is written:

"And he was there with the Lord" (Exod 34:28).

As in the latter passage it means standing and ministering, so also in the former it means standing and ministering.

[Petirat Moshe 2, 363b]

(Following one of Moses' many pleas for an eternal earthly existence, the sub-section concludes:)

Moses then said to God:

So now, if it is good in Your sight,

"I shall not die, rather let me live,

and I shall tell of Your great works." (Ps 118:17)

**The Holy One said to him:**

**Enough!**

**If you were allowed to live on,**

**they (Israel) would go astray because of you!**

**They would make you into a god and worship you.**

**A. The ambiguity surrounding the actual death and burial of Moses leaves much room for speculation. Indeed, the Talmudic opinion that Moses in fact did not die, must be understood in its metaphorical sense. As with the people's response to the Angel of Death,<sup>41</sup> the intimation here is that Moses lives on, ministering to Israel from above. In this respect, Sammael had no dominion over Moses. Explaining Moses' death in this way, as an altered form of earthly existence, the people Israel could forge on, sustaining themselves with the knowledge that Moses' guiding spirit would never die. Moses' soul was destined to guide Israel, eternally, throughout its journey.**

**B. Why does the Choice version of Petirat Moshe close with the Biblical text which affirms that Moses' burial site is unknown? The second supplemental text gives part of the answer. Moses devoted his entire life to teaching God's Torah to the people Israel. Indeed, he alone was called the "servant of the Lord," for his faithfulness and commitment were beyond question. For this very devotion to become the source of Israel's idolatry after his death would negate all that he had worked so hard to achieve. Midrash Lekach Tov mirrors the same concern in commenting on Deut 34:6, suggesting that the grave of Moses was concealed from the eye so that Israel would not turn it into a sanctuary, nor the gentiles into a place of idol worship.**

**But why conclude the midrash in this fashion?**

**Would it not have been more appropriate to end, perhaps, with Section V, as God and all Creation bear witness to the greatness of Moses? It seems that by concluding thusly, the text reinforces two of its major complimentary themes.**

**The Holy One indeed attests to the greatness of Moses, by placing his burial site off limits, lest it become a perpetual shrine. At the same time, God reminds Israel that their Leader has not died, for though Moses has perished, his guiding spirit remains with the**

people. The words he spoke, his admonition and instruction still live on; the Covenant of Sinai remains in tact.

"Now Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses" (Deut 34:9). The memory of Moses' greatness could remain with the people, yet it would not prevent them from continuing onward. To the contrary, it would serve as an ever present reminder of the supreme task which all Israel was called upon to fulfill. In this way, the greatness of Moses insures the continuity of the Covenant, serving to underscore the Source of all greatness, the One, Eternal Leader of the people Israel.

- C. The closing words of the midrash are unclear: "The Shechinah was embarrassed; had been put to shame." The only clue that the sources suggest is that of Sotah, 13b, wherein the Shechinah carries Moses along the route of the "funeral procession," leading him to his ultimate end. But why is the Divine Indwelling ashamed as a result? Perhaps, from the perspective of the Rabbis, the Shechinah was humbled by the experience. More likely, however, is the suggestion that the Shechinah Itself knows not the burial site of Moses, even though It nearly lead him to that very spot. The Rabbis seem to express a general sense of frustration in not knowing the location, yet their "guilt" is alleviated in pointing to the Shechinah. For the Rabbis, an unasked question still seems to linger: Is this a fitting end for Moses, the honor due the "servant of the Lord"?<sup>42</sup>
- D. The possibility that the closing line is a scribal error does exist. Though it is impossible to confirm such a suggestion by comparison of manuscripts, this alternate ending might be more comprehensible. Instead of "nit'bal'sha", we would read, "nit'yash'va", "the Divine Presence dwells with him" or, "the Divine Presence has been comforted." Both of these interpretations cast a new light on the response of the Rabbis'. The first, suggesting that Moses shares in God's Glory, reaffirms Israel's response to the Angel of Death. "...He ascended to heaven and dwells on High." Moses' resting place is the Divine throne itself. The second possibility could be understood in the light of



**Sotah 13b. Israel knows not the burial spot of Moses, rather the Divine Presence alone is privileged to the whereabouts of the leader's remains. As a result, the Shechinah itself feels comforted. The alternate interpretation of this latter possibility is that which has already been noted above. The Divine Presence is comforted that no one on earth knows Moses' burial cite, thus no one shall engage in idolatry by turning it into a shrine. The people will remain faithful to God, the Eternal Leader of Israel.**

### **Notes to the Translation and Analysis**

In citing works in the notes, short titles have generally been used. Works frequently cited have been identified by the following abbreviations:

B.T.	The Babylonian Talmud
D. Rabbah	Midrash Rabbah (to Deuteronomy), translated by Rabbi H. Freedman and M. Simon, Soncino Press, 7 vols., Second Edition, 1951.
Exod.	The Book of Exodus
Gen.	The Book of Genesis
H. Script	The Holy Scriptures, Jewish Publication Society of America, 3 vols., Second Edition, 1973.
Isa.	The Book of Isaiah
Legends	The Legends of the Jews, Louis Ginzberg, Jewish Publication Society of America, 7 vols., Fifth Edition, 1968.
P.M.	Midrash Petirat Moshe
Ps.	The Book of Psalms
P.T.	The Palestinian Talmud

### Notes to Section I, Pages 12-15

1. See Exod. 4:1 in this regard. Moses used "hen" to praise God, but seems to forget that he also used the term in a negative sense, doubting whether Israel would believe him and heed the Divine call.

2. D. Rabbah 9:8 suggests that "hen" is not to be associated with Moses' misdeeds, nor with his praise of God, but rather with "Adam Harishon," the first man God created, Adam. "You are to die because of the first man who brought death into this world. 'Behold, (hen) the man has become as one of us...' (Gen 3:22) From this alternate perspective, "hen" recalls the 'original fall of man,' rather than the deeds of any one person. The term is thereby universally applicable to all, and conveys no special message concerning the life and death of Moses.

3. D. Rabbah 9:7 offers another explanation of this key term. "R. Abin said: What is the force of "hen?" It is as though a noble lady made an exceptionally beautiful garment for the king, which the king took and stored away. When the days of the lady approached their end, the king said: 'Let her now take the garment with which she honored me.' So God said to Moses: "You've praised Me with "hen," thus with "hen" shall I decree death upon you.'" In this light, God's use of "hen" is a great honor for Moses, a partial repayment for his life of dedication to the King of kings.

4. See the comments in Section VIb, pp. 85-86, in which the ramifications of this sub-theme are discussed at greater length.

### Notes To Section II, pages 15-37.

5. M. Avot 5:6: "Ten things were created on the eve of the first Sabbath at dusk. They are: the mouth of the earth (to swallow Korah, cf Num 16:32), the mouth of the well (which gave the Israelites water in the wilderness, cf. Num 21:16),...the letters and the pen and the (stone) tablets. And some say also... the grave of Moses and the ram of Abraham..." The fact that this listing, which is substantiated in B.T., Pesahim 54a, includes Moses' tomb as one of those things prepared by God at the time of Creation, further supports the stance which God assumes in responding to Moses. Not only would his request make the words of Torah fraudulent, but it would alter the Divine plan which God used as His guide in creating the world. To reverse the decree of Moses' death would thus be tantamount to reversing the very acts of

## Creation.

6. Cf. P.M. 2, 368b-369a.

7. D. Rabbah 11:8 states this emphatically by way of a dialogue between God and Moses: "When Moses was about to depart this world, God said to him: 'Behold, your days approach...' Whereupon Moses replied: 'Master of the Universe, after all my labor, You say to me: "Behold, your days approach"; I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord' (Ps 118:17). Thereupon God said: 'You cannot prevail in this matter, for this is [the destiny of] all men' (Eccl. 12:13).

8. B.T., Sotah 13b uncovers some of the secondary implications of this usage. "Whom do we have greater than Moses..."

'And the Lord said to me: Enough! (Let it suffice you). Never speak to Me of this matter again!' (Deut 3:26). R. Levi said: With the word "rau" Moses made an announcement and with the word "rau" an announcement was made to him. With the word "rau" he made the announcement: "Enough!"; and with the word "rau" an announcement was made to him: "Enough of you, you've gone too far!" (Num 16:3). Another explanation: You now have a master, "rau," that is, Joshua. Another explanation of "rau" is that the people should not say: 'How severe is the Master and how persistent the pupil!' And why so? For in the school of R. Ishmael it was taught: According to the camel, so is the burden."

God's response to Moses' plea: "rau l'cha," is pregnant with meaning. This talmudic citation points to the underlying agenda accompanying God's retort. Moses has indeed gone "too far" in his role as leader. The term functioned as a sure sign to Moses, that his term of office was indeed coming to a close. Alternatively, "rau l'cha" should serve Moses and Israel as a reminder of the nature of Divine judgement. Even in the face of death, Moses must serve the people as a pillar of faith. The implication of R. Ishmael's school would seem to tell but half the story. Indeed, the righteous bear the greatest burdens here on earth, yet their reward in the World to Come shall more than compensate for their suffering.

9. B.T., Sotah 14a seeks to clarify Moses' motivation for desiring to enter Israel, illustrating his pure intent and emphasizing his utter righteousness. "R. Simlai expounded: Why did Moses our teacher yearn to enter the Land of Israel? Did he want to eat of its fruits or satisfy himself with its bounty? On the contrary, for Moses declared: Many statutes were commanded to the people Israel which can only be fulfilled in the Land of Israel. I wish to enter the Land only that I might fulfill them myself. The Holy One replied: Is it only to receive the reward that you are seeking?

I shall attribute it to you as if you had performed all of them.

10. See Deut. 32:50-52, which entails God's vow forbidding Moses from crossing over the Jordan to enter the Land.

11. See P.M. 2, 364b-365a.

12. B.T. Avodah Zarah 17a provides what appears to be the source material for Moses' aid campaign to every part of Creation. After approaching all available harlots, R. Eleazar b. Dordia engaged a certain harlot, in a far away village, for a purse of denarii, who claimed that he would never be received in repentance.

"He thereupon went, sat between two mountains and exclaimed:

O you hills and mountains, plead for mercy for me!

They replied: How shall we pray for you? We stand in need of it ourselves, as it is said: 'For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed!' (Isa 54:10). Then he exclaimed: Heaven and earth, plead for mercy on my behalf! Then they replied: How shall we pray for you?

We stand in need of it ourselves, as it is said: 'For the heavens will melt away like smoke, and the earth shall grow faded as a garment' (Isa 51:6).

He then exclaimed: Sun and moon, plead for mercy on my behalf! But they too replied: How shall we pray for you? We stand in need of it ourselves, as it is said: 'Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed' (Isa 24:23). He exclaimed: Stars and

constellations, plead for mercy on my behalf! They replied: How shall we pray for you? We stand in need of it ourselves, as it is said: 'And all of the hosts of heaven shall melt away...' (Isa 34:4). Then he said: The matter then depends upon me alone!..."

In contrast to Moses' petitions, R. Eleazar B. Dordia is lead to the immediate realization that no prayer may save him from God's hand. Moreover, he recognizes that no one else can pray for him, rather, he must do it on his own. Moses comes to this realization only when the actual moment of his death arrives, after having approached all of creation to seek mercy on his behalf. Note the heavy reliance on prooftexts drawn from Isaiah, which our own text also favors.

13. Though the term Sidrei B'reishit in its construct form may imply "Order of Nature," we have chosen the translation "objects of Creation," implying that it would indeed be synonymous with "Sidrei Ma'aseh B'reishit."

14. An underlying theme which the P.M. 2, 362b parallel brings us to consider is the question of the coming of the Messiah. Though this section of the Choice Version does not address it directly, one might take the responses of Creation to imply that it is beyond us to hasten the Messiah's coming. Indeed, our adherence to the terms of the Covenant, our compliance with Divine Will, affirms our ultimate

faith in God's plan, and in the Divine redemption which will come in accord with that plan.

15. See Section IIa, page 16, for God's initial response to the plea of Moses.

16. Midrash Ma'aseh Torah, 98a. Though this text identifies a possible "six angels of death," the prevailing tradition as well as our own text identifies Samael as the "Prince/Angel of Death." Cf. P. M., 370a.

17. P.M., Section IIVa, p. 48. See also Comment 'C' on p. 49, concerning the superiority of Moses to all beings in both the upper and the lower realms.

18. P.M., Section IIVc, (Part 4), 67. See also Comments 'A' and 'B', p. 71, on the privileged nature of Moses' death and the implications therein.

19. P.M. 2, 364b. The possibility that Moses was in control of the time of his own death runs counter to the general premise of the Choice Version; that the Creator alone controls the destiny of His Creation. The Alternate Version may have intended to intimate that Moses merely knew the day of his death long before the actual fact, as another section of the same midrash corroborates.

20. Midrash B'reishit Rabbah (Gen. Rabbah), 39:6.

Moses' response to God's ultimatum is actually an admission of man's finitude in the face of Divine justice. God's "either/or" proposal is a direct reference to the following passage, which underscores a major sub-theme of Petirat Moshe. Just as Abraham, Moses too questions the justice of God, only to find, in the end, that his efforts were in vain. It is our task to affirm the Divine plan. To seek our own vision of justice, our own "plan," is to show our lack of faith in the Master of the Universe, which leads, ultimately, to the destruction of our world. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do justly?" (Gen 18:25).

R. Levi said: If it is the world you seek, there can be no justice; and if it is justice you seek, there can be no world. Why do you grasp the rope at both ends, seeking both the world and justice?

Let one of them go, for if you do not relent (loosen up) a little, the world will not endure." Interestingly, here it is Moses who "grasps the rope at both ends," yet he is unable to successfully maintain his hold. In Petirat Moshe, however, the idiom is turned on its side, as God now holds both ends of the rope; the destiny of the world and the course of Divine justice are in His hands alone.

21. P.M. 2, 364a. The conclusion of this second parallel passage suggests that Moses never totally relinquished his life's-dream, nor did he truly accede to Sammael's vision of Divine justice. Even after

accepting the Holy One's ultimatum: either Israel or himself, Moses continues his search, persisting in his struggle to alter God's master plan. "But what will humanity say? The feet which walked about in the firmament and the hands which received the Torah, the mouth which spoke directly to the Lord, - he must die!(?)...This is Moses (we are talking about). What will humanity do; what will they say?"

22. D. Rabbah 11:10. The power of Moses' prayer was exceedingly great, for it possessed the secret of the Ineffable Name, which he had learnt from Zagzagel, his Divinely appointed instructor.

### Notes to Section III, pages 38-44

23. B.T., Hullin 89a. Though Moses was unique among the prophets, rabbinic tradition is far from definitive in regards to his relative status among the leaders of Israel. Placing him above the Patriarchs at times, and in other instances, below the Patriarchs, the individual figures seem to trade positions, depending upon the needs of the text in question. The following is representative of the many texts which defend one figure, over and against the others.

"Raba said: More significant is that which is said of Moses... than that which is said of Abraham. Of Abraham, it is said: "I am but dust and ashes", whereas of Moses and Aaron it is said: "And we are nothing."

Raba also said: The world exists only on account of (the merit of) Moses and Aaron, for it is written here: "And we are nothing," and it is written there (Job 26:7) "God hangs the earth upon nothing."

24. See Josh., 12:24ff, in which the conquest of the thirty one kings is detailed.

25. In describing Sammael's feelings of anticipation in awaiting the death of Moses, the tradition in D. Rabbah 11:10 adds: "He was like a man who had been invited to a wedding feast, looking forward to it, saying: When will the rejoicing come that I may share therein?" For Samael, evil has taken the place of all that was good. Death is a celebration; and the death of the truly righteous is his greatest joy.

26. See Section III, Comment 'C', p. 43.

27. See P.M., Section VIa, Comments 'A' and 'B', pp. 80-81.

28. Cf. Deut R. 9:9 on the difficulty of the transition of leadership, specifically the inability of Moses to be a mere follower amidst the community of Israel under Joshua.

29. A. Jellinek, Bet HaMidrash, VI, pp. 75-76. In the introduction to



'Eldad Hadani', the Name is presented as the key which unlocked the door to the future of the world. Its protective power was unequalled, fending off the consuming fire of the Shechina itself. See also P.M., Section VIa, 82.

30. Ginzberg, Legends, vol. VI, 158.

#### Notes to Section IV, Pages 44-71

31. Ginzberg, Legends, vol. VI, n. 898, 150. The identity of Sangazel/Zagzagel is questionable, since the exact formation of the name appears in three different variants. Most probably, all three variants represent the same archangel. Sefer Hanokh identifies Zagzagel with Metatron, chief/prince of the angels. Indeed, Sifre Deut pisqa #338 identifies Metatron as the instructor of Moses, just as two versions of Petirat Moshe depict Sangazel/Zagzagel as Moses' Divinely appointed teacher. Ginzberg explains the name variant "Sangazel" by breaking it down into what he views to be its component parts: "S'gan Sganiel," meaning Prince of the Heavenly Princes. Such a title would fit that which was ascribed to Metatron, prince of the angels, though a definitive identification is still uncertain.

32. Midrash Ma'aseh Torah, 98a.

33. Pirkei Rabbenu Hakodesh, 14b.

34. P.M., Section IVb, Comment 'B', pp. 57-58. See also n. 28.

Cf. B.T. Hullin 89a.

35. See n. 20 on the connection between the identities of Sangazel and the teacher of Moses.

36. Ginzberg, Legends, vol. III, 480-481. God attests to Moses' superiority over and above all creation.

37. See n. 40 on Ish Ha'Elohim for an extended discussion of Moses as the perfect human creation.

38. In D. Rabbah 11:5, for example, the Angel of Death is consistently portrayed as inferior to the power of Moses, seemingly at his beckon call: "The Rabbis say: What did Moses do? He seized the Angel of Death and cast him down in front of him and blessed the tribes, each according to his blessing."

39. Though Moses' status may indeed have been unique, H. Script. also calls others by the same title. The following are listed in Midrash Tannaim to Deut. as being referred to by the title, "Ish Ha'Elohim": Moses, Elchanah, Samuel, David, Iddo, Shemaiah, Elijah, Elisha, Micah and Amos.

40. Ginzberg, Legends Vol III, 93. Sammael's comment that "the glow of Moses' face was like that of the Divine Presence itself", attests to the lasting effect of the theophany upon Moses. Though the midrash suggests that all Israel was given such Divine gifts (as a crown of Glory) when they accepted God's Torah, it was Moses alone who retained this heavenly radiance throughout his lifetime. So great was the glow of God's Presence within Moses, "that if even today a crack were made in his tomb, the light emanating from his corpse would be so powerful that it would surely destroy all the world." The power of Moses is beyond compare; only the Eternal can claim superior status to him. See also Pesikta Rabbati 21:18 on Moses' radiance.

41. D. Rabbah 11:4 sheds new light on 'Ish HaElohim': "Another explanation: What is the meaning of "the Man, God"? R. Abin said: His lower half was 'man,' but his upper half was 'God.' " The implication is that Moses' physical half belonged to the earthly realm, while his emotional and mental capacities were Divine in quality. A less literal understanding could fit our interpretation. Moses' dual nature could be taken to imply that, in essence, he was half terrestrial and half celestial, thus enabling him to actualize his full potential in both the upper and the lower realms.

Cf. Ginzberg, Legends, Vol VI, 166, n. 965.

42. P.M., Section V, Comment 'A', page 73.

43. P.M., Section V, Comment 'A', page 74.

44. D. Rabbah 11:3 states: "Jacob said to Moses: 'I am greater than you, for I wrestled with the angel and prevailed over him.' Whereupon Moses replied: 'You wrestled with the angel in your own territory (on earth), but I went up to their territory, and they feared me. From where does this derive? As it is said: "The angels of the hosts flee from you..." (Ps 68:13). ...God said: 'Seeing that he (Moses) is far superior to them all, he shall bless Israel.' "And this is the blessing..."

45. Midrash Tehillim, chap. 90: 3, p.388.

46. A tradition in Ha'Emek Davar, pp. 370-371, suggests that Moses was awarded the title "Ish HaElohim" because he had attained the highest possible degree of spiritual perfection, just prior to his death.

47. D. Rabbah 11:7. The words in parentheses signify material which is unique to this passage and not included in any of the Petirat Moshe versions.

48. See B.T. Yoma 85b in this regard. "The Holy One purifies Israel," which is the basic source of attributing "Tohorot HaMayt" to

God. In this light, we are striving to be like the Eternal One when we take part in the mitzvah of cleansing the dead body and preparing it for burial.

49. See P.M. 2, 362b. On the transgressions of Moses as enumerated by God, the text states: "Moses said: You deal mercifully with Your Creations once, twice, even three times, yet for my one sin You won't forgive me! God said to Moses: You have sinned six times. To begin with, you said to Me: 'Please send someone else...' (Exod 4:13). Then, 'Moses returned to the Lord and said: Why have You dealt ill with this people? And why did You send me? For ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak on Your behalf, he has done evil to this people...' (Exod 5:22). Third, "It was not God who sent me." Four, "But the Lord creates a new thing and the earth opens her mouth" (Num 16:30). Five, "Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock and said to them: Listen, you rebels; shall we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num 20:9-10). And lastly, "And the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until the entire generation that had done evil was consumed. And behold, you have risen up in the place of your fathers, a brood of sinful men... (Num 32:13-14)."

50. Cf Ps. 50:5.

51. P.M. 2, 362b-363a, pp. 22-23, cited within the body of the comments as "The Tale of the Teacher of the King's Son."

#### Notes to Section V, Pages 72-76.

52. Though the statement seems to be a Biblical reference, I was unable to find the actual citation, even after much concordance cross-checking. Perhaps it was not included in the Masoretic text?

53. This figure is possibly also known as Zagzagel, the heavenly teacher especially designated for Moses. See n. 20 for details.

54. See P.M., Section VIb, Comment 'B', pp. 84-85, for a discussion on the ramifications of the closing statement of the midrash.

#### Notes to Section VI, Pages 77-87.

55. Note P.M. 2, 367b. "When Moses saw that he could not escape death, he called Joshua before the entire community of Israel and said to him: 'My son, look at these people, Adonai's people...They are the children of The Holy One,...and God loves them more than any people. At that very moment, God said to Joshua: 'Moses, your teacher, has appointed you, and you shall take his place....'"

56. P.T. Menachot 29b.

57. See P.M., Section VIIa, the people's response to the Angel of Death, p. 71, in this regard.

58. M & M Roshwald, Moses, (Thomas Yosseloff, New York, 1969), pp.199-200 offers a unique answer to the Rabbis' frustration. "A modern writer like Lincoln Steffens has a great answer to the unfulfilled ending of Moses' life. He sees it not an act of punishment, but of mercy. '...Moses' land of promise was a place of the imagination, and of an imagination inspired by God...No real country could possibly be so perfect. ...Moses would have been heartbroken if he had gone over there and lived,...and God knew that. The lands of promise are nothing but lands of opportunity... That is what the Lord God, in His wisdom, foresaw; that is why He let the people go on; that is why, in His mercy, He spared His faithful servant.'" This rationalization certainly satisfies the question of Moses' "premature" death on one level. God's decree was in reality, an act of Divine mercy. What could be more befitting the leader of Israel, than to be spared the ultimate pain of life's disappointment.

**PART THREE:**

**The Analytical Perspective**

The many themes of Midrash Petirat Moshe have thus far only been cited as they arose in the course of the textual translation and analysis. These themes, noted in the 'Comments,' cannot stand in isolation, however, but must rather be viewed in light of the overall development of the Choice version. In attempting to gain a sense of perspective, we shall focus upon thematic development, the manner in which specific concerns are played out in the midrash as a whole.

Though there are numerous ways by which to structure the thematic content of Petirat Moshe, we shall limit our consideration to three perspectives. A linear view will consider the theme as it develops sequentially. Treating the text as a literary unit, we shall focus upon the dramatic flow of the midrash, seeking to discern the overall thematic progression as conveyed by the text. A dialectical view will group the major themes in pairs, highlighting tensions in the text so as to identify its basic concerns, and offer some potential solutions. Lastly, by analyzing the thematic strains within the text, the recurring issues may be divided into general categories. In this way, we can view the major motifs of the midrash which serve to underscore its basic message(s), thus attempting to assess the overall impact of Petirat Moshe, both within its contextual time-setting and for our own day.

#### A. A Linear Perspective

The text begins by placing God in the position of defending Divine justice before Moses, the "prosecutor" and "primary witness" in the case. The interchange between the two is like that of two barristers, each one arguing on the basis of what he/He perceives to be truly fair. The concerns of Moses, however, seem to take precedence for the reader, the jury. Can the death of the righteous be justified? How can the Holy One explain the taking of Moses' life at this time, at any time? And where is the reward of the truly righteous? When shall the faithful "servant of the Lord" be given his just due?

Section One raises these and other crucial questions associated with Moses' initial confrontation with the announcement of his impending death. In turn, God's retort conveys a basic sub-theme which later recurs at the conclusion of

the midrash. As God's initial promise of glory in the hereafter states: "Thus, I will exalt you...in the midst of the Garden of Eden after your death."<sup>1</sup> The reward of the righteous is not meant for this world. Moses shall surely reap the benefits of his life-works, following his death, in the World to Come.

The overall thematic thrust of the section, which is implied by the response of God, is conveyed by the Deuteronomic prooftext contained therein.<sup>2</sup>

"Behold, the heavens to their uttermost reaches belong to the Lord your God, the earth and all that is in it!" (Deut 10:14)

God is sovereign, Creator of heaven and earth, Keeper of the upper and the lower realms. Man's vision is finite; his notion of true justice is limited to the experience of his existence. God is infinite; He alone views the destinies of all living beings in a single instant. Only the Holy One can balance the scales of justice. In the final analysis, the ultimate justice of God is upheld. For Moses, as well as for us, or so the text suggests, the answer to those pressing concerns comes solely through an affirmation of God's justice. With the Divine Plan in tact, the righteous face death with the assurance that their lives will be duly rewarded.

Section Two flows directly from this assertion, suggesting that the acceptance of death as our common destiny is, in effect, an affirmation of faith in God's Sovereignty. Still unwilling to accede to God's decree, however, Moses persists in his attempt to avert death. The large majority of this section focuses upon the various pleas of Moses to see the Land of Israel and live.

Unsuccessful in his efforts to sway the Eternal, Moses turns first to the Works of Creation and then to the people Israel themselves, beckoning them to seek mercy on his behalf. With each response, the primary message of the text becomes apparent. Once again, the Deuteronomic prooftexts speak for themselves. Indeed, the midrash as a whole seems to highlight the Deuteronomic prooftexts' message, utilizing them as a foundation, and then always returning to them at the close of each section as a method of framing the major images within the text. Initially, God responds to Moses' petition, saying: "There is no God beside Me, I deal death and give life...None can deliver from My hand" (Deut 32:39). Thereupon Moses, seeking to alter God's decree, praises what he believes to be Divine justice. "The Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just" (Deut 32:4).

After all the Works of Creation reject Moses' plea for aid, the prooftext returns to underscore the point. "...and none can deliver from My hand" (Deut 32:39). And finally, just as Israel agrees to pray for Moses, the Angel of Death appears to divert their supplications, responding with the very prooftext which Moses utilized in his own defense. "The Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just" (Deut 32:4). This bit of literary irony is powerful indeed. For Moses, the perfection of God's deeds implies an affirmation of his own sense of what is just. The decree of his death cannot be final; God's justice would simply not permit it. Sammael turns the same prooftext inside out, employing it from an opposite point of view so as to uphold the Divine decree. As all God's ways are just, so is the death of Moses an act of ultimate justice. To annul the decree, from Sammael's perspective, would be a denial of God's justice.

Thematically, the drama builds as the Works of Creation, and then all Israel, acknowledge the ultimate Sovereignty of the Holy One. Concurrently, God's Plan is affirmed, as He is recognized as the sole Author of life and death.

Thus Moses' vision meets its first direct challenge. Indeed, Sammael's retort implies that which was intimated in Section One: God's Justice is beyond our limited faculty of comprehension. The ideal, then, is to make God's will our will, to become One with the Divine. Moses, however, was far from ready to acquiesce, and his continuing struggle points to the secondary theme, related directly to that of God's Sovereignty, at work here, in Section Two.

Moses wishes for God to annul but one decree, a single oath, so that he might live to see the land. Yet God is immovable, unbending; He will not break His vow.<sup>3</sup> Viewing the situation objectively, we realize that which Moses could not. If God disregarded just one decree, even a single vow, the validity of the entire Torah would be thrown into question. It was not merely the future of a single soul which was at stake here, but the destiny of an entire people, bound by their faith in the word of God.<sup>4</sup> At this crucial time of transition in the life of the people, it would prove to be of extreme importance that the foundation of the Covenant community, the Torah, be firmly upheld. Though it was not Moses' intent, his request, if granted, could give rise to great doubt in the mind of Israel. And doubt could only lead Israel to question God's word, and thereby to exhibit a lack of faith. To ensure that his

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life-teachings continue to grow and flourish among the people, Moses has no choice but to accept the Divine decree. The consistency of Torah must be maintained at all costs, for it is the lifeblood of Israel, the key to their very existence.

This secondary thematic development implies that which the text will eventually bear out, the future survival of the community of Israel must take precedence over the life of any individual members of that community. Moses must die so that the people Israel may continue to live. Though leaders may come and go, Israel remains, called upon to bear witness to the sovereignty of the Eternal by maintaining the sanctity of God's word, the Torah.

Section Three functions as a thematic segue, of sorts, shifting the focus from the sovereignty of the Holy One to the greatness of His servant, Moses, from the ramifications of the Divine decree to the actual preparations for death. Underscoring the entire discussion, the issue of the transition of leadership emerges as a primary thematic consideration.

From this point onwards, the text continually proclaims the righteousness of Moses, as each sub-section heaps praise upon praise, gradually exalting the leader of Israel from his earthly post to God's Throne of Glory. Section Three pits Sammael, "the wicked one," against Moses, the picture of righteousness. The ensuing argument between Sammael and Michael, not only serves to highlight Moses' greatness, but emphasizes the smooth transition of leadership which must occur.

Indeed, from the thematic standpoint, the Deuteronomic proof-text likewise alludes to this not so hidden agenda.

"Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses" (Deut 34:10). This portion of the cited proof-text, is preceded in the Biblical text with the following: "Now Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hand upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses" (Deut 34:9). Joshua succeeds due to the merit of Moses; thus the text goes to great lengths to acclaim his righteousness. Israel's recurring assertion of Moses' superiority is, in essence, a personal reassurance, for it is the guiding spirit of Moses which shall remain as the foundation of leadership for their future.

The extent to which the text praises Moses attests to the difficulties involved in Israel's transition of leadership. The midrash itself suggests this, with its description of Moses' last official act, at the close of Section Three.

**"Then what did our master, of blessed memory, do?  
He took a scroll to write the Ineffable Name upon it, so as to  
transmit it to Joshua. But he'd not finished writing it when  
the moment of his death arrived." <sup>5</sup>**

**Moses was the first link in the "chain of tradition," his was a firsthand, primary experience with the Holy One. No matter how smooth an exchange the text portrays, Moses could never fully transmit the essence of his experience to Joshua, his successor. Moses could not be replaced; rather, Israel would settle for another who would lead them with the spirit of Moses as his guide.**

**As noted above, this section forms the bridge via which the core of the midrash comes into play. Section Four focuses on the death of Moses; the acts leading to the taking of Moses' soul. With the sovereignty of God firmly established, the theme centers around the superiority of Moses, the portrayal of Israel's leader as the epitome of righteousness.**

**The archangels attest to Moses' greatness by their refusal to take part in the execution of his death. Even the Angel of death is unsuccessful in two separate attempts at the taking of Moses' soul. This two round confrontation between Sammael and Moses serves to heighten our perceived greatness of the leader of Israel. More than that, however, it points to the secondary theme at work in this section: the presentation of Moses as the model of human perfection.**

**Initially, Sammael is ward off by the glory of Moses, and later, by the purity of his soul. Yet the thrust of the passage comes in the defense offered by Moses himself in the face of the Angel of Death. Two semi-parallel listings detail the life achievements of the leader of Israel, attesting to his unique status among all humankind. <sup>6</sup> Moses was born circumcised. In his youth, he performed acts of extraordinary strength and talent. Moses talked at three days and prophesied at three months, predicting the downfall of Pharaoh and the Exodus from Egypt. Moreover, Moses performed wonders throughout his life. From the parting of the sea to the transmission of the Torah directly from the Holy One, Moses life attested to his special status. And it was not humankind alone, but the heavenly hosts as well, who would bow to the glory of Moses. Sammael could not stand in his presence, as he explains to the Holy One:**

**"Because he resembles the angels of Your mighty chariot. Sparks and lightning issue forth from his mouth when he speaks, just as they issue forth from the mouths of the seraphim, who exist to praise, glorify, exalt and magnify Your Name. What's more, the brilliance of his image is like the glow of Your Divine Presence..." 7**

Moses is likened to the angels on high, not because he dwells in the heavens above, but precisely because of his accomplishments here on earth. Moses has praised God with his every act; his teachings, taken together as one, are but the glorification of the Divine Name Itself. His life of devotion, his commitment to Israel and to God, have earned him a greater share of Divine Glory than the angels themselves possess. Moses is the ideal of human perfection.

Prior to this section, Moses was subject to the natural course of death. Now that the unique superiority of Moses has been established, the text can proceed. The Holy One, using Sammael's failures as a gauge, can be sure of the glory of His servant, and the merit due him in departing this world. All is ready for the dramatic climax of the midrash, thematically as well as textually. God's sovereignty and Moses' glory are established; we have but to await the "final act," the last meeting of Moses and his Maker.

The remainder of Section Four serves to put the thematic strains which run throughout the text in perspective, reinforcing the basic messages of the midrash. Moses once again encounters the Eternal, yet the roles have changed. No longer is God the accused, and Moses the prosecuting attorney, as at the outset of the text. On the contrary, Moses now approaches the Divine Judge of heaven and earth, pleading for mercy, even though the verdict is a forgone conclusion.

Finally, Moses too acknowledges his ultimate faith in God's plan. The ideal human life-model can indeed struggle with the Holy One, so long as it eventually leads to an affirmation of God's will.

**"Master of the Universe,...I beg of You, do not deliver me into the hands of the Angel of Death. Rather, I am in Your power; do what is good in Your sight with Your servant." 8**

Moses accepts the Divine decree, asking only for God's mercy in taking his soul.

God's compliance underscores the righteousness of Moses, and points to the ultimate merit of a life devoted to serving the

Lord. It is God Himself who descends to gather in Moses' soul. The Deuteronomic prooftext is turned on its side, attesting to God's love for His servant. "So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there...by the command of the Lord" (Deut 34:5). This phrase, "Al pi Adonai," by the mouth/command of the Lord, supports the assertion of our text, that Moses died by a kiss from the mouth of God.<sup>9</sup> The manner of death made all of the difference. In death, as in life, God's unique love for Moses was apparent. The glory of Moses was so great that it merited the Divine Presence, the Glory of God. Such is the model of righteousness which the midrash presents, the ideal towards which all Israel must strive.

The thematic thrust of this section was one of reconciliation, of compromise. Moses recognized the true justice of God, and the Eternal attested to the unique status of His servant by His actions. Death was not a mad struggle, but rather represented the final embrace of two lovers, the emotionally charged, yet peaceful parting of two who had been so intimate with one another. Indeed, this secondary thematic concern which has been present throughout the midrash now comes to the fore. The text's portrayal of death is, in essence, an affirmation of life, rather than an extended lament. Moses' death was not intended to immobilize the people beyond the customary mourning period. On the contrary, the death of Moses presents itself as a challenge for Israel, to live the words that he preached, to make Torah the foundation of their existence. As his life served Israel as a model of human achievement, so too, Moses' death serves the people, motivating them to righteous living.

Section Five is the eulogy of Moses, as the final portion of Deuteronomy attests. "And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days" (Deut 34:8). It was not Israel alone, however, who mourned the loss of Moses, but all of Creation. The sun, the moon and the constellations, the heavenly hosts, even the Holy One Himself cries out to eulogize the great leader. Taken together, the eulogizing statements express the full range of emotions which are usually associated with the loss of a loved one.

The final three statements in particular join to form the thematic thrust of the section. Israel's response expresses the immediate shock which the people assumedly felt: "Israel cried, saying: Where is our leader?" The implication herein is that there is

but one leader of Israel, and without him, the people just cannot go on. Joshua's response acknowledges the great loss, yet looks to the future for hope: "Save us O Lord; O Lord, let us prosper" (Ps 118:25). As the newly appointed leader of Israel, Joshua recognizes the source of his leadership, and calls upon God for help. He knows that the road ahead will be difficult, but realizes that the people have no choice but to go on. The final statement, that of the Angels, is perhaps the last crucial step in the mourning process. Before Israel can move onwards and leave the steppes of Moab, they must come to grips with the heartfelt impact of their loss, by incorporating the spirit of Moses into their midst. "The Angels of heaven eulogized him, saying: He executed the justice of God, and his/(His) righteousness is with Israel" (Deut 33:21). The Deuteronomic prooftext, for our purposes, implies that Moses, in fact, did not die, for his teachings live on in the hearts and minds of Israel.

The thematic thrust of Section Five is apparent, beyond its normal cathartic function. The transition of leadership shall indeed be smooth, for it is Moses' guiding spirit handling the reigns. The foundation for Israel's future is firm, built upon the merit of the righteousness of Moses. And once again, the focus of the midrash is clear, summoning us to look to the future with hope and renewed vision; calling Israel to affirm its commitment to covenant living.

Section Six flows nicely from the eulogy material, seeming to represent an extended inner struggle within the hearts and minds of Israel as they try to come to terms with the long range effects of their loss. If Section Five is equivalent to the initial thirty day mourning period, then this section is the time that follows it. Though life continues, Israel still grieves, thus they must learn to cope with the death of their leader. This section suggests three varied, yet interrelated coping mechanisms, which Israel might employ in facing their future. In its own way, each answers the question which the text poses: "Where does Moses lie?"

The long search of the Angel of Death for the soul of Moses culminates in an interchange between Sammael and the people themselves. The force of Israel's response is all the more powerful, considering the irony of the Angel of Death's predicament:

**"They said: Moses is not amongst the people, but rather is one of the Ministering Angels. He went up to heaven and dwells on High, just as a Ministering Angel, since God placed the Holy Spirit in his hands. What do you want from the son of Amram anyway? 10**

The people are emphatic. Their response elevates Moses to eternal bliss in the shadow of God's Glory. Israel can rest assured that the spirit of their former leader continues to guide them from above. Thematically, Israel once again acknowledges the ultimate justice of God, as confirmed in the reward of the righteous bestowed upon Moses.

The Angels' response to the probe of Sammael is equally direct, and seemingly opposite that of Israel. "He (Moses) is with the people." The heavenly hosts imply that although Moses died, he never left the presence of Israel. The eternal teacher, the leader who forged the "mixed multitude" into a united people, continues to guide them, not from above, but amongst them.

Taken together, these two responses express two varied perceptions of the effects of Moses' leadership. The people's tendency is to exalt their former leader, for the immediate past is now remembered as a time of glory. The Angels look to the months and years ahead, recognizing that the true lasting effect of Moses' leadership will be felt amongst the people, through the teachings that he imparted.

The third "coping mechanism," directly related to the previous two, is conveyed in the closing lines of the midrash. Once again, the Deuteronomic proof-text carries the weight of the intended message. "He buried him in the valley, in the land of Moab, near Bet-Peor; and no one knows his burial place to this very day" (Deut 34:6). What answer does this verse offer to the question: "Where does Moses lie?" The text asserts that Moses did indeed die, and that his burial site is unknown. The only way then to pay tribute to the great leader is by honoring him throughout the land. Israel can show its respect for Moses, through their faithfulness to the Covenant which he transmitted. The greatest honor that the people can bestow upon their teacher is to carry on his teachings, to make them their own. In this regard, Moses' death again becomes a motivation for renewed life and revived faith.

The theme has nearly come full circle. The thematic conflicts which were raised initially have been resolved by way of the natural development of the text. It is fitting, then, that the midrash seeks closure in presenting its final image. The fact that Moses' burial site is unknown conveys a dual message, which puts the midrash itself in perspective. It was the Holy One Himself who attended to Moses' burial; thus God intentionally concealed the location from Israel, fearing that they would turn it into a shrine, and thereby partake of idolatrous worship.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, the righteousness and glory of Moses were beyond compare, as affirmed by God's actions. At the same time, the fact that the God went to the trouble of hiding Moses' burial site carries with it an implied message to Israel. It is as if the Holy One had said: 'there is but One Eternal Leader of Israel.' Moses' greatness must never overshadow the teachings which he dedicated his life to transmitting. Likewise, Israel may indeed incorporate the guiding spirit of Moses into their midst, so long as it leads them to recognize the source of all spirit, the author of life and death.

### **B. A Dialectical Perspective**

Midrash Petirat Moshe may be viewed as a series of thematic dialectics, points of thematic tension, whose clash produces an insightful look at the underlying messages of the midrash. By viewing pairs of thematic concerns which play off one another, tensions at work within the text can be highlighted, so as to discern some of the possible solutions offered by the midrash.

From the outset of the text, the decree of God is pitted against the plea of Moses. The servant of the Lord is persistent in his attempts to sway the Holy One to alter His vow, yet, God stands firm. The inner dialectic at work here appears to be the distinction between God's ultimate justice and man's perception of Divine justice in the world. Moses, after all, led a life worthy of Divine merit. Should he not be entitled to ask a small favor of the God whom he alone has experienced "panim el panim", face to face?

(Deut 34:10) Would it not be more "just" for him to see the land and live, rather than to die in the wilderness of Moab, alone and unfulfilled?

God's initial retort suggests that indeed, this is the earthly fate of Moses, due to the lack of faith he exhibited at Kadesh Barnea. (cf Numbers 20:10-12) Every person receives his/her just desserts. On a secondary level, God has no explanation, at least none that can be made known to finite beings, such as we are. The Holy One needs no explanation, for God's justice is beyond our comprehension. The repeated response of Sammael to all who attempt to pray on Moses' behalf, and thereby annul the Divine decree, rings true. "Is it your business to contradict God's word?" (P. Moshe 369a) Clearly, it is not. God's ultimate justice shall be meted out in ways which we cannot know; both in this world and in the World to Come. (Cf Section One, 368b, wherein God affirms that Moses shall be exalted in the Garden of Eden, following his death.) Our perception of "justice" is limited; it is incomplete. The "solution" then, offered by the text, is for Moses to acknowledge God's justice; to affirm his faith in the ultimate truth of the Divine Plan.

This, in turn, gives rise to another tension at work within the text, which is a direct offshoot of the above consideration. The relative value of Moses' plea stands in direct contrast to the ultimate worth of Torah. Moses' request is simple enough; just one oath, a solitary vow amidst a mass of laws and promises. Yet the Master of the Universe cannot simply pull out the eraser and jot down a change of plans. The Torah is immutable; it cannot be altered. Though Moses seems to be deserving of an extended stay on earth, it cannot be implemented at the risk of damaging the Torah. The analogy is taken to the extreme in an exchange between Moses and God, in the alternate version of Petirat Moshe.

"The Holy One said: Two oaths have I vowed. First, that you shall not enter the Land of Israel; and second, that Israel will not be consumed. If you want Me to overturn the oath and allow you to enter the land, so too shall I transgress the other, and destroy Israel." (Petirat Moshe 2, 364a)

When any single word of Torah is thrown into question, the entire Torah loses its eternal validity. More than that, if the ultimate truth of Torah is in doubt, then the very existence of Israel is threatened. At this formative period in the saga of the Jewish nation, the utter consistency of the Torah was crucial. To alter but



one decree would be tantamount to destroying the foundation upon which Israel exists.

Connected to the aforementioned concern is the dialectic which recurs in various manifestations throughout the work, between Moses, the leader, and Israel, the community of followers. The first third of the text focuses on Moses' attempts to avert the inevitable decree, as he beckons Creation, and then all of Israel, to seek mercy on his behalf. Moses is ever confident that the force of the communal prayer will convince God to alter His Plan: "...since God never rejects the prayers of assemblies." (P.Moshe, 369a) Yet God did not receive the prayers on behalf of Moses. The Holy One would not deviate from His Plan. Moses' reaction clearly portrays the tension of leadership, between majesty and humility, which he struggled to keep in balance. After hearing God's ultimatum, as noted above, Moses responds.

"You cunningly come to me holding the rope at both ends!  
Let Moses perish, and a thousand more like him, but do not  
destroy a single soul of the people Israel.

Then Moses added:

But what will humanity say? The feet that walked about in  
the firmaments, and the hands which received the Torah, and  
the mouth that spoke to the Lord; he shall die!(?)...This is  
Moses we are speaking about! What will humanity do, what  
will they say?" (Petirat Moshe 2, 364a)

Moses recognizes that he does not take precedence over Israel; the survival of the community far outweighs that of its leader. Yet, at the same time, he cannot totally subdue his self-acclaimed greatness. Moses, the leader, perceives himself to be unique, seemingly irreplaceable. He himself intimates that the loss may be too great for humanity to bear.

Clearly, at times, Moses' leadership perspective was out of focus. His defense against the Angel of Death is self-elevating, proclaiming "I'm the one who...". Attempting to exhibit the great share of Divine truth which he possessed, Moses took full credit for the wonders and miracles which he wrought in the sight of all Egypt. The leader of Israel temporarily lost sight of the Source of his greatness. In the face of death, however, Moses too, acknowledges the Source of all being, surrendering his will to the will of God. Indeed, the alternate version reinforces the humility of the great leader vividly, in the "Parable of the Teacher of the King's Son." (Petirat Moshe 2, 363a) For in the end, when the time

of his death arrived, he became like any other, seeking mercy before the King of Kings. As it is written: "The poor speak with supplications..." (Prov 18:23)

From another standpoint, the tension between Moses and Israel was one of life-goals versus life-fulfillment. Moses' level of commitment was unparalleled; he became the embodiment of the teachings he transmitted. The Torah was his life, and the formation of Israel as a Covenant community was his primary task. The goals of Israel: to establish itself as a nation, bound by the Covenant, in the promised land, were identical to his own. Thus Moses' self-fulfillment was intertwined with that of the people. There was no distinction between the leader and the community, for his every bone was dedicated to realizing the dream of "Israel", the dream which he shared wholeheartedly. (In this light, one can understand the intense yearning of the text, expressing Moses' burning desire to "see the land and live.") Accepting death, Moses made the ultimate sacrifice, relinquishing his personal dream so that Israel might realize its own vision. The challenge of death, for Moses, compelled him to reach a personal compromise, to distinguish between his goals and those of the community. Only then could he die peacefully, knowing that his life was one of fulfillment and satisfaction.

Perhaps the most apparent, pervading dialectic in the midrash is that between life and death itself. The drama of the text derives its force from Moses' struggle for life in the face of death. From nearly the start of the text, the basic premise is set forth that "death is our common destiny". Still, Moses persists, summoning every possible resource to combat the decree of his death. It is not the fear of death that this tension points to, but rather, the need to maintain an appreciation for/ perspective on life. Moses' "blurred vision" is portrayed in the following plea to the Holy One.

"Moses began his long, but fruitless prayer by saying: Lord of the World! Consider how much I had to bear for the sake of Israel....But by forbidding me to enter the Land, you make the Torah a fraud, for it says: "In his day you shall give the laborer his due fee." Where, then, is my due fee for the forty years during which I labored...." (P. Moshe 2, 364b)

Moses sought a reward for his years of devotion; he thought himself deserving of more time on earth, considering all of the time he had put in leading the people. Moses considered himself to be

entitled to a reward for his services, for the life that he'd lead.

What the leader of Israel failed to recognize was that life itself was his reward. The years of wandering: of leading Israel through the wilderness, of receiving God's Torah and teaching it to the people, were, in and of themselves, more than just compensation. The underlying message speaks to every member of Israel, calling them to maintain a balanced perspective on living, to view life as a gift of great magnitude whose possibilities far outweigh any imaginable reward in the hereafter. Indeed, the first exchange of Petirat Moshe hints at an other worldly reward, but the primary focus of the text remains. The fullness of Moses' life summons us to live our lives "to the fullest", not to be fooled by promises of riches upon our deaths. Life in this world is our treasure; the reward is life's road itself.

### The Overall Motif

The recurring themes combine to paint an overall picture as developed in the midrash. Like a crafted weaving, individual strands intertwine, at specific points, joining together to form a single cloth/piece. Though the strands have merit on their own, it is when they are viewed together as a whole, that the true beauty of the artform emerges.

The text presents the dual image of the ultimate sovereignty of God alongside the centrality and majesty of humankind. As God is the Creator, the Author of life and death, so man is the crowning glory of God's creation. From here, the text moves on to affirm the eternal validity of the Torah, the product of the union between the Holy One and His Creation. Revelation is our connection to the Source of Being; we are the instrument of God's Truth in the world. Thus it follows, that by living according to the teachings of Torah, and maintaining the unbroken chain of Jewish tradition, we take part in the ongoing Redemption of the world. Though our vision is limited, we affirm our faith in the ultimate justice of God, by sharing with Him in the execution of the Divine Plan.

In essence, Petirat Moshe presents a model relationship

between God and man, a model for Covenant living. Moses had achieved the perfect union, he was called "Ish HaElohim", the Man-God (Deut 33:1). Moses had attained the highest degree of spiritual perfection; he resembled the Angels of the Divine Chariot. (cf Petirat Moshe, 370a) But Moses was not a deity; he did not live in the heavens above. Rather he dwelt among the people, for he had dedicated his life to making God's word live. He was the teacher of Israel, teaching not by exhortation alone but by example. His deeds were a personal testament to God's Presence in the world. Moses' life was indeed a model of Covenant living, for through him did Torah flourish within the hearts and minds of the people. Creation, Revelation and Redemption unite in the personage of Moses, for he is the prototype, the human ideal, sharing with God in the fulfillment of His word, working together with the Holy One towards the ultimate Redemption of the world. As it is written:

"He executed the justice of the Lord, and his righteousness is with Israel." (Deut 33:21)

The righteousness of Moses calls us still, to live our lives bound by the Covenant of Sinai, the model which was his life.

**Notes to Part III: Analytical Perspective, Pages 98-112**

1. See Petirat Moshe, Section I, Part 2, p. 13.
2. Indeed, as the text progresses, it will be these selected prooftexts from Deuteronomy, (mainly chapters 32-34), which highlight the major underlying theme of each section.
3. Cf. Deut 32:49-52 on God's vow not to allow Moses to enter the Land of Israel.
4. See Section IIc, Part 2, p. 33, Supplemental text on P.M. 2, 364a.
5. P. M., 369a, p. 43.
6. See P. M., Section IVa, pp. 51-52.
7. P.M., Section III, p. 42.
8. P. M., Section IVc, 370b, p. 63.
9. Cf. B.T. Baba Batra 17a.
10. P. M., Section VIa, p. 78.
11. Cf. Midrash Lekah Tov on Deut 34:6.

**PART FOUR:**  
**Conclusions**

Midrash petirat Moshe arose in a time of transition, as migrations and the shifting centers of Jewish leadership confronted the Jewish people with the ever present challenge: How could Judaism survive the drastic changes and yet maintain the integrity of Torah amidst the sea of cultural cross-currents? Clearly, the themes and core messages of Petirat Moshe grew out of the context of eighth through tenth century Jewry, attempting to answer the challenges of the new age of post-talmudic Judasim.

With this contextual perspective in hand, we can begin to recognize the impact of Petirat Moshe for its own historical timesetting. The major motifs within the text may be viewed as outgrowths of the contextual concerns facing the Jewish community, and in particular, the Jewish leadership of both Babylonia and Palestine.

The presentation of Moses within the text as the ideal human being, superior to all creation, served to reinforce the authority of the Gaonate. After all, a crucial step in securing their leadership position was to build a sturdy foundation. And how much stronger a base could there be than the founding father of the people Israel himself? By associating themselves with Moses, the Rabbis became an extension of his teaching, a representation of that human perfection. Moreover, Moses' perfection, his superior share of Divine truth, validated the Rabbis' own claim on God's truth. The talmudic interpretations of the geonim were sanctioned through their connection to Moses, the giver of both the written and the oral Law. Just as the legislation of Moses was wholly perfect, so, too, were the interpretations of the geonim.

But such a claim was not enough. At a time when the unity of the Jewish community was threatened by competing claims to the true interpretation of Torah, the geonim sought to minimize distinctions by presenting themselves as the rightful heirs of God's truth. To all who would offer an alternate understanding, the text would recall the "shalshelet hakabbalah," the chain of tradition which stems from the Divine Himself. Moses' last act was to present a scroll with the Ineffable Name written on it to Joshua, thus forging the first link in the chain.<sup>1</sup> In the face of the Karaite schism and a gradual decentralization of leadership, the Gaonate hoped to affirm itself as the next true link in the chain.

Further still, the author(s) of Petirat Moshe stressed the importance of the continuity of leadership. Israel's future was bright, for it was Joshua who would lead the people with the spirit of Moses as his guide.<sup>2</sup> So, too, the geonim were guided by that same spirit, for they were the guarantors of Torah for their generation and the generations to come.

But it was not their authority alone for which the geonim were concerned. Eighth century Babylonian and Palestinian leadership had to look beyond their own takkanot to ensure the lasting validity of the Torah itself. Thus, the text struggles to maintain the unity of the Torah, for through it are the people Israel united as one. God could not grant Moses' request to annul the decree of his death, for to do so would be to invalidate the entire Torah. And that, God suggests, would be tantamount to destroying the people Israel.<sup>3</sup> The Torah is the life-blood of the people; without it, they cannot survive. With Islam and Christianity professing their own 'gospels,' the geonim recognized the importance of re-establishing the ultimate validity of the Torah. No matter what the question to which they were responding, the primary task of the Gaonate was to build a "siyag laTorah," a fence around the Torah through its legal decisions. Indeed, the amplification of Torah by way of applying talmudic principles, enabled diaspora Jewry to uphold the Law, without negating the world around them. The sanctity of Torah was to be maintained, for through it was the existence of the people Israel affirmed.

But what was to be their model? How might the Jewish nation, scattered throughout the Mediterranean, actually maintain the sanctity of Torah? The picture that the text paints of Moses in his relationship with God offers a model of covenant living, an ideal towards which all Israel might strive. Moses was "Ish HaElohim," the man (of) God, for he was wholly righteous. He taught Torah with his words and through his deeds; the Divine will and his own were one. Realizing that few, if any, could ever attain such a state of spiritual perfection, the Rabbis suggested a compromise.<sup>4</sup> Though the text affirms Moses' uniqueness, it enables Israel to bring Moses into their midst, to be like their leader by carrying on his teachings. Faith in God and devotion to the teachings of Torah are the basic steps on the pathway to righteousness, to covenant living.



But the geonim understood that the reality of diaspora life did not provide enough motivation for most Jews to strive to be like Moses. Thus, towards the close of Petirat Moshe, the text confirms that there is indeed an ultimate reward for the truly righteous. In the face of the Pact of Omar and Christian antagonism, when others sought to deny the Eternal Law by ushering in a premature "Olam Haba," the World to Come, Jews could rest assured that their adherence to God's Torah in this world would bring them glory in the future.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, crucial to realize that the author(s) did not focus on the vision of "Olam Haba," but chose to underscore the importance of life in the here and now. Messianic fervor would only lead to a denial of all worldly pursuits, and eventually to apostasy. The geonim, as the authoritative interpreters of the Law, did not wish to "vote themselves out of office." Moreover, in keeping with the classic rabbinic view which they no doubt shared, it was only by adherence to the Torah that Israel could help to initiate such a messianic coming. Attempting to maintain the status quo, or at least to keep their grip on the central reigns leadership, the geonim sought to minimize conflict and maximize adherence, by aiding the many Jewish communities around them in accomodating Torah to the demands of diaspora daily living. Clearly, the authoritative basis for such an enterprise, as well as the major problems entailed therein, are reflected in the thematic development of Midrash Petirat Moshe.

Beyond its historical message, Petirat Moshe has much to offer the Jewish community of our own day. Moses' struggle with death and his subsequent search for "true" justice, his role as leader and teacher of the people Israel, raise questions and offer certain insights which are of ultimate concern to us today, as Jews approaching the twenty-first century.

The core of the midrash deals with the passing of Moses, as the title of the work suggests. Yet the scope of the text's message is not for the nation alone. Indeed, the midrash speaks to every Jew, to each member of the people Israel. Petirat

Moshe speaks to us of the very real struggle which we all must encounter, the confrontation with death. We have all asked ourselves the unending series of "Why's." "Why now?" "Why like this?" "Why did he or she do this to me?" The questions abound; yet there seems to be no answer, no way to explain. Though Petirat Moshe does not pretend to provide the answers, we might gain a valuable perspective on life and death through briefly viewing the struggle which Moses himself experienced.

Moses, the great leader of the people Israel, the founding father of the nation, the instrument of God's revelation, did not wish to "go" when his time had arrived. It mattered not that death was our common destiny, for he was not ready to share in any part of it.<sup>6</sup> Moses sought to avert the Divine decree in every way imaginable. He petitioned, he pleaded, he mounted a verbal defense, and he even resorted to physical force. What then, in the end, convinced him that accepting death was the only viable option?

It seems to me that by way of his struggle, Moses gained a renewed perspective on life, and so too, on death. By recounting his life achievements to the Angel of Death, Moses saw all that he had done, his many triumphs, his moments of glory. For the first time, the leader of Israel took a step back, in order to view the progression of his years, the experiences which, joined together, marked his special contribution to humanity. Perhaps, as a result, he had come to the realization that the quality of a life was far more important than the number of its years. Or maybe now he understood that no matter when the end came, he would always have more to do, things he had yet to accomplish. Whatever the actual rationale, Moses accepted the Divine decree after his interchange with the Angel of Death.

Moses' struggle presents us with a dual faceted model of faith. To be sure, his acceptance of death constituted an affirmation of God's eternal plan, an acknowledgement of the ultimate justice of the Lord, which is beyond the comprehension of humankind. For many of us, however, it is Moses' faith in the power of living that provides meaning to our own personal trials. Moses finally recognized that he was, in effect, eternal, for his teachings would live on indefinitely. Though he would perish, the Torah which he transmitted would remain with the people as an eternal reminder of the impact of his life. Accepting death,

Moses finally recognized the power of life, the lasting effect of his own earthly existence.

Death is never easy, nor is it possible to truly understand. Yet, for us, Moses' own struggle can serve as a model which we can emulate. We too can approach death with the faith of Moses. In this sense, our faith becomes our determination to make ideals live long after the one who professed them is no more. Accepting death, we do not here find answers to the many "Why's" which we ask ourselves again and again. Yet, with Moses as our primary example, we might better cope with the weight of those questions, by reaffirming our commitment to living. Our lives can be a testament to those who are gone, if we can but transform precious memories into guiding inspiration. Something of those who are dead lives on in us, through the lives that we live.

As noted in the introductory statement, the role which Moses molded for himself presents us with an insightful model of leadership, which would be of value to congregations and congregational leaders alike. Early on in the midrash, Moses realizes that his death is not for his sake alone. He had to die in order for Israel to live on and flourish.<sup>7</sup> His life as leader of the people was ending. He lead Israel and maintained them. He provided them with sustenance, encouragement and love. He gave them the Torah and taught them how to live. He brought them to the point where they now might begin to walk on thier own, to lead themselves.

The model of leadership which Moses presents speaks to every Rabbi, Cantor and Educator, to every congregational leader. Moses maintained his sense of perspective. He successfully balanced the greatness which the Holy One bestowed upon him with the recognition of his own finitude. He was majestic, yet ever humble. Moses learned that he was not indispensable. Though his vision became blurred at times, he regained focus to discern that his true role was as teacher of Torah to Israel. He was not the leader, but a teacher of the tradition, the first in a line of many more to come. The source of all being, the Giver of Torah to the people Israel, God alone was the Eternal Leader of Israel.

Moses' life as a leader, the role which he created for himself, challenges the Jewish leader of today to strike a balance

between leading and instilling leadership in others. So too, Moses' life summons the Rabbi and the Cantor to refocus their perspectives on congregational leadership, so that they might realize that their ultimate goal is to build a generation of leaders, Jews capable of leading themselves.

Moses spent his entire life trying to teach a "way of life," developing the confidence and the ability of a mixed multitude so they might one day become a self sufficient Jewish nation. In this way, Moses affirmed the ultimate sanctity of the tradition, offering it as a gift to each and every Israelite. Sinai called every slave who had come forth from Egypt to transform himself by way of Torah. Rabbis and Cantors must follow the lead of Moses.

Jewish living is a gift, offered equally to every member of the household of Israel. Searching the Torah, applying the tradition to daily life, studying other Jewish texts, celebrating the festivals, experiencing the Sabbath, these are not the sole responsibilities of the spiritual leader. Congregants must realize that they can live Jewishly all on their own. The Rabbi is not a surrogate for their prayers; they cannot sing vicariously through the voice of the Cantor. Only when Rabbis and Cantors help their congregants to realize that the Torah is entrusted to them: to learn, foster, develop, creatively apply and transmit, might they begin to actualize their full religious and creative potential. As the midrash affirms in the closing eulogy statement on Moses: "He executed the judgements of the Lord, and his righteousness is with Israel." <sup>8</sup> The task which Moses began has been given over to each and every Jew to continue. The leadership of Israel now rests with the people. The righteousness of Moses lives on through us, challenging us to make his teachings our own.

The uniqueness of this particular work lies partly in the nature of its message. Not only does the text speak to every individual Jew on a personal level, to Jewish leaders and congregations everywhere, but it also addresses the people Israel as a whole. Petirat Moshe is a rallying cry, a charge to the contemporary Jewish community.

Petirat Moshe is a call to unity. Moses' plea for petitionary aid is twice rejected. Both the Objects of Creation and the people Israel recognize that they are unable to annul the Divine decree

by praying on Moses' behalf.<sup>9</sup> In effect, their rejection was tantamount to an affirmation of God's justice, of the Divine plan which unites us all as instruments of the ongoing redemption of the world. In a time when the branches of Judaism find little common ground, our text summons all Jews to reaffirm their shared faith in the Eternal, the Creator and the Redeemer of all humankind.

Yet, as the midrash confirms, shared faith alone is not enough. Moses was portrayed as the epitome of righteousness, the tsaddik extraordinaire, for he served God with his heart and his hands. The midrash calls us to renew our commitment to the covenant of Sinai, to keep the spirit of Moses alive by carrying on the teachings which he transmitted. But how should this be done? Is there but one way for us to remain faithful in thought and in deed to the tradition? Just as the geonim saw fit to utilize their connection to Moses to sanction their interpretations of Torah, each branch of Judaism must be granted the authority to apply the halacha creatively, so long as the ultimate end of such application is the preservation and growth of the Jewish people.

Clearly, in our pluralistic society, there can be no single path which all Jews shall choose to follow. We must decide for ourselves then which would be the best way for us to maintain the tradition of Moses in our world. The text itself stresses the task to which all of us are called, in the closing eulogizing statement offered by the Ministering Angels. "He executed the judgements of the Lord, and his righteousness is with Israel" (Deut 33:21).<sup>10</sup> It is now in the hands of all Israel to keep the Torah alive, to apply the teachings of those who came before them, so as to foster the growth and development of Judaism. We might thus infer from the midrash, that we must mutually confirm our differences, accepting the many varied paths to Jewish living that exist in our world, while recognizing the underlying purpose which ultimately unites us as a people.

Though this thesis does present a structural breakdown of Petirat Moshe along with parallel and supplementary sources, seeking to analyze the composition and thematic progression of the midrash, there are still areas for further development which, if pursued, might provide the reader with a broader base for analysis and application of the theories posited herein.

Since there were five different versions to choose from, it was possible, after selecting the "Choice version," to do a general comparison between the variants. In so doing, I attempted to identify areas of close similiarity, as well as those of marked difference, which might have a bearing on the analysis of a given section. My findings are included in the textual parallels which accompany each sub-section of the text. There were a few specific areas, however, where the "Choice Version" was not altogether clear. In this respect, the presentation would only be enhanced by detailed critical manuscript work. If one could undertake to locating all available manuscripts of this work, an exhaustive comparison could be made, and the gray areas within the text might well be clarified. Moreover, such an endeavor could produce another variant, which might prove beneficial in the reading and interpretation of the "Choice text."

The other area which would benefit from greater expertise is that of the historical analysis. Though a clear portrayal of the geonic age was presented, a more in depth historical survey might have aided in the application of the midrash to its contextual timesetting. Clearly, the text mirrors certain concerns of the mid-geonic period, yet more historical data might lead to a greater understanding of the thematic development within the text as it reflects the agenda of its time.

Hopefully, this limited study will contribute to the general body of narrative-historical midrashim of the eighth and ninth centuries C.E. Whether from a thematic standpoint, a structural analysis or a stylistic perspective, Midrash Petirat Moshe offers much that might aid in the understanding of parallel sources or other works of similiar stucture. In the final analysis, this work enables the reader to get to know Moses, to experience the many sides of the leader of Israel, and thereby to become better acquainted with themselves.

This genre of exegetical, narrative-historical midrash is one of many which stem from the middle period, 640 - 900 C.E. Though some have been investigated, such as perhaps the major work of the time-period, Pirkei D. Rabbi Eliezer, many shorter pieces, such as Petirat Moshe, lie dormant, awaiting closer scrutiny.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the limited study undertaken in this thesis, though far from conclusive, might well prove to be beneficial in assessing the impact of Moses' leadership, and in reading other parallel narrative midrashim on the life and death of Moses. Furthermore, the thematic progression which developed within the text may shed light on the major concerns and the worldview of the mid-geonic period.

At any rate, such a focused, limited study enables one to start from square one, with manuscript comparison and the development of a linear translation, and to gradually peel the layers from the work, discovering the worlds of hidden meaning buried within. The sense of satisfaction gained from attaining a level of mastery over a single, self-contained piece of midrash has been great indeed. Needless to say, such an endeavor has proven very rewarding for me, so much so that it will no doubt motivate me to continue similar studies of midrash in the future.

Notes to the Conclusion, pages 114-122.

1. See PM, Section III, Part 2, p. 38.
2. See Deut. 34:9.
3. See the parallel material on PM 2, 364a, p. 30.
4. Refer to PM Section IUc, comments A and B, pp. 66-67.
5. See PM Section IUc, comment C, p. 72-73.
6. Cf. Eccl. 12:13 and also Deut R. 11:8.
7. See PM, Section IIc, p. 31, on PM 2, 364a.
8. Cf. PM, Section U, comment B on Deut 33:21, p. 73.
9. See PM Section IIc, Part 3, p. 32.
10. See PM Section U, p. 69-70.
11. M. Herr, "Midrash," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. 11, 1509.



## **APPENDIX: A Thematic Outline of Midrash Petirat Moshe**

Section	Thematic development	Key Text
1	<u>Justification for death of Moses by God:</u> Reward in the Afterlife=World to Come —[THE ULTIMATE JUSTICE OF GOD]	(Deut 10:14)
	"Behold, to the Lord do the heavens to their uttermost reaches belong."	
2a	<u>Moses' plea for life:</u> Enter the Land of Israel —[IMMUTABILITY OF GOD'S DECREE/CONSISTENCY OF TORAH] —[DEATH; THE COMMON DESTINY OF ALL HUMANITY] —[MAN'S (MOSES') VISION OF GOD'S JUSTICE]	(Deut 32:39)
	"There is no god beside Me, I deal death and give life... None can deliver from My hand."	
2b	<u>Moses' plea for help:</u> All Creation petition God for mercy —[ALL CREATION ACKNOWLEDGES GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY] —[GOD; THE SOLE AUTHOR OF LIFE AND DEATH]	(Deut 32:4) (Deut 32:39)
	"The Rock, His works are perfect; and all His ways are just." "...None can deliver from My hand."	
2c	<u>Moses' plea for help:</u> All Israel petition God for mercy —[ALL ISRAEL ATTESTS TO THE DIVINE PLAN] —[IND US. COMMUNITY: THE SURVIVAL OF ISRAEL] —[THE LEADER IS PRIVILEGED; DESERVES SPECIAL TREATMENT] —[GOD'S JUSTICE IS BEYOND MAN'S COMPREHENSION]	(Deut 32:4)
	"The Rock, His works are perfect; and all His ways are just."	

3

Sammael awaits Moses' death:

Preparing for the inevitable decree

\_\_\_[WICKED VS. RIGHTEOUS: MOSES THE SUPER TSADDIK]

\_\_\_[THE SUCCESSION OF LEADERSHIP: ISRAEL'S FUTURE IS BRIGHT]

\_\_\_[SHALSHELET HAKABBALAH: TORAH ALONE IS ETERNAL]

(Deut 34:10)

"Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses..." [Note: Deut 34:9-"Now Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses laid his hand upon him..."]

4a

The taking of Moses' soul: (Round 1)

The Angels and Sammael

\_\_\_[GLORY OF MOSES IS UNIQUE: A SHARE OF DIVINE GLORY]

\_\_\_[SOUL OF MOSES IS PURE: ABOVE ALL HUMANKIND]

\_\_\_[LIFE OF DEVOTION MERITS ALTERING DIVINE PLAN]

\_\_\_[THE SOURCE OF POWER: A PERSPECTIVE ON LEADERSHIP]

4b

The taking of Moses' soul: (Round 2)

Sammael vs. Moses: The Confrontation

\_\_\_[POWER OF MOSES IS DIVINE: DOMINION OVER ANGELS]

\_\_\_[PERFECTION OF MOSES: ISH HA'ELOHIM, THE MAN-GOD]

4c

Moses' final plea:

Accession to Divine Will

\_\_\_[UNIQUE STATUS OF MOSES MERITS THE DIVINE PRESENCE]

\_\_\_[GOD SEEKS FAITHFUL IN HEART &amp; SPIRIT]

\_\_\_[MOSES ACKNOWLEDGES GOD'S JUSTICE AND DIVINE PLAN]

4d

The taking of Moses' soul: (Round 3)

God and the Angels

\_\_\_[GLORY OF MOSES MERITS GLORY OF GOD]

\_\_\_[SUPERIORITY OF MOSES; THE ANGELS SERVE HIM]

\_\_\_[LIFE OF DEVOTION MERITS DEATH OF STATUS]

\_\_\_[ALL ARE NOT EQUAL IN DEATH AS IN BIRTH/LIFE]

(Deut 34:5)

"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there...at the command of the Lord." ("...al pi Adonai." kiss of God)

5

The Eulogy

- \_\_\_[DEATH OF RIGHTEOUS DIMINISHES ALL CREATION]
- \_\_\_[DEATH OF MOSES DIMINISHES DIVINE PRESENCE ON EARTH]
- \_\_\_[TRANSITION OF LEADERSHIP; IRREPLACABILITY OF MOSES]
- \_\_\_[LEADER LIVES ON THROUGH HIS TEACHINGS, THE TORAH]
- \_\_\_[GOD IS ONE TRUE, ETERNAL LEADER OF ISRAEL]

(Deut 34:10)

(Deut 33:21)

"Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses."

"He executed the Lord's judgements

and His decisions for Israel/and his justice is with Israel."

6a

In Search of Moses' soul:

The embarrassment of the Angel of Death

- \_\_\_[MOSES' CONNECTION: CREATION-REVELT'N-REDEMPT'N WRD]
- \_\_\_[MOSES IS WITH PEOPLE; THE ETERNAL TEACHER OF ISRAEL]
- \_\_\_[MOSES IS WITH GOD; THE ULTIMATE REWARD OF RIGHTEOUS  
AFFIRMATION OF DIVINE JUSTICE]
- \_\_\_[RATIONALIZATION OF DEATH, RENEWS LIFE-FOCUS OF ISRAEL]

6b

The Epitaph: Moses' burial place

Where does Moses lie?

- \_\_\_[MOSES NEVER BURIED/DIED, STILL LEADS ISRAEL FROM ABOVE]
- \_\_\_[DIVINITY OF MOSES: MYSTERY & AWE IN DEATH AS IN LIFE]
- \_\_\_[NO MAN MAY BE WORSHIPPED; THERE IS ONE TRUE GOD]

(Deut 34:6)

"He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near  
Beth Pe'or; and no one knows his burial place to this day."

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