

AUTHOR Beth Brownstein Wing

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THE IMAGE OF JOSHUA IN THE RABBINIC LITERATURE

Beth Brownstein Wing

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College -Jewish Institute of Religion

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Referee, Professor Edward Goldman

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Digest

This thesis is a collection and analysis of midrashim about Joshua son of Nun, the second great leader of our people. It is my hope that this compilation will provide a complete portrait of Joshua's life. While little is known about Joshua as he is presented in the Bible, the Joshua of Rabbinic literature is quite complex. He is capable in battle, to be sure, but his true strength emerges as a leader. During his tenure as leader, Joshua balances justice and mercy with ease. He is both respected and loved by the people he leads and by those whom he serves. Though he has sinful moments, reminding all that he is human, Joshua's righteous behavior far surpasses his misdeeds. He is an example of a leader who is worthy of emulation.

Chapter One explores Joshua in his earliest role as Moses' servant and designated leader of the troops. They have a beautiful relationship based on mutual respect, love, and loyalty. Chapter Two focuses on two significant events in Joshua's life as they appear in the Torah text: the battle against Amalek and Joshua's name change. As he succeeds Moses and becomes the leader of the people, Joshua must forge his own relationship with God. This relationship is explored in Chapter Three. Chapter Four begins a large exposition of Joshua as he enters the Land with the people. This chapter includes several major events such as the second circumcision of the people, the stopping of the sun, and the rebellion of Achan. This chapter also includes a portrait of Joshua as leader and warrior.

Chapter Five introduces material about Joshua's family as well as Joshua's good and bad points. The thesis concludes with the Epilogue as Joshua's death and aftermath are examined. My hope is that those who read this thesis will learn valuable lessons from this great leader of the people Israel.

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INTRODUCTION

The biblical character Joshua is first mentioned in the book of Exodus. He is described there as a servant of Moses and a military warrior. He gains some prominence in the book of Numbers as one of the twelve spies sent to scout out the land of Canaan and one of only two to come back with a favorable report. But, Joshua really becomes known at the end of Deuteronomy when he is chosen to be Moses' successor. He is the man who leads the people across the Jordan river and leads them in the battles to conquer the Land. He is portrayed as a leader and a warrior.

As Moses' successor, he has a very difficult role to play which he seems to take on with relative ease. Yet, Joshua is not as popular a character as some of the other characters in the Bible. On the surface he doesn't seem to have the charisma of Moses. Joshua's biblical persona is rather flat. Nor is Joshua's story a clearly defined narrative like Joseph or Esther. Furthermore, the placement of his story outside of the Torah makes Joshua even less well-known. In spite of this, Joshua is one of the great biblical leaders of our people and this fact makes him worthy of study. The goal of this thesis is to present a comprehensive picture of Joshua as seen through the lens of Rabbinic literature.

Whereas the Bible does not reveal much about Joshua, Rabbinic literature develops Joshua quite thoroughly. Joshua is defined by his relationships with Moses, God, and the people that he leads. He becomes a leader of great strength

and discerning judgment. He is both forceful and merciful. He trusts the people to act in a righteous manner, but he is not afraid to correct them when they do not. He is a servant as well as a leader, a fighter as well as a peace-keeper.

In each section, I will begin the study of Joshua by examining various biblical texts that mention Joshua's name. Then I will turn to the associated rabbinic passages on those verses. The Rabbis, through the midrashim, expand upon, and explain in greater depth, the biblical verses. This thesis will attempt to assemble, translate, and interpret these midrashim in order to fully understand Joshua. In the course of explaining the rabbinic texts, I will explain various hermeneutic devices used in this literature. Furthermore, throughout the thesis, I will attempt to present deeper messages about how to live life that emerge from these texts. These messages had meaning in the days of the Rabbis as well as importance to us today. While the material is presented in a roughly chronological order, there are many exceptions to the rule. The thesis is organized more by category than by time. The method for finding materials, which is described below, should make it evident why the organization is carried out in this way.

I began my study by consulting a Hebrew concordance to the Bible. In the concordance I found all verses in the Bible which contained Joshua's name. Then in order to locate the material, I proceeded to consult the indices of various rabbinic works appearing in English translation. These included: The Soncino *Talmud*, the Soncino *Midrash Rabbah*, Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews*, Braude's

translations of *Pesikta deRav Kahana*, *Pesikta Rabbati*, and Friedlander's *Pirke deRabbi Eliezer*. In addition, I consulted *Torah Ha-ketuvah v'hamesura*, as well as Braude's translation of *Sefer Ha-aggadah*. From each source, I found a myriad of midrashim about Joshua. After sifting out some that were irrelevant to the study or otherwise not useful, I sorted out the stories into various categories. These categories later became the chapters, and the sections within the chapters, of this work.

The challenge of the research was that Joshua appears in many different places and circumstances in the biblical text. Therefore, the midrashim about him also appear in many different contexts. The problem was not a lack of material about Joshua, rather a plethora of places to locate it. In addition, certain midrashim apply to more than one biblical event and others present different information about Joshua depending on the context in which the midrash is placed! All of these challenges lead to a somewhat non-chronological presentation of material.

A note about translations: For biblical citations I relied on the *Jerusalem Bible*, Koren Publishers, 1992. While I consulted the English, I always relied on the Hebrew when translating text. In addition, I adjusted the language to reflect modern usage of English. When studying the rabbinic texts, I tended to rely on the available English translations, but checked them against the Hebrew originals to fully understand the meaning and nuances of the rabbinic analysis. It would have

been impossible to fully understand this material from the English translation alone.

I. JOSHUA AND MOSES

THE BEGINNING OF THE RELATIONSHIP

EXODUS 17:8-14

(8) Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Refidim. (9) And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us out men, go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." (10) So Joshua did as Moses had said to him and fought with Amalek. Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. (11) And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed. (12) But Moses' hands were heavy so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat upon it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands one on one side and one on the other and thus his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. (13) And Joshua harried Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. (14) And the Lord said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in a book and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

The above verses, which appear at the end of *Parashat Beshallah*, portray Joshua's first appearance in the Bible. Amalek, the bitter enemy of Israel, is poised to attack the Israelites. Joshua's introduction is somewhat abrupt. We have

not been given any information about who he is or even who his father is. The latter is especially interesting as Joshua is almost always referred to as "Joshua son of Nun." Here, however, we have none of that. We can only surmise that Joshua has been around Moses for some time and has proven himself during that time to be a warrior and leader who is trustworthy enough to lead the battle. The Rabbis use this mysterious appearance of Joshua to define the relationship between Moses and Joshua.

And Moses said unto Joshua, "Choose Us out Men." From this it is evident that Moses treated Joshua as his equal. Learn, all the world, proper conduct from Moses who did not say to Joshua, "Choose me out men," but "Choose *us* out men"--he treated him as an equal. From this we learn that a teacher should hold his student as dear as he holds himself¹

Of all of the relationships that Joshua has in Rabbinic literature, his relationship with Moses is the most complex and the most well-defined. This Midrash demonstrates how, even from the earliest point in their relationship, Moses and Joshua had a special connection. Moses, as the God-chosen leader of the Israelite people, was under no obligation to share power in any way. Yet, where Joshua is concerned, Moses brings him into the fold of leadership as an equal.

¹ Mekhilta, Tractate Amalek 1:68-71.

Another passage makes a similar point about the relationship between Moses and Joshua.

Rabbi Eleazar B. Shammua said: Let the honor of your disciple be as dear to you as your own, and the honor of your colleague as the reverence for your teacher, and the reverence for your teacher as the fear of Heaven.²

In a footnote to this passage in the Talmud, Ex. 17:9 is cited as proof. Thus, when Moses says, "Choose us out men," he not only treats Joshua as an equal but also shows him honor.

The above passages reflect the respect that Moses had for Joshua, but each of those same passages also reflects the respect that Joshua had for his teacher, Moses. The Mekhilta passage continues:

And from where do we know that the respect for his teacher should be as dear to a man as the fear of heaven? It is said, '*And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses from his youth up answered and said, "My lord Moses, shut them in"*' (Numbers 11:28). He said to him: "My teacher Moses, just as God would shut them in, so you should shut them in."³

This passage refers to an event in Numbers in which two Israelites, Eldad and Medad, are prophesying in the camp. This incident will re-appear below to

² Bavli Avot Chap. 4.

³ Mekhilta, Tractate Amalek 1:75-79.

further define the relationship between Moses and Joshua. In this context, Joshua refers to Moses as "My lord, Moses." Because Joshua addresses Moses as "my lord," the Rabbis infer that Joshua has as much respect for Moses as one would have for God. Thus it is proven that "the respect for his teacher should be as dear to him as the fear of heaven."⁴

At the end of the above Biblical passage it is written, "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this for a memorial in a book and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.'" It is unusual that God would tell Moses to repeat something to Joshua. This peculiarity begs for explanation which is given in the following midrash:

It is written, '*And rehearse it in the ears of Joshua.*' This is one of the four cases in which a hint was given [by God] to a righteous man: two took the hint and two did not. Moses was given a hint and did not take it . . . When Moses was told, '*And rehearse it in the ears of Joshua,*' it was a hint to him that he would die and Joshua would lead Israel into the land, and yet we read, '*And I entreated the Lord, etc*' (Deut. 3:23).⁵

Thus, as early in the text as Exodus 17:14, according to the Rabbis, Moses has been told that Joshua will succeed him (even though Moses does not pick up on the hint as evidenced by the fact that in Deuteronomy Moses still pleads with

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Esther Rabbah 6:6.

God to let him lead the people into the land). The fact that Joshua is chosen here as successor makes two very important points. The first is that Joshua was already a trusted advisor, leader, and servant to have been chosen as Moses' successor. This is especially remarkable when it is not yet clear that Aaron will die in the wilderness and that Moses has sons. Why Joshua was chosen over Moses' sons will be discussed later. The second important point is that Moses and Joshua must have had a special kind of closeness that allowed for Moses to be told of Joshua's succession. If Moses and Joshua were not close, God could not have revealed this information to Moses without jeopardizing Joshua's life.

Joshua's next appearance is when Moses is about to ascend the mountain to receive the Law.

EXODUS 24: 12-13

(12) And the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me to the mountain and be there, and I will give you the tablets of stone, and the Torah, and the commandments which I have written, that you may teach them." (13) And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua. And Moses went up into the mount of God.

This verse is somewhat enigmatic as Joshua appears quite suddenly and then disappears as quickly. Nowhere in the text does it intimate that Joshua is told to ascend the mountain with Moses and yet, he is shown to have done so in this

passage. One might even be tempted to say that it was a scribal error of some sort--an ancient "typo." In the world of the Rabbis, however, this is practically unthinkable. There can be no mistakes in the Torah--every word is written for a reason. Oddly enough then, Joshua's appearance is barely mentioned in the literature of the Rabbinic period. For this reason, I turned to the Medieval commentator Rashi to elucidate this passage.

I do not know what Joshua's role is here. But I say that the student was escorting the master until the place where the limits of the mountain were set, for he was not allowed to go beyond that point. And from there, '*Moses ascended*' by himself '*to the mountain of God.*' And Joshua pitched his tent there and waited the entire forty days, for so we have found when Moses descended, '*And Joshua heard the sound of the people in its trumpeting*' (Ex. 32:17). We have learned that Joshua was not with them.⁶

Even Rashi is perplexed on some level by Joshua's appearance here. Rashi's explanation is that Joshua went up the mountain with Moses because he was such a diligent disciple of his teacher. However, he could only ascend part of the way and thus remained there while Moses continued to the top. The assumption that Rashi makes is that Joshua remained there until Moses descends from the mountain. He makes that assumption based on a statement that Joshua

⁶ Rashi's comment to Exodus 24:13, Rabbi Herczeg, trans. *Rashi: The Saperstein Edition* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), p.315.

makes to him as Moses descends. He says that he can hear "noise of war" in the camp below. This presumes that he was not down in the camp to hear the noise clearly.

One comment in the Talmud supports Rashi's argument.

Another interpretation of: '*Man did eat the bread of the mighty.*' That is Joshua, for whom manna [specially] fell down as it did to all Israel, [for] it is written here, '*man,*' and also there it is written, '*Take thee Joshua, the son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit.*'⁷

The text is focused on the word "*ISH,*" meaning "man." Because the quote "Man did eat the bread of the mighty," contains the word "man," and the quote about Joshua as a "man [emphasis mine] in whom there is spirit" also contains the word "man," one is able to draw parallel conclusions about them by means of the hermeneutic device, *g'zera shava*. In this case, the conclusion is that Joshua is the "man" who "did eat of the bread of the mighty." The bread then that is being referred to is the manna. The reason that they assume that manna fell for Joshua is that it is said of Moses that he did not eat or drink while on the mountain, but it does not say that of Joshua. Therefore, Joshua must have received food while at his post half-way up the mountain and that is why it is written in this passage that manna fell especially for Joshua at his place. What Exodus 24:13 teaches about

⁷ Bavli Yoma 75b-76a.

Joshua is that he was a loyal enough servant of Moses to accompany him up the mountain before he knew that he would be provided with food while there. It also reflects that Joshua held a special privileged position with God that manna fell specifically for him.

EXODUS 32: 15-18

(15) And Moses turned, and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand - tablets written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. (16) And the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved upon the tablets. (17) And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." (18) But he said, "It is not the voice of those who shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of those who cry for being overcome, but the noise of those who sing do I hear!"

Since Joshua the faithful servant waits on the mountain for Moses, it makes sense that Joshua's next appearance in the text would be here, as Moses is descending the mountain. The difference is that some of the midrashim based on these verses portray Joshua in a less favorable light.

'Nor yet favor to men of skill' (Ecclesiastes 9:11). This applies to Joshua.

R. Ahava the son of R. Ze'ira said: Two things did Joshua say to Moses,

which did not meet with his approval. . . . Again, when he said to him,
'There is a noise of war in the camp' (Ex. 32:17), Moses replied: Joshua!
 A man who will one day hold sway over sixty myriads cannot distinguish
 between different sounds! *'It is not the voice of them that shout for
 mastery'* (ib. 18)--as when you read, *'And it came to pass, when Moses
 held up his hand, that Israel prevailed'* (ib. 17:11); *'Neither is it the voice
 of them that cry for being overcome'* --this having the same meaning as in
 the verse, *'And Joshua discomfited Amalek,'* etc. (ib. 17) I am amazed!
'But the noise of them that sing do I hear,' which R. Jose interpreted: I
 hear the voice of idolatrous praise.⁸

This midrash demonstrates a tension between Moses and Joshua as Moses
 scolds Joshua for his lack of discernment. In each of the phrases above, Moses
 reminds Joshua of events in the past which might have sounded like "the noise of
 war." Moses seems angry and frustrated with Joshua for not correctly identifying
 that the Israelites below were engaging in idolatrous behavior.

Much can be gleaned from this midrash about Moses and Joshua. Moses
 seems so frustrated because he knows that Joshua will be leading the people after
 he is gone. It stands to reason that Moses would want to hand over the people to
 someone he trusts and feels will be a good leader. That is why Moses is so
 frustrated that Joshua can't discern the sound of idolatry from the sound of war.

⁸ Genesis Rabbah 96:1.

Moses understands that upon entering the land, one of the greatest challenges that they will face will be idolatry. It is therefore extremely important that Joshua understand what that sounds like.

In addition, even though Joshua is being scolded by Moses, an element of love is behind it. This is similar to a parent who chastises a child, not because the parent hates the child, but rather because of the deep love that the parent has for the child as well as the great interest that the parent has in seeing that the child learns. This appears to be happening between Moses and Joshua as well.

Finally, Moses is "amazed" to learn that Joshua misheard the noise. This demonstrates that Joshua had heretofore presented himself as thoroughly capable. Because of this, Moses is taken aback that Joshua could make such a serious mistake.

JOSHUA AS MOSES' SERVANT

EXODUS 33:9-11

(9) And it came to pass, as Moses entered the Tent, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the Tent, and one talked with Moses.

(10) And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the door of the Tent. And all the people rose up and worshipped, every man at his tent door.

(11) And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he turned back to the camp, but his servant, Joshua, the son of

Nun, a young man, did not depart out of the Tent.

These verses represent Joshua's final appearance in Exodus. Not unlike his other appearances, this appearance, too, is unusual. One wonders why Joshua was in the Tent at all while God was speaking to Moses "face to face." It also seems strange that Joshua would remain in the Tent after Moses had departed. Yet, as in the other places, Joshua maintains an unusual prominence in Moses' life. The midrashim on this verse will address two issues--the quality of Joshua as a servant of Moses, and the reason that Joshua merited being chosen as Moses' successor over Moses' own sons.

This bears on the text, '*The one who keeps the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof; he that waits on his master shall be honored*' (Proverbs. 27:18), which applies to Joshua, who served Moses; as you read, '*But his minister Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the Tent*' (Ex. 33:11). Why was the Torah likened to a fig-tree? Because most trees--the olive, the vine, and the date--are picked all at once, while the fig-tree is picked little by little. It is the same with Torah. One learns a little of it one day and more the next; for it cannot be learned all in one year or in two. Of such a man it says, '*The one who keeps the fig-tree.*'⁹

In this first section of the midrash, Joshua is likened to "one who keeps the

⁹ Numbers Rabbah 12:9.

fig-tree." The fig-tree in this case is Torah. Like the keeping of a fig-tree, the study of Torah requires dedicated study "little by little," that "cannot be learned in a year." Thus Joshua is portrayed as a person who has been dedicated over time to the methodical study of Torah. This part of the midrash also explains that when Joshua remained in the Tent, it was for the purpose of serving Moses. The extent to which Joshua served Moses appears in another midrash on this same passage.

Joshua served you much and he showed you great honor. It was he who rose early in the morning and remained late at your House of Assembly; he used to arrange the benches, and he used to spread out the mats. Seeing that he has served you with all his might, he is worthy to serve Israel, for he shall not lose his reward. *'Take for yourself Joshua son of Nun'* (Numbers 27:18). This serves to confirm the text, *'The one who keeps the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof.'*¹⁰

This passage presents a specific list of tasks that Joshua performed for Moses. It helps to explain why Joshua would remain in the Tent, even after Moses had left--he had work left to do to serve Moses. For this reason, Joshua is rewarded with the leadership of the people. God responds to Moses' request for a successor by saying, "Take thee Joshua...."

This midrash appears in Numbers Rabbah. The Rabbis want to know why,

¹⁰ Numbers Rabbah 21:14.

at this point, Moses asks God for a successor.

Just this: that when the daughters of Zelophehad inherited from their father, Moses argued: The time is opportune for me to demand my own needs. If daughters inherit, it is surely right that my sons should inherit my glory. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: *'The one that keeps the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof; and he that waits on his master shall be honored* (Proverbs 27:18). Your sons sat idly by and did not study the Torah. [In contrast,] Joshua served you much and he showed you great honor. . .¹¹

Moses is motivated by God's decision to allow the daughters of Zelophehad to inherit to ask that his own sons inherit. God tells Moses that his sons do not deserve to inherit the mantle of leadership because they did not study Torah. Therefore, Joshua is chosen over Moses' own sons because he studied Torah and because he served Moses with such zeal.

ELDAD AND MEDAD

NUMBERS 11:26-28

(26) And there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad and the name of the other, Medad. And the spirit rested upon them and they were of them that were written, but went not out to the

¹¹ Numbers Rabbah 21:14.

Tent. And they prophesied in the camp. (27) And there ran a young man and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp." (28) And Joshua son of Nun, the servant of Moses from his youth, answered and said, "My lord, Moses, shut them in!" (29) And Moses said to him, "Are you envious for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them!" (30) And Moses retired into the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

In this episode, two men Eldad and Medad prophesy within the camp while Moses and the 70 elders are around the Tent. Joshua seems particularly upset by this and calls for them to be "shut in," or "restrained" in some way. The key Hebrew word here is "*K'LA-EIM*," the meaning of which is unclear. It could mean shut in, restrain, or even "put an end to." If the latter of these meanings is applied, Joshua's request becomes quite drastic--calling for Eldad and Medad to be killed. Moses, in turn, reacts sharply to Joshua's suggestion. The moment seems charged with emotions on both sides and it is not clear why. The Rabbis explore this in several midrashim on the subject. The first of these is a midrash from Genesis Rabbah which was mentioned above.

Two things did Joshua say to Moses, which did not meet with his approval. When he urged him, *'My lord Moses, shut them in'* (Numbers 11:28), Moses answered him, What are you thinking--that I am jealous of you? Would that all Israel were like you! *'Would that all the Lord's people*

were prophets' (ib. 29).¹²

This part of the midrash is very complicated and needs to be examined carefully, piece by piece, in order to better understand it and its reflection of the relationship between Joshua and Moses. The first question that must be answered is, what did Eldad and Medad say which upset Joshua so? The Talmud explains that Eldad and Medad were prophesying that Moses would die and Joshua would lead them into the wilderness.¹³ This partially explains why Joshua would have been upset. Perhaps that is why the Bible text mentions here that Joshua "*was a servant of Moses from his youth.*" Joshua, after serving Moses his whole life, was outraged that these two men would make such a statement publicly about Moses to the congregation of Israelites. One could even think of such a public statement as treason against Moses which would explain why Joshua called for them to be "brought to an end," if that is how *K'LA-EIM* is to be read.

What is still confusing is Moses' sharp response to Joshua. He says in the Bible text, "Are you jealous for my sake?" which the Rabbis read as, "Do you think that I am jealous of you?" In other words, Moses is saying to Joshua, "Do not think that their prophecy makes me jealous of you because I'm not. Rather, I am strong enough that I wish all Israel could prophesy the truth like them and that all Israel was righteous enough, like you, to succeed me." Looking at the text this

¹² Genesis Rabbah 96:1.

¹³ Bavli Sanhedrin 17a.

way makes it seem as if Joshua tries to protect Moses and Moses rebukes him for thinking he needed protecting.

The relationship between Moses and Joshua is quite complex as the two of them switch roles and then switch back. Eldad and Medad's prophecies anger Joshua because he has been a loyal servant of Moses for a long time. Thus Joshua momentarily steps out of the role of disciple into the role of Moses' protector. He suggests discipline be meted out to the offending men, as one might do if he were in charge. This switch of roles is short-lived, however, as Moses swiftly steps in, rebuking Joshua, and thus returning him to his rightful place. This midrash demonstrates Joshua's fierce love of his teacher Moses. It also perhaps serves to foreshadow Joshua's eventual succession of Moses. Later we will in fact see a reversal of their roles which is more permanent.

JOSHUA AND THE MANTLE OF LEADERSHIP

Joshua's prominence truly comes to the fore when he is officially chosen by God to be Moses' successor and it is announced publicly to the congregation.

NUMBERS 27:15-23

(15) And Moses spoke to the Lord saying, (16) "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, (17) One who may go out before them, who may go in before them, and who may lead them out, and may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as

sheep that have no shepherd.” (18) And the Lord said to Moses, “Take for yourself, Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit, and lay your hand upon him; (19) and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. (20) And you shall put of your honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may hearken. (21) And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of the Urim before the Lord: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” (22) And Moses did as the Lord had commanded him: and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, (23) and he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses.

There is a lot of material on this one Biblical passage, some which explores the character of Joshua and some which emphasize the relationship between Moses and Joshua. Because of the length of this passage, it makes the most sense to deconstruct the text verse by verse. As explained earlier in this chapter, Moses is prompted to look for a successor after Zelophehad’s daughters successfully argue their case for inheritance. It is at this point that Moses asks God to “set a man over the congregation.” A midrash implies that Moses is really asking God to set the *right* man over the congregation.

When Moses saw that his sons were not worthy to succeed him in

dignity of his office, he wrapped himself in his tallit and standing up in prayer before the Holy One, said: . . . Master of the universe, the disposition of every one of them is revealed to You--the disposition of one is not at all like the disposition of another. After I depart from them, when You will be setting another leader over them, I beg you, set over them a leader who will put up with each and every man according to his particular disposition. So, in saying, '*Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set [the right] man over the congregation,*' Moses asked: Will the man You set over the congregation have within himself the spirits of sixty myriads, so that he will be able to converse with each man according to his particular disposition? The Holy One replied: Moses, you have made a proper request.¹⁴

Moses cares a great deal about the people and wants to make sure that their needs will be taken care of after he is gone. So, he makes a request for an extraordinary person to succeed him--one who has tremendous leadership abilities and skills in relating to people. The fact that Joshua is chosen for this task then, is a true testament to his abilities. This shows the great confidence that God had in Joshua. Additionally, if on some level, Moses knew that Joshua was the best man for the job, then it is also a great testament to the confidence that Moses had in

¹⁴ Yalkut Pinchas sec. 776, as it appears in *Sefer Ha-aggadah*, H.N. Bialik and Y.H. Ravnitzky, eds. (Tel Aviv: Dvir), p. 76.

Joshua.

The first verse after the request is for a man who "may go out before them, who may go in before them, and who may lead them out, and may bring them in."

A midrash elucidates this verse:

In the end He[God] said to him[Moses], '*You shall not bring this assembly into the land*' (Numbers 20:12). Moses said to Him: Sovereign of the Universe! I did not ask to be allowed to go! In this strain it says, '*You have begun to show Your servant, etc.*' (Deuteronomy 3:24). Seeing that You have made this decree against me, do not do to the man who will enter the land the same as You did to me, but let him be such as '*May go out before them, and who may come in before them*' (Emphasis mine).¹⁵

In this case, Moses acknowledges that he has been forbidden to enter the land. After this acknowledgement however, he pleads with God that the next leader, whomever it might be, be allowed to take the people all the way there. This conclusion is derived from the fact that Moses makes a double request: Someone who will lead the people out *and* in. The Rabbis explain this seemingly superfluous phrase as meaning two different requests--leading them *out* of the Wilderness and *into* the land. It seems as though Moses knows that the switch of leaders will be difficult for the people and so he wishes that they not have to lose a second leader before entering the land. This demonstrates Moses' great concern

¹⁵ Numbers Rabbah 21:15.

for the people he leads. Moses needs to know that the people will be in good hands after he is gone. It is interesting to note that by this time, it has been made clear that only Joshua and Caleb will survive the generation of the desert and enter the land. Thus, Moses is basically asking that one of the two survivors be designated leader. Furthermore, based on their previous relationship, one can only assume that Moses is talking about Joshua. Moses wants Joshua to succeed him and basically asks God to confirm this.

The final phrase of the request includes the reason "that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep that have no shepherd"(Numbers 27:17). There is a lovely midrash on this verse about Moses:

To whom may Moses be compared? To a faithful shepherd. When the owner of the flock said to him, "Remove yourself from my flock," he replied, "I will not remove myself until you tell me whom you will set as shepherd in my place."¹⁶

In other words, Moses is that faithful shepherd who will not abandon his flock until he knows that a suitable successor is in place. Therefore, in response to Moses' request, God tells Moses to "take for yourself Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit . . ." (Numbers 27:18). The reason that Joshua is called "a man in whom there is spirit," is explained as follows:

¹⁶ Yalkut Pinchas sec. 776, as it appears in *Sefer Ha-aggadah*, H.N. Bialik and Y.H. Ravnitzky, eds., p. 76.

This was in answer to [Moses] having said, '*the God of the spirits,*' (Numbers 27:16) by which he meant: You are acquainted with the spirit of every individual and should appoint a man who will know how to deal with each one of them in accordance with his own temperament.¹⁷

Moses is also instructed to take Joshua for himself, as it says, "Take *for yourself* Joshua . . ." (emphasis mine). This extra word, "*L'CHA*" seems extraneous, but as we have seen before, there are no superfluous words in the Torah according to the Rabbinic view. In the following midrash, this word is explained. The Hebrew word for "take," "*KAKH*," is interpreted as "acquire."

And the Lord said to Moses, '*Acquire for yourself Joshua the son of Nun*' (Numbers 27:18). The word "acquire" here implies acquisition at much cost, for a companion is acquired after difficulties upon difficulties. Hence say the sages, a man should acquire a companion for everything: for reading Scripture with him, reciting Mishnah with him, eating with him, drinking with him, and disclosing all his secrets to him.¹⁸

This midrash implies that by choosing Joshua, Moses was in fact choosing a companion with whom he might share many experiences. It also says that this was not a hastily formed partnership. Rather, a companion is chosen only after

¹⁷ Numbers Rabbah 21:15. See above for further discussion of this passage.

¹⁸ Sifre Deuteronomy, Section 305.

going through trials and tribulations together, as Moses and Joshua have. It emphasizes how Joshua is not just filling a role for God, but also for Moses.

In the next phrase Moses is instructed to lay his *hand* upon Joshua. When Moses carries out the action, however, he places his *hands* on Joshua. The difference between the singular hand and plural hands is explained in the following midrash:

Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him, '*Take Joshua son of Nun*'

(Numbers 27:18. Moses did so in a generous spirit . . . It may be

illustrated by the case of a king who said to the overseer of his house:

"Give so-and-so a seah of wheat." The overseer went and gave him two seahs, saying to him: "Here is one seah from the king and one from me."

In the same way the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: '*Lay your hand upon him*,' (Numbers 27:18)--one hand. What did Moses do? '*And he laid his hands upon him and gave him a charge*' (Numbers 27:23).

What this story demonstrates is how Moses felt about Joshua. He chose Joshua, not begrudgingly, but rather with love, affection, and generosity. In the *mashal*, the overseer gives an extra reward to his underling above and beyond what the king suggested. In the *nimshal*, Moses does the same for Joshua. He places *both* his hands on Joshua, not just one as God suggested. In this way, Moses shows his *own* pleasure over God's choice of Joshua.

In this same midrash passage, there is an alternative explanation of the

meaning of the verse, "And lay your hand upon him" (Numbers 27:18) which says that it can be compared to one who lights one candle with another.¹⁹ That is to say that just as the light of a candle does not diminish after it has lit another, so Moses' light is not diminished as he lays his hands upon Joshua. This idea also finds support in the Talmud which points out that because the Bible text says "of your honor" and not "all of your honor," that Moses' countenance does not diminish when Joshua is chosen.²⁰

In contrast to that, the next comment in the Numbers Rabbah passage says just the opposite. The passage is commenting on a later part of the original biblical verse which reads, "And you shall put of your honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may hearken." The midrash says that when the verse says, "put of your honor upon him," that it can be compared to a man emptying a vessel into another.²¹ In this case, when Moses passes the mantle of leadership to Joshua with this laying of hands, Moses' light *does* diminish. In fact, Moses "empties" all that he is into the "vessel" that is Joshua. If this later parable is true, then Moses' actions here are tremendous--he gives Joshua *everything* that he has to give. Perhaps this is why in a passage from the Talmud, Moses is credited with filling Joshua with wisdom, even though it is ultimately God who does the work.

¹⁹ Numbers Rabbah 21:15.

²⁰ Bavli Baba Kamma 75a.

²¹ Numbers Rabbah 21:15.

Raba said to Rabbah ben Mari: Whence can be derived the popular saying, "Though the wine belongs to the owner, the thanks are given to the butler?" He replied: As it is written, *'And you shall put of your honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may hearken,'* and it is also written, *'And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the children of Israel hearkened to him'* (Deuteronomy 34:9).²²

In this passage, Joshua is said to be filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses laid his hands on him. In truth, in this case, Moses is really the "butler" who brought the "wine," in this case the spirit of wisdom, but it is God, the "owner," who should really get the credit. Perhaps because of Moses' great sacrifice, he gets the "thanks" instead of God.

One final comment is necessary on this very important Biblical passage in Numbers when Joshua receives the mantle of leadership from Moses. To find this comment, it is necessary to return to a midrashic passage that was discussed above when Joshua's loyal service was being discussed. The midrash tries to explain how the Proverbs 27:18 verse, "The one who keeps the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof; and he that waits on his master shall be honored," applies to Joshua. The midrash demonstrates how the verse refers to Joshua as "the one who keeps the fig tree," who "eats the fruit [Torah] thereof," and who "waits on his master." This

²² Bavli Baba Kamma 92b.

section describes how he "shall be honored."

Consequently the Holy One, blessed be He, honored him. What honor did the Holy One, blessed be He, confer upon him? He said of Joshua as follows: *'And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of the Urim, etc.'* (Numbers 27:21). And because he served his master he attained to the privilege of receiving the Holy Spirit, as it says, *'Now it came to pass after the death of Moses... that the Lord spoke to Joshua'* (Joshua 1:1).²³

So, Joshua's reward for his loyal service is that he is chosen to take Moses' place as leader of the people. He is blessed abundantly and willingly by his teacher Moses in front of all of the congregation of Israel. This passage concludes the discussion of Numbers 27:15-23. These verses are among the most important verses in explaining the character of Joshua and his very special relationship with Moses. Outside of the book which bears his name, there is nowhere in the Torah where Joshua appears more prominently or more poignantly.

THE TRANSITION OF LEADERSHIP

DEUTERONOMY 3:21

(21) And I commanded Joshua at that time saying, "Your eyes have seen

²³ Numbers Rabbah 12:9.

all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings; so shall the Lord do to all the kingdoms into which you will pass.

The Rabbinic interpretation of this verse represents the beginning of a transition in the relationship between Moses and Joshua. In previous passages, Joshua was the servant and Moses the teacher. This will gradually begin to shift and Joshua will begin to take over. The above verse appears at the end of *Parashat Devarim*. What follows immediately is *Parashat Va'etchanan*, in which Moses pleads with God to be permitted into the land. This is important information as the following midrash passage attempts to connect the two.

'At that time' (Deuteronomy 3:23). At which time? At the time when Joshua was appointed leader, as it is said, '*And I commanded Joshua at that time*' (Deuteronomy 3:21). Rav Huna said: As soon as God said to Moses, "Hand over your office to Joshua," Moses immediately began to pray to be permitted to enter the land. He can be compared to a governor who so long as he retained his office could be sure that whatever orders he gave, the king would confirm . . . But as soon as he retired and another was appointed in his place, he had to ask in vain for the gate-keeper to let him enter [the palace]. Similarly, so long as Moses remained in office . . . But when he was relieved of his office and Joshua was appointed in his

stead, . . . he began to supplicate to be permitted to enter the land.”²⁴

This passage uses a *g'zera shava* to connect the two passages. Because the phrase “at that time,” appears in both verses, Rav Huna connects them to each other. In this case, there is also the *mashal* and *nimshal*, in which Moses is compared to a governor who, when in office, has great power. When the governor is replaced however, he cannot even get access to the palace! Likewise Moses, after Joshua was chosen leader, had to ask for permission to enter the land. This suggests that Moses is beginning to fall out of power even as Joshua is beginning to fall into power.

DEUTERONOMY 31:7

And Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall cause them to inherit it.

One passage on this verse reads the verse as Moses giving advice to Joshua about how to deal with the people.

‘Be strong and of good courage’ (Deuteronomy 31:7). The people I am turning over to you are still kids of the goats, being very young. Do not be provoked by what they do, even as their Lord was not provoked by what

²⁴ Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:5.

they did, as He said, *'Because Israel was young, I loved him'* (Hosea 11:1).²⁵

Moses appears to be trying to teach Joshua a lesson that Moses himself seemed to forget sometimes. That is, the congregation is young and Joshua should not let their impetuous ways provoke him to anger. In order for Joshua to do this, he will need to be "strong and of good courage."

Another explanation of the idea of "encouraging" and "strengthening," is based on a earlier verse from Deuteronomy.

DEUTERONOMY 3:28

But command Joshua and encourage him, and strengthen him: For he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which you shall see.

The Hebrew words for encourage and strengthen, in this verse, are based on the same root as "be strong and of good courage," "*CHAZAK*," and "*AMATZ*," respectively, which are present in Deuteronomy 31:7. The midrash which elaborates on their meaning is as follows:

In every case where the expression of "commanding" is used in Scripture, it is intended that the command shall take effect immediately, as soon as it

²⁵ Sifre Deuteronomy, Section 305.

can be put into action, and it shall remain in force for future generations.²⁶

Rabbi Judah son of Batyra says that "commanding" in every instance signifies only encouragement, as it says, '*But command Joshua and encourage him*' (Deuteronomy 3:28). Incidentally we have learned that one should encourage only those who are already courageous and stimulate only those who are already on the alert.²⁷

What this midrash is saying is that because the term "command" was used in the Biblical verse, it means that it was intended to take effect immediately and for all time. Thus Joshua would be encouraged and strengthened immediately. This implies that a power switch is gradually taking place. Rabbi Judah son of Batyra says that really Moses is just encouraging Joshua and nothing more.

The last part of the midrash is significant also. One might be tempted to think that Joshua was very afraid and very weak to have been told so many times to be strong and courageous. This midrash counters that notion by pointing out that a person is not to be encouraged or strengthened who is not already courageous and strong. Therefore Joshua, after a long time as Moses' servant, is ready to take over as leader.

²⁶ See also Bavli Kiddushin 29a.

²⁷ Numbers Rabbah 7:6.

THEIR FINAL DAYS TOGETHER

DEUTERONOMY 31:14-15

(14) And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold your days approach that you must die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may give him a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the Tent of Meeting. (15) And the Lord appeared in the Tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood over the door of the Tent.

With these words, the final transition is about to take place. Moses and Joshua have forged a relationship which is quite beautiful and complex. Together they have been through everything. We imagine them to be companions in the closest sense. They are teacher and student, war commander and warrior, master and servant, and loyal friends who care deeply for one another. There is a deep sense of sadness as the disciple finally takes over as the master passes away.

There is a tender story which portrays the transfer of power. Because of its length and depth, it will be explained in sections.

Moses said to the Holy One: "Master of the Universe, if I must die [to vacate my post for Joshua], let me be his disciple [in my remaining hours]."

The Holy One replied, "If that is what you wish to do, go and do it."

That Moses wants to spend his last few hours in a role reversal with his trusted servant is very beautiful. Moses wants his final act to be one that will aid

his disciple in assuming the role of teacher to the people.

So Moses rose early to be at Joshua's doorway, where Joshua sat and interpreted Scripture. [In order to hide his identity] Moses stooped and put his hand over his heart. At the same time Joshua's eyes were veiled [by God], making him unable to see Moses, so that Moses would be humiliated and come to be reconciled to his dying.

In this section of the story, Moses knows that Joshua would recognize him and therefore would not dare to act in the role of teacher in his presence. Since Moses truly wants Joshua to be the teacher and himself to be the disciple, he knows that he must disguise himself. God then multiplies the disguise by veiling Joshua's eyes. God knows that even in disguise, Joshua would recognize Moses because he knows him so well and served him so closely. God also veils Joshua's eyes with the hope that Moses will be humiliated by not being recognized and then be reconciled to his own death.

In the meantime, when the people came to Moses' doorway to study Torah and asked, "Where is our teacher Moses?" they were told, "He rose early and went to Joshua's doorway." They went and found him at Joshua's doorway--Joshua seated and Moses standing. They said to Joshua: "What has come over you, that you allow our teacher Moses to stand while you sit?" When Joshua's eyes were again clear and he recognized Moses, he rent his garments, cried out, and wept: "My master, my master! My father,

my father!”

In this section, the people recognize Moses and rebuke Joshua for showing such bold disrespect by assuming the role of teacher in the presence of Moses. However, Joshua’s strong reaction makes it clear that he had no idea that Moses was there, and if he had known, he *never* would have behaved in that way. Joshua is horrified that he had been sitting while Moses was standing. Even though his eyes were veiled and he didn’t see Moses, Joshua is still deeply grieved over what he had done, to the point that he rents his garments and cries aloud. It is clear that Joshua regards Moses with great respect. Perhaps Joshua is also so upset because he realizes that Moses’ time is coming to an end. All too soon then, Joshua really will be the rightful teacher of Torah to the people, instead of Moses. When Joshua discovers that Moses was attempting to be *his* disciple instead of the other way around, it was too much for him to bear. It is also poignant that Joshua calls Moses “master” and “father.” We don’t know much about Joshua’s father from the Bible text. This cry implies that on some level, he thought of Moses like a father. How painful it must be for both of them knowing that the end is coming rapidly!

Then the people said to Moses, “Moses our teacher, teach us Torah.” He replied, “I no longer have the authority.” They said: “We will not leave you.” Then a divine voice came forth and commanded the people, “Be willing to learn from Joshua.” With that, the people submitted to the

command to sit and learn from Joshua's mouth.

In this dramatic interchange, Moses tries to tell the people that he no longer has the authority to be the teacher. Moses graciously attempts to step out of the way that Joshua may step in. However, the people are understandably loyal and refuse to leave him. Finally, a divine voice is heard commanding the people to listen and learn from Joshua. Only after divine intervention will the people listen. The transition is nearing completion.

Joshua sat at the head, Moses at his right, and Aaron's sons at his left, while Joshua taught in Moses' presence. At that session, the tradition of wisdom was taken away from Moses and given to Joshua.

To finalize the transition of Joshua as teacher, he must actually teach a session which is what takes place. Once the session has been completed, the "tradition of wisdom" is officially passed.²⁸

One final midrash truly defines the relationship of Moses and Joshua. It also is best analyzed in sections.

"Call Joshua" (Deuteronomy 31:14). Moses said to God: "Master of the Universe, let Joshua take over my office and I will continue to live."

Whereupon God replied: "Treat him as he treats you." Immediately Moses

²⁸ This midrash contains parts of stories from Bavli Sotah 13b; Deuteronomy Rabbah 7:10; Tanhuma Va'etchannan, as it appears in *Sefer Ha-aggadah*, Bialik and Ravnitzky, eds. pp. 77-78.

arose early and went to Joshua's house, and Joshua became frightened.

Moses said to Joshua, "My teacher come to me." and they set out to go,

Moses walking on the left of Joshua.

Up to this point the passage is similar to the one that preceded it. It is important to note that a disciple normally walks on the left of the master. In this case Moses is showing deference to Joshua by taking the place of the disciple.

When they entered the Tent of Meeting, the pillar of cloud came down and separated them.

On the surface this does not seem unusual. Although there are no descriptions of it in the Bible, one can easily imagine this scene having happened many times before--Joshua being in the Tent of Meeting while Moses received the divine communication from God. What happens in this case however is quite unexpected.

When the pillar of cloud departed Moses approached Joshua and asked him, "What was revealed to you?" Joshua replied, "When the word was revealed to you did I know what God spoke with you?" At that moment Moses bitterly exclaimed, "Better it is to die a hundred times than to experience envy, even once."

In this unexpected twist, the divine communication is between God and

Joshua, not God and Moses! The pillar of cloud came and separated them, but it was Moses who ended up on the outside! Naturally Moses was curious to know what had transpired, but Joshua refuses to reveal it. Joshua recognizes that he must now stand strong even in the presence of his beloved teacher, Moses. Joshua sends the message to Moses that it is time for him to go. Joshua is ready to take over, even in communication with God. It is at that moment that Moses finally feels the pangs of jealousy. Clearly, he does not like this feeling at all, especially being jealous of someone he cares for so. This causes him to admit that death is better than these feelings. He, himself, is preparing to die.

Solomon expressed this clearly: *'For love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave'* (Song of Songs 8:6). This refers to the love with which Moses loved Joshua, and the jealousy of Moses toward Joshua. When Moses resigned himself to death, God began to appease him. He said to him: By your life, in this world you have led My children. In the time to come also I will have you lead them. From where do we know this? For it is said, *'Then his people will remember the days of old, the days of Moses'* (Isaiah 63:11).²⁹

It is evident from this passage the depth of the relationship between Moses and Joshua. To be sure, Moses loves Joshua with a love "strong as death." Moses also feels some jealousy towards Joshua because he will take over as leader of the

²⁹ Deuteronomy Rabbah 9:9.

people.

With this section we also have a *nechemta*, or "passage of comfort." Once Moses has resigned himself to death, God comforts him. God assures him that even though Joshua is taking over in this world, Moses will always be the leader of the people, especially in the World to Come.

The relationship between Moses and Joshua is a wonderful example of the role of midrash. In the Bible, Joshua makes several appearances with Moses, but these are brief. While Joshua does appear in certain prominent places, such as in the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 33:11) and on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:13), it is not clear what the nature of the relationship is. The midrash, then, truly paints a portrait, not only of what their relationship was like, but what an ideal relationship between master and teacher might look like. Moses and Joshua, through the vehicle of midrash, become the paradigm in fact for that special bond which includes awe, reverence, learning, respect, friendship, service, loyalty, dedication, warmth, protectiveness, and, of course, love.

II. TWO SIGNIFICANT EVENTS: THE BATTLE WITH AMALEK AND JOSHUA'S NAME CHANGE

JOSHUA AND THE BATTLE WITH AMALEK

EXODUS 17:8-10a, 13

(8) Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Refidim. (9) And Moses said to Joshua, Choose us out men, go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand. (10) So Joshua did as Moses had said to him and fought with Amalek. . . . (13) And Joshua harried Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

This section will explore some elements of the battle with Amalek and how Joshua is portrayed in Midrashim related to this event. As observed above, one can only surmise, based on the Biblical text, why Joshua was chosen for this task. He appears suddenly and without prior introduction. The Rabbis fill in the blanks somewhat in the following Midrash.

AND MOSES SAID UNTO JOSHUA: CHOOSE US OUT MEN (Ex.

17:9). Why to Joshua? The primary explanation is because he wanted to train him for battle, for [Joshua] would bring Israel into the Land. Another

explanation of, why to Joshua: He said to him: "Since Israel came down to Egypt because of your ancestor, you must fight with him who attacks them on their departure." Another explanation of, why to Joshua: [Moses] said to him: "Your ancestor said, *For I fear God* (Gen. 42:18), and of this one it says, *And he feared not God* (Deut. 25:18); let the descendant of him who said, '*For I fear God*' come and punish him of whom it says, '*And he feared not God.*'"³⁰

This one Midrash has meaning on several different levels. The first reason that Joshua was chosen was because Moses knew that Joshua needed practice leading the people in battle since he would be the one leading them into the Land. In a way, this particular battle is a perfect "trial run" because Moses is still around. In fact, as reflected in the text, Moses is even up on the hill looking on as the battle is being fought.³¹

The next two reasons why Joshua was chosen to lead this battle have to do with his ancestral connection to Joseph. Joshua, it is written, is from the tribe of Ephraim.³² Since Ephraim is one of Joseph's sons, Joshua is a descendant of Joseph. In Rabbinic literature, a character is deeply connected to his or her ancestral roots. One's actions affect those in later generations and the actions of

³⁰ Exodus Rabbah 26:3.

³¹ Pesikta Rabbati 12:5 notes that Moses can only watch from above because he is in a weakened state after having momentarily lost faith in God at Rephidim. Moses' hands, especially, are weak as a contraction of "*RAFAH*," "feeble" and "*YADAYIM*," "hands."

³² Numbers 13:8.

previous generations affect the current. In this case, Joshua is connected to Joseph even though he was several generations removed from him. It was Joseph who brought Jacob and his family to Egypt, where they were enslaved for 400 years, and now found themselves facing a battle with Amalek. If they had not been in Egypt, they would not be facing Amalek now. Therefore, because of his connection to Joseph, Joshua must lead the fight. In other words, Joshua is told "Your ancestor Joseph got us into this mess! Now you get us out!"

The third reason given in this Midrash for why Joshua was chosen to lead the fight against Amalek is also because of his ancestral connection to Joseph. Joseph, as the vizier of Egypt, tells his brothers (who do not recognize him) that one of them must remain imprisoned until they all return with the youngest brother Benjamin. He had said previously that they would all be imprisoned and only one could leave to fetch Benjamin. To explain the relenting of his harsh decree Joseph says, "I fear God."³³ Thus, because of an ancestral connection, Joshua is credited with being on the "side" of those who fear God. Amalek, on the other hand, is described by Moses as one who "feared not God."³⁴ So, because Amalek "feared not God," the cosmic order of the universe requires that a man (or in this case a descendant) who *fears* God be chosen to lead the battle against him. In this case, that man is Joshua. This Midrash also appears in Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 12:5.

The meaning of this Midrash is quite profound. It implies that Joshua was

³³ Genesis 42:18.

³⁴ Deuteronomy 25:18.

destined to fight and defeat Amalek. He found himself in this predestined role not because of his own merits but because of the merits of his ancestors. This motif appears repeatedly in Rabbinic literature. Future generations are deeply affected by the actions of previous generations.

In a similar Midrash, Joshua is connected not to Joseph, but even further back to Rachel. In this Midrash, Joshua is also connected to Saul:

And no sooner did Saul become king, than the Holy One, blessed be He, said: The brood of Amalek will fall only at the hand of a descendant of Rachel, even as you find at Rephidim, Amalek fell at the hand of Joshua, as it is said, '*And Joshua discomfitted Amalek.*' The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "This Tribe, descended from Rachel, is held forever ready to punish Amalek." And the proof? The verse with which the lesson in the Prophets concludes: '*Out of Ephraim came [Joshua], one who would pluck them up--them of Amalek--by the roots; after you, [O Joshua, Saul man of] Benjamin, with your many soldiers*' (Judges 5:14).³⁵

In this Midrash, Joshua is charged with defeating Amalek because he is a descendant of Rachel. Saul, also a distant descendant of Rachel, is likewise charged with the defeat of Amalek. Why do Joshua and Saul both have to do battle with Amalek? The answer appears in the following section of Pesikta Rabbati:

³⁵ Pesikta Rabbati 13:1.

Another comment: '*MIN-NI Ephraim.*' What is implied by the phrase *MIN-NI Ephraim*? "It is because of Me that Ephraim," for according to our Masters, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "As far back as the days of Moses the decision came from Me (*MIN-NI*).³⁶" When Moses said to Joshua: '*Choose us out men,*' (Ex. 17:9) would he have used the word *us* if he were speaking for himself alone? No. In saying *us* he had in mind My command [that Joshua should fight against Amalek but not blot him out], though Joshua was capable of blotting out entirely the brood of Amalek. Hence, '*It is because of Me that Ephraim plucked up only some of them--them of Amalek.*'³⁶

In a previous Midrash on Exodus 17:9, Moses uses the word "us" to show honor and respect to Joshua. Here, on the other hand, Moses uses the word "us" to mean Moses and God, or God's command. Thus, Joshua fights with Amalek but does not utterly blot them out, leaving Saul to finish the job later. The Midrash does give Joshua credit, however, for being capable of completely destroying the enemy.

In a related Midrash, Joshua's defeat of Amalek is due to the humility of the former and the haughtiness of the latter.

This bears on the text, *A man's pride will bring him low; but the humble in spirit shall attain honor* (Proverbs 29:23) . . . Another exposition: *A man's*

³⁶ Pesikta Rabbati 13:2.

pride applies to Amalek who displayed haughtiness toward the Holy One, blessed be He, by his revilings and blasphemings . . . *But the humble in spirit shall attain honor* applies to Joshua who killed him; as it says, '*And Joshua discomfitted Amalek and his people*' (Exodus 17:13).³⁷

In this Midrash it is Joshua's character rather than his lineage that makes him suitable to defeat Amalek. Whereas Amalek is haughty, Joshua is humble and it is this very humility that "brings Amalek low." Joshua then attains honor not only from defeating Amalek, but also because he is humble. The honor that Joshua received is also that he was chosen to lead the Israelites after Moses as explained in the previous chapter.

Regardless of why Joshua was chosen for this task, he is portrayed favorably as a warrior and a leader. The event was so spectacular that it is listed as one of the reasons that Jethro converted.

This is a controversy of Tannaim: *Now Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard* (Exodus 18:1): What news did he hear that he came and turned a proselyte? Rabbi Joshua said: He heard of the battle with the Amalakites, since this is immediately preceded by, *And Joshua discomfitted Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.*³⁸

³⁷ Numbers Rabbah 13:3.

³⁸ Bavli Zebahim 116a.

This Midrash uses the principle of *smuchin*, which allows for events that appear sequentially in the Bible to be connected in content and cause. Therefore, because Joshua's battle with Amalek comes immediately before Jethro appears, it is considered as a reason for why Jethro came. This Talmudic passage then goes on to suggest that it was the giving of Torah or the splitting of the Red Sea that Jethro heard. This implies that the battle with Amalek was significant enough to be paired with the other events.

There is one final note having to do with the battle that Joshua fought with Amalek. In a passage that appears in Pirke deRabbi Eliezer, God is credited with having defeated Amalek as a personal vendetta of sorts. This reminds us that even though Joshua may have been a valiant war hero, the credit is still due to God for making victory attainable. For the Rabbis this message is never far from the forefront--God's justice is central to their frame of mind about the world as we know it.

JOSHUA'S NAME CHANGE

NUMBERS 13:16

Those were the names of the men whom Moses sent to scout the land; but Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua.

As are many of the appearances of Joshua in the Biblical text, this one is

unusual. Seemingly out of nowhere, Moses changes Joshua's name from Hoshea to Joshua. Moses does not change anyone else's name in the Bible. What is even more strange is that Joshua has appeared in several places already with the name Joshua or Joshua son of Nun and has never appeared with the name Hoshea. Further, his appearances as Hoshea are infrequent, generally without Rabbinic commentary. It seems as if he has been Joshua all along. In fact, the only comments that arise out of this name change are based on the grammatical difference in Joshua's new name. The Hebrew for Joshua is "YEHOSHUA." The difference in spelling is important for understanding the Midrashim that follow. The name "YEHOSHUA" adds a *yud* to the beginning of the name. Where this *yud* came from and what it means will be the subject of many of the Midrashim. In the process, there will be aspects of Joshua's character that will be revealed.

The first of these Midrashim imagine that the *yud* is an entity that is alive in some way and thus able to communicate with God.

YOU SHALL NOT CALL HER NAME SARAI, BUT SARAH SHALL
HER NAME BE. R. Joshua b. Karhah said: The *yud* which the Lord took
from Sarai soared aloft before God and protested: "Sovereign of the
Universe! Because I am the smallest of all letters, You have withdrawn me
from the name of that righteous woman!" Said the Holy One, blessed be
He, to it: "Before now you were in a woman's name and the last of its
letters; now I will set you in a man's name and at the beginning of its

letters, as it says, '*And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua.*'"³⁹

This Midrash comments on Sarah's name change. When Sarai was changed to Sarah, the spelling of her name lost the *yud* at the end and was replaced by a *hey*. Thus, the *yud*, having been eliminated, has the basis for its complaint. God assured the *yud* that the move to Joshua's name is a promotion of sorts. Not only does the *yud* now appear at the beginning of a name instead of at the end, but also, the letter has higher standing because it was placed in the name of a male. This is considered to be higher standing in the male-dominated world of the Rabbis.

If that was all there was in terms of Rabbinic material, the Rabbis would have said nothing more than that Joshua was male which does not illustrate anything that we did not heretofore know about Joshua. But that is not the end of the story. There is an almost identical Midrash in Song of Songs Rabbah which adds the following, "Now I will put you [the *yud*] in the name of a male and at the beginning, in one of the *most righteous men in the world*" (emphasis mine).⁴⁰ So we learn here that Joshua is considered one of the most righteous men in the world. As highly respected as the matriarch Sarah is, Joshua is considered even more so.

In a related Talmudic passage, David argues with God to have the passage about his sins removed from the text. God replies:

³⁹ Genesis Rabbah 47:1.

⁴⁰ Song of Songs Rabbah 5:11, section 4.

That is impossible. If the single *yud* which I removed from Sarai continuously cried out for many years until Joshua came and I added it to his name, as it is written, '*And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua.*' How much the more so a complete section!⁴¹

The point is that not even a letter as small as a *yud* can be removed from the Torah. So, Joshua's name change fills a very important role in keeping the Torah in tact.

In another short Talmudic passage the name change reflects Moses' prayer for Joshua.

And they went up by the South and he came unto Hebron--it should have read 'and they came'!--Raba said: It teaches that Caleb held aloof from the plan of the spies and went and prostrated himself upon the graves of the patriarchs, saying to them, "My fathers, pray on my behalf that I may be delivered from the plan of the spies." (As for Joshua, Moses had already prayed on his behalf, as it is said, '*And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua,*' [meaning] May Yah save you from the plan of the spies.)⁴²

In this passage, there is a word play on the root of Joshua's name. If broken up it sounds similar to "*YA Y'HOSHIAKHA*," or "May God save you."

⁴¹ Bavli Sanhedrin 107a.

⁴² Bavli Sotah 34b.

What this means is that when Moses changed Joshua's name, it was a prayer that Joshua be saved from the plans of the spies. Moses tries to protect Joshua from any evil that he might encounter. It is a further demonstration of Moses devotion to his servant and disciple Joshua.

In another passage, a letter added to one's name reflects his deeds:

Another interpretation: *Now Jethro . . . heard.* Originally, they called him merely Jether, as it is said: '*And Moses went and returned to Jether his father-in-law*' (Exodus 4:18). After he had performed good deeds, they added one more letter to his name so that he was called Jethro . . . And so you find it also in the case of Joshua, whom they originally called merely Hoshea. And when he performed good deeds, they added one more letter to his name so that he was called Joshua.⁴³

Therefore, the fact that Joshua got a letter added to his name reflects that he performed good deeds.

Finally, a letter added to a person's name can be considered a reward, as in the following Midrash.

And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua. What reason did Moses see for adding a *yud* to the name of Joshua? Caleb had taken his reward in the form of a share in the land; as it says, '*Surely the land whereon your foot walked upon shall be an inheritance to you and your children for*

⁴³ Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek 38-40, 46-49.

ever' (Joshua 14:9), while Joshua received the reward that should have gone to the ten spies, as implied by the fact that an extra *yud* was added to his name; *yud* being ten.⁴⁴

In Hebrew, the letters also have numerical value. Thus the letter *yud* equals ten. So when the extra letter is added to Joshua's name, it represents his reward for not joining the spies in their evil plan. It is interesting to note that Joshua is rewarded before the spies have even begun their journey. It must have been clear to Moses that Joshua would not be drawn into the spies' plan. Caleb on the other hand is rewarded after entering into the Land.

In summary, the battle with Amalek and the name change both contain significant information about Joshua's character. He is connected to his ancestry as well as his future in the Land. Moses' faith in Joshua is reflected in both of these episodes as well. In short, these two groups of midrashim provide anchors for us about Joshua's early years, as they are portrayed in Rabbinic literature.

⁴⁴ Numbers Rabbah 16:9.

III. JOSHUA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

GOD'S PRESENCE WITH JOSHUA

One of Joshua's first appearances in the Bible text is during the battle between the Israelites and Amalek.⁴⁵ According to midrashic literature, Joshua's relationship with God also begins at that time.

You find that whoever takes up arms at the command of God, God loves him forever. For thus you will observe in the case of Joshua who joined issue with Amalek and dealt with them in accordance with the land and the commandments, as it is said, '*And Joshua discomfited Amalek, etc.*'

(Exodus 17:13), and so the Holy One, Blessed be He, promised him, "Out of your tribe will I always raise up one that shall punish Amalek," thus,

'Out of Ephraim shall come they whose root is in Amalek' (Judges 5:14).⁴⁶

In this midrash, Joshua is rewarded for his part in the defeat of Amalek with the everlasting love of God. The everlasting love takes its form in a great honor that is bestowed on Joshua's tribe, Ephraim. That is to say, Joshua's tribe will be entrusted forever with the punishment of Amalek. The proof text is brought from Judges because that verse connects Ephraim and Amalek together. In a play on words it could be said that Ephraim, whose "root is in Amalek," had the job of

⁴⁵ Exodus 17:8-14.

⁴⁶ Numbers Rabbah 1:12.

uprooting Amalek throughout history. Thus, the relationship between God and Joshua is begun with a gift of trust and eternal love.

While the previous midrash presents a powerful example of God's relationship with Joshua, other midrashim speak only of God's presence being with Joshua.

'Stand still and see the salvation of God' (Exodus 14:13). The Israelites asked him, "When?" Moses said to them, "Today the Holy Spirit rests upon you." For the expression "standing" everywhere suggests the presence of the Holy Spirit, as in the passages: *'I saw the Lord standing beside the altar'* (Amos 9:1), *'And the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel, Samuel"'* (I Samuel 3:10). And it also says, *'Call Joshua and stand in the tent of meeting that I may give him a charge'* (Deuteronomy 31:14).⁴⁷

In all of the verses above, the word for "standing" derives from the exact same root - *"YUD.TZADI.BET."* Additionally, all three proof texts that are brought forth imply that God's presence is near. They all support the idea that God's presence rests upon the Israelites as they are about to see the splitting of the sea. This is because that verse also has the word "stand" containing the same root letters. While Joshua appears in this midrash only as a proof text, the message is

⁴⁷ Mekhilta, Tractate Beshallah 3:81-86. See also Mekhilta, Tractate Shirata 10:65-67.

the same - God's presence is with Joshua as he is about to take on the mantle of leadership just as God's presence was with the Israelites at the sea.

In another midrash, the presence of God appears to Joshua in the form of the Shekhinah.

Put off your shoes (Exodus 3:5). Wherever the Shekhinah appears one must not go about with shoes on; and so we find in the case of Joshua, '*Put off your shoe,*' (Joshua 5:15). Hence the priests ministered in the Temple, barefooted.⁴⁸

This midrash recalls God's call to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus. There Moses is told to remove his shoes because he is standing on "holy ground." The above midrash seems to say the ground is holy because God's presence (in the form of the Shekhinah) is near. We know this because Joshua is asked to take his shoes off when approached by God in the book of Joshua. The midrash testifies that God appears to Joshua, thus giving Joshua special status in biblical terms. The midrash also, much more subtly, serves as a reminder of Joshua's connection to the great leader Moses. This further elevates Joshua in standing. In other words, because Moses and Joshua have similar encounters with God, they must be similar to each other as well.

⁴⁸ Exodus Rabbah 2:6.

JOSHUA'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD THROUGH PRAYER

Like Moses, Joshua also has moments where he challenges and questions God in an attempt to understand God's ways. These powerful moments define Joshua's relationship to God through uttered prayers and supplications. The following midrashim are based on the verses below:

JOSHUA 7:5-10

(5) And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty-six men for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shevarim. Then they smote them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became like water. (6) And Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until evening. He and the elders of Israel put dust upon their heads. (7) And Joshua said, "Alas O Lord God, for what did You bring this people over the Jordan to deliver us into the hand of the Emorites, to destroy us?" Would we had been content and had remained on the other side of the Jordan! (8) O Lord, what shall I say when Israel has turned its back before its enemies?! (9) For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it and surround us and cut off our name from the earth. So, what will You do for Your great name? (10) And the Lord said to Joshua, "Get yourself up! Why are you now fallen upon your face?"

The above verses appear at the beginning of the Achan story.⁴⁹

Unbeknownst to Joshua, Achan has caused the defeat of the Israelites at Ai because he stole devoted property. Joshua is stunned by the defeat and cries out to God. The questions that are raised by this passage are as follows: 1) What was the result of Joshua's cry? Did God "answer" him? 2) What did Joshua mean when he said, "What will you do for Your great name?" And 3) How was Joshua able to boldly challenge God's justice in this manner without arousing God's wrath? Some of the midrashim on this passage help to answer these questions.

Perhaps it makes sense to answer the first of these questions: How was Joshua's cry answered? The following midrash addresses that question.

They then said to God, "We know no Torah." "Then weep and pray unto Me and I will accept," was the Divine assurance. "Did I not redeem your ancestors when they were enslaved in Egypt, on account of their prayer, as it is written '*And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried*' (Exodus 2:23). And did I not perform miracles in the time of Joshua, as it says, '*And Joshua rent his clothes*' (Joshua 7:6). What did I say to him? '*Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand towards Ai*' (*ibid.* 8:18)?"⁵⁰

In this midrash God is explaining to the Israelites that He will save them on

⁴⁹ See Chapter 4, page .79ff. for an in depth discussion of this incident.

⁵⁰ Exodus Rabbah 38:4.

account of their prayers. God then gives the example of the Exodus from Egypt where the cry of the Israelites moved Him to action. God then brings up the example of Joshua. When Joshua rends his clothes, which is part of the longer plea he makes to God, God "hears" him and answers. God assures Joshua that although they fell to Ai in the previous battle, when he stretches out the javelin, they will be victorious.

According to Radal, the Hebrew word for javelin, "*BEKIDON*," is actually a play on words. The word can be broken up into two parts, "*BEKI*," and "*DON*." This is possible because there are no vowels or punctuation in the Bible which allows for the Rabbis to break up and repoint the text in creative ways. In this case, the two halves of the Hebrew word for javelin can mean "this" and "weeping." So, when the word is connected back into the Joshua text it could be read, "THIS (victory over Ai) will be granted through your WEEPING." In other words, Joshua's prayer to God was answered in the affirmative.

The broader message of the Rabbis to their own congregants is that God hears the prayers of the Israelites when they are in times of real distress and powerlessness. Even when the Israelites can do nothing else but pray, it is more than enough. For the Jews of the time, it must have been an especially powerful message to hear that their prayers could reach God even though they were being oppressed, and that, like the Israelites, ultimately they would be redeemed from their suffering.

In another midrash, Joshua is again victorious with prayer versus military might. The midrash is trying to explain the verse from Job 5:5, "Whose harvest the hungry eat up and take it though without a buckler, and the allies trample upon their substance." This verse can be read this way as a result of repointing and translating some of the words differently.⁵¹

Another comment: By '*whose harvest*' is meant the harvest of the thirty-one kings. The phrase '*the hungry eat up*' refer to Joshua and Caleb, hungry for the word of God. And the words '*and take it though without a buckler*' imply that they took away the power of the thirty-one kings not with weapons nor with a shield, but with prayer and supplications to the Lord, as proved by God's command to Joshua, '*Get yourself up! Why are you now fallen upon your face?*' (Joshua 7:10). '*And the allies trample upon their substance.*' Who was it that trampled upon the substance of the thirty-one kings? Joshua, Caleb and all that were allied with him.⁵²

The thirty-one kings that are mentioned in the above midrash are the thirty-one kings that were defeated in the Israelite conquest of the Land. These kings are listed in Joshua 12:9-24. Much of the book of Joshua is about military might and victory. The assumption is that Joshua and his army must have been strong in order to be victorious. This midrash flies in the face of that assumption. The

⁵¹ For detailed information, see notes to Leviticus Rabbah 28:4.

⁵² Pesikta Rabbati 18:3. See also Leviticus Rabbah 28:4.

midrash says that it was *only* because of prayer, and not because of human strength that Joshua and his army was successful. The message that the Rabbis want to deliver is quite clear. The success that we attain in life cannot be attributed solely to our own strength and power. Rather, we must acknowledge God's role in that achievement. Good things may come into our lives but we need God to maintain them. That maintenance occurs through prayer.

We now return to the second of our original three questions: What did Joshua mean when he asks God in verse 7:9, "What will You do for Your great name?" Joshua is crying out to God and questioning God as to why He didn't just let them stay on the other side of the Jordan, but rather led the people into the defeat at Ai. Joshua points out to God that it will be hard to explain why the Israelites turned and ran from their enemies. Then Joshua asks God a question that seems to link God's name with the fate of the people. The following midrash explains why Joshua does this.

Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish said in the name of Rabbi Yannai: The Holy One partnered His great name with Israel. What He did may be illustrated by the parable of a king who had a small key to a treasure chest. He said to himself, "If I leave the key without identification, it may be lost. So, I will attach a chain to it, and if it should be lost, the chain will identify it." So too, the Holy One said, "If I leave Israel without identification, they may be lost among the nations. So, I will join My great name to them and they will remain alive [as a distinct entity]." Hence, [when there was danger of the

Israelite name being wiped out] Joshua asked, '*What will you do for Your great name?*' (Joshua 7:9), by which he implied that the Name is partnered with us.⁵³

The above midrash uses the technique of *mashal/nimshal*⁵⁴ to explain the point. The parable of the king is used to show how God's name is connected to Israel's name. Just as the king attached a chain to identify the treasure chest, so too does God attach His name to Israel's name. One might be tempted to think that the attachment is spiritual only, but a look at the Hebrew letters would suggest a literal attachment of God's name to the name of the Israelites. The people is known by the name "Israel," or in Hebrew, "YIS-RA-EL." The last syllable of that name is "EL," which means "God." Thus, one of God's names is literally partnered with the name of the people. Additionally, the Jews are descended from the tribe of Judah, which is spelled in Hebrew, "YUD-HAY-VAV-DALET-HAY." These Hebrew letters, minus the *DALET*, form another of God's names - the tetragrammaton, unspeakable name of God that is usually pronounced "*Adonai*." Again, God's name is literally a part of the name of the people.

Before looking at the Hebrew, it appeared that, in the Bible, Joshua was saying to God, "How will it look for You, God, if the people that claim belief in

⁵³ Yalkut Shimoni, section 17, as it appears in *Sefer Ha-aggadah*, H.N. Bialik and Y.H. Ravnitzky, eds, p. 261.

⁵⁴ See page 57 for explanation of this technique.

You are wiped out.? You will look very bad if that happens. What are You going to do to make Yourself look better in front of the other nations?" Now, after looking at the Hebrew, the midrash has additional depth of meaning. If the Israelites are wiped out, God's name *literally* is wiped out as well. Thus, God has a vested interest in the survival of His people and Joshua reminds God of this in his plea. The message to the people must have been that they must always remain cognizant of, and comforted by, the fact that because God's name is partnered with them, God will protect them from disappearing off the earth. At a time when the Jews must have felt threatened by the ruling powers of the time, this was a strong message of comfort.

The final question raised by the Bible text is: How was Joshua able to boldly challenge God's justice in this manner without arousing God's wrath? The following midrash helps to answer that question.

Yet they [mankind] abuse Me with words and say, "He does not judge well." *'Apart from Myself, I will see'* (Job 34:32), which is to say, "Without Me, do you go and scrutinize My judgment. And if I have erred, *'You teach Me'* (ibid.). *'And if I have wrought injustice'* (ibid.) to the earlier generations, *'I will do it no more'* (ibid.) to the later generations.

'To him will I keep silence [and] to his branches' (Job 41:4). [God to Abraham] "To you will I keep silence and to the branches that proceed from you." To Abraham who said, *'That be far from You to do after this manner'* (Genesis 18:25); To Moses who said, *'Lord, why does Your wrath*

wax hot against Your people?' (Exodus 32:11); To Joshua who said, '*For what did You bring this people over the Jordan*' (Joshua 7:7); and to David who said, '*Why do You stand far off, O Lord*' (Psalms 10:1).⁵⁵

In the first paragraph of the midrash, the Bible verses are being read as if God is speaking. It is possible to read the text this way because the Hebrew is not clear. In those verses, God is defending Himself against accusations that He is not just. God responds that if He has judged in error against earlier generations, He will not repeat the error in later generations. God is saying that He will not judge too harshly in the future. The second paragraph of the midrash explains how this restraint will manifest itself in God's actions.

In the second paragraph, the verse, '*To him will I keep silence [and] to his branches*' is examined. It is necessary at this time to explain how the translation is arrived upon. The Bible verse contains a *kree u'khtiv* which means that the text is written one way but read differently. Although it is not always clear why these variances exist, it is usually attributed to different traditions that were merged during the canonization process. In the Bible verse that is being examined, the variance of one word allows the Rabbis to reinterpret the verse. The word, written *LAMED-ALEF*, (usually meaning "no" or "not") is supposed to be read *LAMED-VAV*, meaning "to him." The Rabbis then read the word "*BAHDAV*," as the

⁵⁵ Genesis Rabbah 49:10.

possessive of "BAHD," meaning "branch." Thus the verse can be translated as above. Now we will examine the meaning of the midrash.

Basically, the midrash presents four cases in which God "keeps silence," i.e. does not judge harshly, when His justice is questioned by man. In each of these cases, a person challenges God's justice, which could be cause for punishment, and God does not retaliate. One of these cases is Joshua. Like the others, Joshua challenges God's justice and is not punished. Thus, because Abraham went before all of these men and challenged God, he opened the door for others to do so as well, in certain situations. It bears noting as well that this midrash puts Joshua in high standing because of the company with which he is placed. He is portrayed in this midrash on the "same level," so to speak, as Abraham, Moses, and David. All of these men were able to challenge God's justice, face to face, and live.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Joshua's relationship with God manifests itself in ways other than through prayer. In the following midrash, Joshua shows his devotion to God through respect for God's laws and ordinances.

Another interpretation is that the text, *'Ephraim is also the defense of my head'* (Psalms 60:9) speaks of Joshua who belonged to the tribe of Ephraim and carried out warlike operations on the Sabbath, as it is written, *'And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they rose early at the*

dawning of the day, and encompassed the city . . . ' (Joshua 6:15). How do we know that it was the Sabbath? Because there can never be seven consecutive days without a Sabbath. And because the day on which they captured Jericho was the Sabbath, he therefore devoted Jericho as holy to the Lord, as it is written, 'And the city shall be devoted, even it and all that is therein, to the Lord . . . ' (ibid. 17). Joshua argued, "The Sabbath is altogether holy, so let all that has been conquered on the Sabbath be holy to the Lord." Accordingly it is written, 'But all the silver and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are holy to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord' (ibid. 19).⁵⁶

The first part of this midrash attempts to prove that the battle of Jericho was fought on the Sabbath. Since the approach is to take seven days, a Sabbath must occur at some point during that time. Because the Bible mentions the seventh day, the connection is made that the battle was fought on Shabbat. Once that is established, the next part of the midrash shows how Joshua respects the sanctity of the Sabbath by dedicating the spoils of Jericho to God. Though Joshua was a warrior, he doesn't neglect his role as leader of the Israelites. He makes sure that God gets His proper due. What is left unanswered at this point is, how could Joshua fight the battle on the Sabbath in any case? Why didn't he truly respect the Sabbath by not engaging in battle. The next part of the midrash explains.

⁵⁶ Numbers Rabbah 14:1.

Rabbi Judah the Levite, son of Shalom said: Joshua gave Israel an object-lesson on the law which the Holy One, blessed be He, had laid down. *'Of the first of your dough, you shall set apart a cake for a gift'* (Numbers 25:20). Joshua argued, "Seeing that it [Jericho] is the first to be conquered, let us dedicate all its spoil to the One above." If a man should say to you, "How is it that Joshua desecrated the Sabbath?" Tell him that he did so at the bidding of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written, *'And the Lord said to Joshua, "See I have given into your hand Jericho. . . and you shall encompass the city . . . and the seventh day you shall encompass the city seven times . . ."'* (Joshua 6:2), and it is impossible to have seven consecutive days without a Sabbath.⁵⁷

This part of the midrash presents some new information. First and foremost is the idea that Joshua only violated the Sabbath because God told him to do it. God gave Joshua instructions which would require a Sabbath violation. The implication is that without God's command, Joshua would never have violated the Sabbath intentionally. It is interesting to note that this section of the midrash seems to contain a hint for refuting missionaries. It is as if the text is advising, "Should someone approach you and question you as to why you should observe the Sabbath when even Joshua did not, tell them that God told Joshua to violate the Sabbath. Otherwise, he never would have done so."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

This section of the midrash presents a different reason why Joshua dedicated the spoils of Jericho to God. In this example, Joshua dedicates the spoils to remind the Israelites of the dough-offering. Here again, Joshua proves that he is devoted God by enforcing and encouraging the observance of His laws and ordinances. Thus Joshua's relationship with God is extended to include a respect for God's laws.

One midrash summarizes the essence of the relationship between God and Joshua.

Another interpretation of, '*And He has filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and knowledge*' (Exodus 35:31). From where came all this knowledge? From the Holy One, blessed be He, namely from '*the spirit of God.*' Similarly, in the case of Joshua, who descended from Joseph, you find written, '*And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom*' (Deuteronomy 34:9).⁵⁸

This midrash refers to how Bezalel was chosen to craft the Tabernacle. God fills Bezalel with the spirit of God which includes God's greatest gifts of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. Because these gifts are so highly prized, the receiver must also be a highly valued servant of God. Therefore Joshua, too, who we read is also filled by God with the "*spirit of wisdom,*" must have been a

⁵⁸ Exodus Rabbah 48:4.

dedicated and valued servant of God. In summary, God's relationship with Joshua is a strong one, though not as well defined as Joshua's relationship to Moses or God's relationship to Moses. Nevertheless, during his tenure as leader of the people, Joshua forges his own unique connection to God through God's presence in his life, prayer, and dedication to the Law. It is a blueprint for connection to the Divine which is as true today as it must have been 4,000 years ago.

IV. JOSHUA IN THE LAND

JOSHUA AND THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE PEOPLE

JOSHUA 5:2-5

(2) At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel a second time. (3) And Joshua made flint knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of Aralot. (4) And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt that were males, all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way after they came out of Egypt. (5) Now all the people that came out were circumcised, but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came out of Egypt, they had not been circumcised.

This passage appears immediately after the Israelites have crossed over the Jordan and have arrived in the land. There are several questions that emerge upon examining this text. For instance, why does the text say that Joshua circumcised them "again." Why haven't the people been circumcised before this? And finally, how did God react? These questions are dealt with in various midrashim on the passage.

The first of these passages deals with the linguistic question of why the Bible says that Joshua circumcised them again. The basis for the midrash is Exodus 12:48 where the Israelites are cautioned that no uncircumcised person may

eat of the paschal offering.

He [Moses] said to them: "Thus has God said to me, in one word, '*No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.*'" At which time each one put his sword on his thigh and circumcised himself. Who circumcised them? Rabbi Berekhiah said: "Moses circumcised them and Aaron turned back the flesh and Joshua gave them drink. Some, however, say that Joshua circumcised them . . . as it is written, '*At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make knives of flint, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time*'" (Joshua 5:2). Why '*second time*'? This shows that he circumcised them the first time. Straightaway, '*Joshua made himself knives of flint, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of Aralot*' (ibid. 3). What is meant by '*hill of Aralot*'? Rabbi said: Thus we infer that they made a hill of foreskins.⁵⁹

One might be tempted to look at the Bible text and just see the words "a second time" as a mistake of some kind. However, the Rabbis who created these stories would never see the Bible as containing mistakes or errors. Just as there are no superfluous words, there can not be any errors. The way that they make sense of the statement then is to say that Joshua must have in fact circumcised the people before. Thus Joshua was involved in the most important aspects of the people's covenant with God from his earliest days as a leader.

⁵⁹ Song of Songs Rabbah 1:13, section 1. '*Aralot*' is thus explained as the plural of "*ORLAH*," which can mean skin, or in this case, "foreskin." The location reflects the act that took place there.

Another midrash posits a different reason why the words "a second time" appear.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Joshua, "Israel's Master, Moses, circumcised them in the seventh generation from Abraham, and you circumcised them in the eighth, as it is said, '*At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make knives of flint and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time"*'" (Joshua 5:2), and bring them into the covenant." The words '*the second time*' intimate that God was saying, "Circumcise them once again [but] you will not have to circumcise them a third time [because they will perform the ritual of circumcision from now on.]"⁶⁰

This midrash explains that the people have been circumcised before once in every generation since Abraham. This time will be significant in that from this point forward, the people will be able to perform the ritual on their own. This sends a message about how the people have developed under Joshua's leadership. They are now ready to take on the covenantal responsibility on their own.

A midrash suggests that Joshua already trusted the people to take on this responsibility.

When they came to the land, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Joshua:

"Joshua! Do you not know that the Israelites are not circumcised according

⁶⁰ Pesikta Rabbati 52:4.

to the proper regulation?" He [immediately] circumcised them again.⁶¹

This midrash makes it seem as if Joshua did not even know that they were uncircumcised. Since we know that Joshua was a capable leader who would not just forget to make sure of an important detail like circumcision, it must be that Joshua already trusted the people to take on this important ritual on their own. As soon as God points out that they are not circumcised properly, he acts right away to take care of it.

Another midrash supports the notion that Joshua trusted the people to act on their own.

Rabbi Berekhiah and Rabbi Helbo in the name of Rabbi Abin b. Rabbi Jose said: It is written, '*And this is the cause (DAVAR) why Joshua did circumcise*' (Joshua 5:4). Joshua spoke a word (*DAVAR*) to them and circumcised them. "What are you thinking," he said upbraiding them, "that you will enter the land uncircumcised?!"⁶²

When Joshua finds out that the people have not been circumcised he is angry with them. He is genuinely surprised that they have not done it, proving that he trusted them to do it. Joshua rebukes the people, reminding them that circumcision was part of the covenant for keeping the land. His reaction suggests that he did not know that they were uncircumcised. It also reflects a quality of

⁶¹ Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 29; Friedlander ed., p.211.

⁶² Genesis Rabbah 46:9.

leadership that Joshua was not afraid to rebuke the people for their improper actions.

Regardless of how it came about, God is pleased with the circumcision as reflected in the following midrash:

Similarly, when Joshua circumcised them it was sweet to the Holy One, blessed be He. It is an allusion to this that the text says, '*I [God] will get me to . . . the hill of frankincense*' (Song of Songs 4:6). This alludes to the circumcision on their entry into Canaan when they made a hill of foreskins, as you read, '*And Joshua circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of Aralot (the foreskins)*' (Joshua 5:3). The scent was as sweet to the Holy One, blessed be He, as the scent of frankincense.⁶³

So Joshua performs an act here which is extraordinarily pleasing to God. There is a midrash which suggests one reason why God is especially pleased with the circumcision and Joshua.

Our Rabbis have taught: A man is obliged to do five things for his son.⁶⁴

The father is the Holy One, blessed be He, and the son is Israel. As it is the father's duty to circumcise his son, so did the Holy One, blessed be He, do to Israel. He circumcised them through Joshua.⁶⁵

So, according to this midrash, Joshua has played an extremely important role; he has served as a "stand-in" for God Himself! By circumcising the people,

⁶³ Numbers Rabbah 14:12.

⁶⁴ One of these obligations is to circumcise him.

⁶⁵ Numbers Rabbah 17:1.

Joshua is carrying out what God wants to do Himself. In this manner, Joshua acts as a father to the children of Israel when he performs their circumcision. In addition, it shows a high level of trust between Joshua and God that God would trust Joshua to stand in for Him.

In one final midrash about circumcision, there is a messianic connotation to the circumcision. In Genesis, after Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, God places a revolving flaming sword to block the way to the Tree of Life. According to a passage in Genesis Rabbah, this revolving flaming sword represents Gehenna,⁶⁶ because it "revolves around man and burns him up from head to foot."⁶⁷ As the midrash continues, Adam is deeply concerned about this flaming fire.

Said Adam: Who will deliver my children from this flaming fire? Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rabbi Abba's name: '*Sword*' [as in the flaming sword] refers to circumcision, as it is written, '*Make you knives of flint, and circumcise again, etc.*' (Joshua 5:2).⁶⁸

In order to understand this midrash, one must look at the Hebrew word for sword, "*HEREV*" and the Hebrew word for knives, "*HARVOT*." Because the words have the same root, when the vowels are taken away, they could be the

⁶⁶ Gehenna in Jewish tradition is somewhat comparable to Hell. Basically, it is an unpleasant place where one's soul might end up in the afterlife.

⁶⁷ Genesis Rabbah 21:9.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

same word, one in the plural and one in the singular. Thus, the flaming sword that represents Gehenna is cancelled out by the knives that perform the circumcision. What a powerful message this makes then! Since circumcision represents the covenant between God and the people Israel, then the very act of circumcision saves the people from the flaming fire of destruction. It is a message with messianic connotations as mystical images tend to accompany descriptions of messianic times. We thus find Joshua and his act of circumcision at the heart of this messianic vision.

JOSHUA STOPS THE SUN AND OTHER MIRACLES

JOSHUA 10:12-14

(12) Then Joshua spoke to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel. And he said in the sight of all Israel, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; and moon in the valley of Ayalon. (13) And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is this not written in the book of Yashar? So the sun stood still in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go down about a whole day. (14) And there was no day like that before or after it, that the Lord hearkened to the voice of a man, for the Lord fought for Israel.

Of all of the events in the book of Joshua, this is probably one of the most

well-known. In this Biblical passage, Joshua speaks to God and then demands that the sun and moon stop in their courses and not move further. What follows his command is quite amazing; the celestial orbs do stop and move no further. Verse 14 then testifies that this is the only event in which God hearkens to the voice of a man, in this case, Joshua. This stunning event gives rise to several midrashim.

The first of these suggest that the stopping of the sun was decreed from the beginning of creation.

Not with the sea alone did God make a stipulation, but with everything which was created in the six days of creation, even as it is written, *'I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded'* (Isaiah 45:12). I commanded the sea to divide, and the heavens to be silent before Moses, as it says, *'Give ear O heavens and I will speak'* (Deuteronomy 32:1); I commanded the sun and the moon to stand still before Joshua . . . ⁶⁹

The purpose of this midrash is to make it clear that miraculous occurrences are the work of God and not the work of man. One might think from the stories mentioned therein that Moses and Joshua performed those miracles on their own. This is especially true of Joshua because the text explicitly says that on the day that the sun and moon stopped, that "God hearkened to a man." The Rabbis were uncomfortable with the idea that miracles are wrought by mankind. This

⁶⁹ Genesis Rabbah 5:5.

discomfort probably stems from conflict that they may have had with the stories of the acts of Jesus in the days of early Christianity. This midrash dispels the possibility that God is in *any way* subservient to man by pointing out that God ordained these occurrences from the point of creation.

Another midrash points out that the sun stopped for other men as well.

A Tanna taught: Just as the sun stood still for Joshua, so did the sun stand still for Moses and for Nakdimon b. Gorion . . . The question was asked: Doesn't Scripture say regarding Joshua, '*And there was no day like that before it or after it?*' [That is, if the sun stopped for Moses and Nakdimon b. Gorion, how could Scripture say this?] You may explain this to mean that there was none that lasted as long as that one; or if you wish, you may say it means that there were no hailstones [as in the case of Joshua] as it is written, '*And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, while they were in the descent from Beth Horon, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven*' (Joshua 10:11).⁷⁰

By saying that the sun stopped for other men makes the occurrence in Joshua seem less spectacular. It seems that the Rabbis want to limit the power that is attributed to Joshua in this story. However, they still must explain why the Bible text proclaims that this day was unique. That is the purpose of the "b" part of this midrash. Two explanations are proposed. The first suggests that the sun

⁷⁰ Bavli Avodah Zarah 25a.

stayed still longer for Joshua, thus making it unique. The second explanation claims that hailstones fell additionally for Joshua. This claim is based on a Biblical text, which is placed right before the story of the sun stopping, which speaks of great stones falling from the sky.

The story of the hailstones originates in another midrash.

‘Hailstones,’ [AVNEI ELGAVISH.] What are ‘avnei elgavish?’ A Tanna taught: Stones [AVANIM] which remained suspended for the sake of a man [AL GAVISH] and came down for the sake of a man. ‘They remained suspended for the sake of a man’: This is Moses of whom it is written, ‘Now the man Moses was very humble,’ and it is also written, ‘And the thunders and hail ceased’ (Exodus 9:33). ‘They came down for the sake of a man’: This was Joshua, of whom it is written, ‘Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit,’ and it is also written, ‘And it came to pass as they fled from before Israel, while they were in the descent from Beth Horon, that the Lord cast down great stones’ (Joshua 10:11).⁷¹

In this Talmudic passage, the word for hailstones is “AVNEI ELGAVISH.” The Rabbis want a definition for this unusual term. So they make a play on the word, separating it into smaller pieces, thereby making it into different words. They change “ELGAVISH,” into three separate words “AL,” “GAV,” and “ISH,”

⁷¹ Bavli Berakhot 54b.

which together mean for the sake of a man.⁷² Thus the full expression can be translated as “stones for the sake of man.” The midrash then continues by using verses (Numbers 12:3 and Numbers 27:18, respectively) to show how “man” in this case refers to Moses and Joshua. In these verses both are called “man.” Then the midrash makes the point that *for the sake of* both of these *men*, stones either did or didn’t fall from the heavens. Because it was hail for Moses, it is assumed that the great stones that fell for Joshua were also hail.

Two messages emerge from this passage. The first is to explain how it is understood that hail fell for Joshua, thus making the day “like no other.” The power of the miracle then is completely transferred from Joshua to God. The second message of the passage is a comment on the cyclical nature of history. The hail that ceased for Moses is connected to the hail that fell for Joshua. The underlying message is that what happens in the present is connected to events that came before. In the life of Israel, this could be developed further to intimate that where sovereignty was lost in the past, it will be regained in the future.

The episode of the sun connects Joshua back to Moses and it also connects him to another ancestor, Joseph. When Joseph was a young boy he had a dream that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him.⁷³ The following midrash connects the events of Joshua with those of Joseph. It is important to remember that Joshua is a descendent of Joseph through Ephraim.

⁷² Literally, “on the back of a man.”

⁷³ Genesis 37:9.

When Joshua said, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon" (Joshua 10:12), the sun responded, "You say to me 'Stand still'? How dare a youngster open his mouth and say to his elder, 'Stand still'? I was created on the fourth day and you on the sixth, and yet you say to me 'Stand still'!" Joshua answered the sun, "You upstart slave! Are you not mere chattel of one of my ancestors? Did not my ancestor Joseph see you as a slave in a dream: '*Behold the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me*' (Genesis 37:9)?" At once '*the sun stood still and the moon stayed*' (Joshua 10:13).⁷⁴

This midrash imagines the sun in conversation with Joshua. The sun, having been created two days earlier than man, bristles at being told what to do by a man, in this case Joshua. Joshua's response is sharp and unequivocal: He has the right to tell the sun what to do because he has his ancestor Joseph on his side. The point is that without the power of the merit of his ancestors, Joshua would have been powerless against the sun. However, with the connection to Joseph and his dream, Joshua is able to literally put the sun in its place. For the Rabbis the message is a strong one. It is that we ourselves do not necessarily have merit for our deeds. Rather, we must rely on the deeds and merit of our ancestors to survive. This translates into action as holding tight to the traditions of our people and not being lured by the customs of the surrounding society for survival. This

⁷⁴ Genesis Rabbah 84:11 and Genesis Rabbah 97:4.

was a common theme for the Rabbis as their congregants were very affected and influenced by the Roman culture that surrounded them. Midrashim such as this one basically told their congregants to "stick with what works," the customs of their own people.

Another midrash suggests that the stopping of the sun was due to the merit of Joshua himself.

Our Rabbis taught: Hillel the Elder had eighty disciples. Thirty of them deserved that the divine presence would rest upon them as upon Moses our teacher. Thirty of them deserved that the sun would stand still for them as it did for Joshua the son of Nun. Twenty were of average character. The greatest of them was Jonathan b. Uzziel; the least of them was Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai.⁷⁵

In this midrash, Joshua and Moses are presented as the paradigmatic examples of men who are rewarded on the basis of their merit. Moses had the divine presence rest upon him and the sun stopped for Joshua. Both men are presented as having the highest level of merit that one can achieve. The disciples of Hillel then, who are also meritorious, are deserving of the same great reward for their behavior. This speaks highly of Hillel's disciples of course, but it speaks even higher of Moses and Joshua who are the models of meritorious men.

There is one midrash which presents a lovely explanation why Joshua

⁷⁵ Bavli Baba Batra 134a.

stopped the sun.

The sixth wonder: From the day when the heavens and earth were created, the sun, the moon, the stars and the constellations were ascending to give light upon the earth, and they did not come into contact with one another until Joshua came and fought the battles of Israel. It was the eve of the Sabbath and he saw the plight of Israel lest they might desecrate the Sabbath, and further, he saw the magicians of Egypt compelling the constellations to come against Israel. What did he do? He stretched forth his hand to the light of the sun and to the light of the moon and he invoked upon them the Name and each one stood for thirty-six hours in its place until the termination of the Sabbath day.⁷⁶

In this midrash, Joshua sees that Israel is in dire straits. Not only is the Sabbath approaching while they are entrenched in battle, but the magicians are working against them as well. Joshua sees that they are in danger of violating the Sabbath by working on it. Therefore, he invokes the Holy Name of God in order to save them from that action. Joshua is shown to care deeply not only for the people whom he is leading, but also for the sanctity of the Sabbath day. He takes both very seriously.

In summary, the episode of the stopping of the sun is very dramatic. It might appear that Joshua had great power but the midrashim make it clear that God

⁷⁶ Pirke deRabbi Eliezer, Chapter 52; Friedlander, pp. 423-4.

was the one who ultimately makes miracles happen. This does not detract from the idea that Joshua was meritorious to have deserved such a miracle. Joshua also receives merit in connection once again with his ancestor Joseph. Additionally, through this occurrence, Joshua is presented as a compassionate leader who cares about the people and the holy Sabbath day.

JOSHUA AND THE INCIDENT WITH ACHAN

JOSHUA 7:1, 7:5-7:7, 7:10-12, 7:18-26

(1) But the children of Israel committed a trespass in regard to the devoted property: For Achan, the son of Karmi the son of Zavdi, the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah, took of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel. . . . (5) And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty-six men . . . and the hearts of the people melted and became like water. (6) And Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until evening. He and the elders of Israel put dust upon their heads. (7) And Joshua said, "Alas O Lord God, why did You bring this people over the Jordan to deliver us into the hand of the Emorites, to destroy us?" . . . (10) And the Lord said to Joshua, "Get up! Why do you lie this way upon your face? (11) Israel has sinned and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have taken of the devoted property . . . (12) Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, because they were

accursed. Neither will I be with you anymore unless you destroy the devoted things among you. . . (18) And he brought his household man by man and Achan, the son of Karmi, the son of Zavdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was picked. (19) And Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give, I pray you, glory to the Lord God of Israel and make confession to Him. And tell me now what you have done. Hide it not from me." (20) And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done. (21) When I saw among the spoil a goodly mantle of Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them and took them. Behold, they are hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent and the silver under it." (22) So Joshua sent messengers and they ran to the tent. And, behold, it was hidden in his tent and the silver under it. (23) And they took them out of the midst of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord. (24) And Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan, the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his asses, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and brought them to the valley of Akhor. (25) And Joshua said, "Why have you brought trouble on us? The Lord shall trouble you this day!" And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. (26) And they raised over him a great heap of stones to this day. Thus the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger.

The lengthy tale portrayed above represents another major episode in Joshua's career as leader of the Israelite people. The Israelites have been warned not to take of the "devoted things," presumably the spoils from the fallen city of Jericho. However, a member of the tribe of Judah violates this ban and secretly steals some items. The Israelites and Joshua are unaware that the theft has taken place until they are stunned with defeat in a battle with the men of Ai. The defeat was unexpected not only because they believed that God was on their side, but also because the Israelites greatly outnumbered the men of Ai. In the battle, thirty-six men are killed. Joshua prays to God to ascertain why they lost the battle and is told that the reason they lost was because of the theft. God tells Joshua how to find out who the culprit is, and Joshua carries out the ritual which fingers Achan. Achan is confronted, confesses, the evidence (the stolen items) is brought forth, and strict punishment is swiftly carried out. The story seems complete enough in the Bible text. Not surprisingly, however, when the midrashim related to this story are examined, the story expands even further.

The first series of midrashim expand upon Joshua's prayer to God. Some questions emerge from the biblical text. What is the meaning when Joshua rends his clothes? Why is it effective? What is revealed about Joshua in his prayer? The following midrash begins to answer these questions.

'AND HE BUILT THERE AN ALTAR TO THE LORD' (Genesis 12:16).

Rabbi Leazar said: He built three altars: One on account of the good tidings about the Land of Israel, another for his possession thereof, and a

third [as a prayer] that his descendants might not fall at Ai, as it is written, *'And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the Ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel, and they put dust upon their heads'* (Joshua 7:6). Rabbi Leazar ben Shamua said: They began recalling the merit of our father Abraham who said, *'I am but dust and ashes'* (Genesis 18:27). Did then Abraham build You an altar at Ai for anything but that his children should not fall there!⁷⁷

In this midrash, when Joshua and the elders fall on their faces and put dust on their heads, they are invoking the merit of their ancestor Abraham. This concept, which appears elsewhere in this paper, is called *z'chut avot*, the merit of the ancestors. It is their hope that by recalling a deed or aspect of Abraham, their prayers will be responded to favorably. In this case, Abraham built an altar as a prayer that his descendants would not all fall at Ai. Abraham also proclaimed that he was only "dust and ashes." So, according to this midrash, when Joshua and the elders put dust on their heads as a part of their prayer, they are really recalling Abraham's prayer to God many generations before in the hope that it will save them from further losses at Ai.

The concept that one generation can be connected to another by its deeds is reflected in the following short midrash.

✧ *'AND JACOB RENT HIS GARMENTS'* (Genesis 37:34). Rabbi Pinchas

⁷⁷ Genesis Rabbah 39:16.

said in Rabbi Hoshaya's name: The tribal ancestors caused their father to rend his garments. And where were they required? In Egypt, as it is written, '*Then they rent their clothes*' (Genesis 44:13). Joseph caused the tribal ancestors to rend their clothes, and his grandson was required for that, as it is written, '*And Joshua rent his clothes*' (Joshua 7:6).⁷⁸

Here Joshua is forced to rend his clothes because of what his ancestor Joseph did. And before that, Joseph's brothers are forced to rend *their* clothes as payment for causing their father Jacob to rend his garments. What is shown here is that one generation's actions can affect (and effect) what happens in another generation. This concept has a prominent place in Rabbinic literature. People are saved and punished because of what happened in the past. The message that follows is that what the current generation does will affect the generations that follow it. Thus, one is encouraged to behave in a righteous manner so as to positively influence future descendants.

Another midrash about Joshua's prayer reveals an aspect of his persona.

Rabbi Eleazar said: A prominent man should not fall upon his face unless he is confident that he will be answered like Joshua, as it is written, '*And the Lord said to Joshua, "Get up! Why do you lie this way upon your face?"*' (Joshua 7:10).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Genesis Rabbah 84:20 and 92:8.

⁷⁹ Bavli Ta'anit 14b and Megillah 22b.

The first point of this midrash is that a prominent man should not fall on his face in prayer unless he is confident of being answered. Joshua is then presented as the prime example. Thus, this midrash reveals not only that the Rabbis considered Joshua to be a "prominent man," but also that Joshua was confident that he would be answered. Perhaps, Joshua was confident because he had his own distinct relationship with God.⁸⁰

Since Joshua had this relationship with God, why didn't God tell Joshua who the sinners are? Why does God tell Joshua to search tribe by tribe for the offender? This next midrash addresses that issue.

And Shecaniah learned it from [the story told of] Joshua. As it is written, *'The Lord said to Joshua, "Get up! Why do you lie this way upon your face? Israel has sinned"'* (Joshua 7:10-11). "Master of the Universe," asked Joshua, "who are the sinners?" "Am I an informer?" replied God. "Go and cast lots [to find out who did it]."⁸¹

This section of a larger midrash is about not humiliating someone who has done something wrong. In this particular section, Joshua asks God to reveal to him who the sinners are, but God refuses. Instead, God encourages Joshua to find out by casting lots - a process that will be less humiliating for the sinners than

⁸⁰ See Chapter Three, Joshua's Relationship with God.

⁸¹ Bavli Sanhedrin 11a.

being "fingering" by God. God doesn't seem to want to be a "tattle-tale." The underlying message is that even though God may see and know everything, we must take responsibility for ourselves and our own troubles. It is not God's role to tell us everything we want to know. More often, we have to seek out the information ourselves. Additionally, God serves as a model in this midrash for how to treat people, even wrongdoers. All care must be taken to avoid humiliating them.

This midrash stands in direct conflict with the biblical text. The text reads again and again how the search will be narrowed by God picking out the offending group.⁸² This process will continue, it is stated, until the guilty party is discovered with the stolen goods. Perhaps the Rabbis were uncomfortable with the picture of a God who singled out the sinners and therefore created this midrash to present a different perspective. In fact, when Joshua carries out God's instructions, the text does not say that God did the picking. So the Rabbis may be explaining the conflicting information.

The biblical story continues as Joshua attempts to find out who the sinners are. The biblical text suggests that Joshua was able to narrow the search to the tribe of Judah, but it is not clear how he was able to do that. The following midrash provides an explanation.

Joshua gazed at the twelve stones which were upon the High Priest, which

⁸² Joshua 7:14.

correspond to the twelve tribes. Every tribe that had done some transgression, the light of its stone became dim. He saw the stone of the tribe of Judah, the light of which became dim, and he knew that the tribe of Judah had transgressed in the matter of the devoted thing.⁸³

This midrash provides an explanation for how the tribe of Judah was singled out. It suggests that the stones on the breastplate of the High Priest could be used to see if a particular tribe had committed some transgression. In this case, the stone representing the tribe of Judah was dimmer than the others, thus revealing the collective guilt of the tribe due to the sin of one of its members.

The meaning of this midrash is profound. One message is that when one member of a group sins, the rest of the group is affected by it. Even if a person thinks that his sins only affect himself, it is not true. A sin can have far-reaching consequences. This concept is very prevalent in the Yom Kippur liturgy. It is one of the reasons that the confession is recited in the plural. We recite our sins together because each sin has hurt the community as a whole. In more colloquial terms, you can't drill a hole in your end of the boat.

The other message of this midrash is that just as the sin of Achan dimmed the tribal stone, a person's sins dim his or her light. When a person sins he or she literally becomes smaller, lesser, and dimmer. This consequence happens

⁸³ Pirke deRabbi Eliezer, Chapter 38; Friedlander, p. 295.

automatically when a sin is committed. Nor is it related to any other consequence that follows. In other words, even if there is no other consequence that occurs and the person seems to “get away with it,” the consequence of dimming has already taken place.

In the next part of the biblical story Joshua goes from family to family to determine who is the guilty person. The method that Joshua uses in the Bible is not specified, but a midrash has suggested that lots were used. This next midrash further expands on the story.

Thereupon he went and cast lots and the lot fell upon Achan. Said Achan to Joshua, “Joshua do you convict me by a mere lot? You and Eleazar the Priest are the two greatest men of the generations and yet, were I to cast lots upon you, the lot might fall on one of you.” “I beg of you,” Joshua replied, “do not cast aspersions on [the efficacy of] the lots, for the Land of Israel is going to be divided by means of the lot, as it is written, ‘*The land shall be divided by lot*’ (Numbers 26:55). [Rather,] make confession.”⁸⁴

This midrash introduces us to Joshua’s adversary, Achan. Achan is portrayed as one who challenges authority. In this case, Achan challenges the authority and accuracy of the lot. He points out to Joshua that if there were only Joshua and Eleazar the Priest the lot would surely fall on one of them even if both were innocent. At that point, Joshua gives in and begs Achan not to disparage the

⁸⁴ Bavli Sanhedrin 43b. See Numbers Rabbah 23:6 for similar version of this story.

reputation of casting lots so as not to cause trouble dividing the Land at a later time. Instead, Joshua suggests that Achan confesses. This midrash addresses the problem that even after the choosing process singles out Achan, Joshua still asks Achan to confess. The Rabbis want to know why Achan would be asked to confess if the lot process has already determined his guilt.

Midrashically, the story is far from over. This next midrash continues the story and adds additional information. Because it is quite lengthy, each part will be examined separately.

At that moment Joshua said, *'My son, give, I pray you, glory to the Lord God of Israel and make confession to Him. And tell me now what you have done. Hide it not from me'* (Joshua 7:19). Then Achan said to Joshua, "You tell me what you have done!" Instantly strife broke out in Israel. The tribe of Judah took up the quarrel and slew in Israel one group after another.⁸⁵

Exigetically, this midrash is derived from the fact that there seems to be extraneous language in the Bible when Joshua asks for Achan's confession. Since that is impossible for the Rabbinic mind, this midrash was created to explain the extra words and unspoken words in between. In this part of the midrash, Achan shows himself to be a disrespectful and rebellious person. Joshua asks kindly but

⁸⁵ Numbers Rabbah 23:6.

firmly for Achan's confession and Achan responds with bold contempt not seen in Israel's ranks since Korah challenged Moses. The result is that strife breaks out in Israel and the tribe of Judah, siding with Achan, goes to battle on his behalf. This event represents the greatest challenge to Joshua's authority that he faces. It is significant that Joshua is not drawn into the battle. As a leader he remains patient, waiting for Achan to behave in a civilized manner. The midrash continues:

When Achan saw that things had come to such a pass he thought in his heart: Any man who preserves one life in Israel is as though he had preserved the entire world, yet through me ever so many people in Israel have been slain. I am a person who sins and causes others to sin. It is better that I should confess before the Holy One, blessed be He, and before Joshua, rather than that calamity should come about through me. What did Achan do? He stood and made his voice heard by all the congregation. All the congregation were silent for him. Then he said to Joshua, *'Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done'* (Joshua 7:20).⁸⁶

This section of the midrash represents victory for Joshua. Achan suddenly becomes aware of the harm he has caused and realizes that he must confess. He recognizes that he must confess not only to God, but to Joshua as well. Achan finally submits to Joshua's rule as leader of the people. This next part of the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

midrash reveals more information about Joshua's style of leadership.

By the expression '*thus and thus*' he as much as said, "This is not the only sin. I have trespassed in other cases too." Joshua said to him, "I knew indeed that you were responsible, but '*tell me now what you have done. Hide it not from me.*'"⁸⁷

In this case, Joshua knew that Achan was the sinner and that he had committed trespasses before. One can only presume that as Moses' servant Joshua would have been aware of these other offenses. The important part is that Joshua did not bring up Achan's former sins. Rather, he waited for Achan to admit them. Only at that point did Joshua ask Achan to confess all that he had done. Again we see a quiet, but firm style of leadership in Joshua. In midrashic literature, Joshua is more than just a military strong man. He is also a savvy leader who understands the people that he leads.

The next part of the midrash contains Achan's reason for taking the devoted property.

Said Achan to him [Joshua], "*I saw among the spoil*" (Joshua 7:21) and I reflected upon what is written in the Torah, '*You shall eat the spoil of your enemies*' (Deuteronomy 20:14). '*A goodly shinar mantle, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them*'" (Joshua 7:21). And do not suppose that I

⁸⁷ Ibid.

am a poor man and needed it, for there is no one in my tribe richer than I!⁸⁸

In this midrash Achan claims that he misunderstood the ban on the spoils of Jericho because he remembered a conflicting verse in Torah which allowed the spoils to be taken. The Rabbis are able to create this connection because of the hermeneutic device *g'zera shava*. In other words, because the Deuteronomy verse contains the same word for "spoil" as Achan's confession, the Rabbis determine that a connection exists.

Another midrash blames Joshua himself for causing Achan to commit this crime.

What then do the words '*Get yourself up*' teach us? The Lord said to him [Joshua], "You have brought [guilt] upon them." For that reason He said to him with reference to Ai, "*And you shall do to Ai and her king as you did to Jericho and her king, only the spoil thereof and the cattle thereof you shall take for a prey for yourselves*" (Joshua 8:2).⁸⁹

The Rabbis are trying to explain the seemingly extraneous word, "*L'CHA*" translated as "yourself" in the verse, "Get yourself up!" (Joshua 7:7). In reality the meaning is not clear. Consequently there is room for Rabbinic interpretation. In this case, the Rabbis interpret the word "*L'CHA*" to mean "to you, [Joshua]" or

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Bavli Sanhedrin 44a.

“because of you [Joshua]” did the defeat at Ai occur. The implication is that Joshua should not have forbidden the spoil of Jericho because it created an irresistible temptation for the people, specifically Achan. The Rabbis then use a later verse to explain how they arrive at that conclusion. When instructing Joshua before the Israelites battle Ai for the second time, God gives very specific instructions regarding what spoils may be taken. Because God gives such specific instructions regarding the spoils at Ai, the implication is that Joshua needed clearer instructions due to a previous error.

Regardless of whether Joshua was to blame or not, Joshua must act decisively to resolve this serious challenge to his authority. The next section of the lengthy midrash describes Joshua’s actions.

Immediately ‘*Joshua sent messengers and they ran to the tent. And, behold, it was hidden in his tent and the silver under it*’ (Joshua 7:21).

For what reason did Joshua send messengers? In order that the tribe of Judah might not abstract the articles and so prolong the strife.⁹⁰

In this section of the midrash, Joshua acts quickly to retrieve the articles from Achan’s tent. He wisely works to avoid further conflict among his people by sending messengers to the tent and presumably, keeping the rest of the people in their place. This says a great deal about Joshua’s strength as a leader. He was

⁹⁰ Numbers Rabbah 23:6.

decisive in getting the articles and protective of the other people. He was also smart to recognize the tendency of the tribe of Judah to want to continue the strife and to counteract that tendency. In the next part of the midrash, Joshua again moves decisively to carry out Achan's punishment.

Then straightaway Joshua, *'took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, the mantle, and the wedge of gold, and his sons and his daughters'* (Joshua 7:24). The sons and daughters he took in order to impress a lesson upon them. *'And his oxen, his asses, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had,'* (ibid.) to be burned. *'And all Israel with him'* to witness his punishment and so not to become habituated to committing crimes.⁹¹

This part of the midrash portrays Joshua as a strict disciplinarian. He wastes no time in administering justice for the wrongdoing. This midrash emerges from some confusing language in the Bible text. It might seem from the text that Achan's sons and daughters as well as all Israel were stoned and burned as punishment for Achan's sins.⁹² This doesn't make sense so the Rabbis insert explanatory text into the verse to further clarify what happened. In doing so, Joshua is seen delivering a strong message to his people by forcing them to witness Achan's punishment. Joshua does this, according to the Rabbis, to deter them

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² While this midrash emphasizes that Achan's family was only a witness to Achan's punishment, other midrashim suggest that the family was punished with death also because they knew about the sin and did not report it. See Bavli Sanhedrin 44a and Pirke deRabbi Eliezer, Chapter 38; Friedlander, p. 296.

from committing crimes in the future. Joshua is making a very clear statement that his authority is not to be challenged and that those who do will be found and publicly reprimanded.

Lest this story make Joshua appear to govern without mercy, a midrash exists which contains evidence to the contrary.

*'And Joshua said, "Why have you brought trouble on us? The Lord shall trouble you this day!"' (Joshua 7:25). 'This day,' he implied, you are troubled, but you will not be troubled in the World to Come, and you shall have a share therein.*⁹³

In this part of the midrash Joshua offers some comfort to Achan as he is about to be executed. Achan is told that he will have a share in the World to Come even though he will have "trouble" on "this day." It is the Hebrew word for "this," "ZEH," which is the basis for this midrash. The Rabbis want to know what is meant by the specification of the day. The conclusion is that if a specific day is specified for "trouble" there must be a day that will not be "trouble." Because Achan is being executed, the day when "trouble" ends must refer to the afterlife.

This midrash reveals Joshua's compassionate side. While he had to be firm when putting an end to the rebellion, here he offers hope to Achan. Joshua tells Achan that his death will serve as complete expiation for the sin which caused the

⁹³ Ibid. See also Pirke deRabbi Eliezer, Chapter 38; Friedlander, p. 296, Leviticus Rabbah 9:1, and Bavli Sanhedrin 44b.

death of thirty-six men.⁹⁴ Achan has sinned, but because he confessed before God, he will not be cursed for all time. Joshua does not glory in his victory. Rather, he remains patient and compassionate towards this man who has caused great strife for him. This model is worthy of emulation by leaders in all generations.

One final midrash summarizes the incident between Achan and Joshua.

'I AM BLACK BUT COMELY' (Song of Songs 1:5). I was black through Achan, as it says, *'But the children of Israel committed a trespass concerning the devoted thing'* (Joshua 7:1). And I was comely through Joshua, as it says, *'And Joshua said to Achan, "My son give, I pray you, glory to the Lord"'* (Joshua 7:19).⁹⁵

This midrash provides a way to understand the Song of Songs verse. If the "I" referred to here is Israel, then Israel is effectively made "black" or tainted by the deeds of Achan. Israel is made "comely" then by Joshua's successful management of the situation. Joshua plays a central role in keeping Israel beautiful and free of sin.

The midrashim on the incident about Achan reveal a great deal about Joshua's connection to his past as well as his future as a leader. Joshua survives this serious challenge and maintains his dignity and stature as leader of the people.

⁹⁴ Some say that it was only one man, because the Hebrew text says *"KI-SHELOSHIM V'SHEISH,"* "[One who is] like thirty-six men." This man was Jair son of Manasseh. For details, see Bavli Sanhedrin 44a, Leviticus Rabbah 11:7, and Esther Rabbah 11.

⁹⁵ Song of Songs Rabbah I. 5:1.

It is only after this test of leadership that Joshua can continue with the conquering and division of the Land. Though Joshua was designated as leader of the people long before this time, he is truly initiated as leader through his actions during this event.

JOSHUA AS WARRIOR AND LEADER

When the biblical character of Joshua is discussed, two of the first descriptions of him are as a warrior and as the second leader of the Israelites. Joshua is perhaps best known for these qualities. In fact, the dual aspects of warrior and leader are so intertwined in Joshua that they cannot be discussed separately. While some of Joshua's leadership style was described in the events with Achan, the midrashim in this section further expand upon this description, creating an even fuller picture of Joshua as a leader.

The first series of midrashim reflect how Joshua, as the Israelite leader, relates with the tribes. The first of these midrashim seems to relate back to the events with Achan.

'Then Judah came near to him' (Genesis 44:18). Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Nehemiah, and the Rabbis commented. Rabbi Judah said: He came near for battle, as in the verse, *'So Joab and the people that were with him drew near to battle'* (II Samuel 10:13). Rabbi Nehemiah said: He came near for conciliation, as in the verse, *'Then the children of Judah drew near to*

Joshua' (Joshua 14:6) - to effect a reconciliation.⁹⁶

In this midrash, the Rabbis are trying to explain the meaning of the word "*VAYIGASH*," translated as "and he drew near," as it appears in the Joseph story. They want to know what was the purpose and deeper meaning of Judah approaching Joseph. One suggested meaning is that he drew near for the purpose of doing battle and the proof text is provided. The second suggestion is that he drew near for reconciliation. It is this suggestion which relates to the Joshua story.

The proof text that the Rabbis put forth is a verse which seems out of place. Joshua is in the process of dividing up the Land among the tribes. The Bible states that the tribe of Judah approached Joshua, but then the narrative switches suddenly to the portion of land that Caleb is to receive. Only after this interruption does the text return to the portion of land for the rest of the tribe of Judah. So, the Rabbis use this confusing placement to suggest an alternative meaning of the Genesis verse, namely that Judah approached Joseph out of conciliation.

The piece that still needs to be explained is how does the out of place verse in Joshua prove a desire for reconciliation? For that answer, one must return to the Achan story as it appears in midrash. When Joshua tries to get Achan to confess, a battle breaks out which is instigated by the tribe of Judah. During this battle, the tribe of Judah slays groups of people. The bloodshed convinces Achan that he

⁹⁶ Genesis Rabbah 93:6. See also Genesis Rabbah 49:8.

must confess. Achan is punished for the sins that he committed and the story seems resolved. However, midrashically, a score to be settled between Joshua and the tribe of Judah remains. This issue seems to be what appears in this midrash.

The division of the Land is taking place and the tribe Judah is about to receive its share. Suddenly, Joshua allows Caleb to change the subject and plead for his own portion. Perhaps Joshua is still angry about the trouble that the tribe of Judah instigated earlier. It could be that because the tribe of Judah approaches Joshua as soon as peace is restored, Joshua is reminded of the lack of peace that they caused. And thus Joshua holds back in giving them their portion of the Land. The Rabbis seem to suggest that when the Judahites approach Joshua, they are hoping to effect a reconciliation. Only after they approach in reconciliation do they receive their portion of the Land. This explains why there is a gap in the biblical text between the approach of the tribe of Judah and the apportionment of their land.

What this midrash says about Joshua as a leader is also very interesting. Joshua is reflected as a leader who appreciates not only justice, but the power of forgiveness. Because Joshua respects the value of justice, he will not allow a tribe that instigates a civil war battle to receive its portion of land without some acknowledgement of wrong-doing. However, once Judah approaches Joshua and asks to reconcile, Joshua shows how to forgive as well. This balance between justice and mercy are the cornerstones of the life of our people. God is frequently

portrayed as the One who is supremely able to find this balance. Thus Joshua's leadership is not only strong, but reflects the very glory of God as well. And, in reflecting the actions of God, Joshua sets a model of leadership for us.

Another midrash relates to the division of the Land and Joshua's connection to the tribes.

'And the children of Joseph spoke to Joshua and said, "Why have you given me but one lot and one part for an inheritance, seeing I am a great people?" . . . And Joshua said to them, "If you are a great people get yourself up to the forest"' (Joshua 17:14-15). He said to them, "Go and hide yourselves in the forests that the evil eye may not have sway over you!"⁹⁷

In this midrash, the tribe of Joseph complains to Joshua about the size of their portion of land. It bears noting at this point that the tribe's approaching Joshua shows that they acknowledge him as the leader of the people. In this case, Joshua seems to give odd instructions to the tribe of Joseph, suggesting that if they want a bigger portion, they should go to the forest. This midrash attempts to explain what is happening.

Joshua sees the tribe's complaint as boasting. After all, they do emphasize their large numbers. Joshua is concerned that their bragging demonstrates

⁹⁷ Bavli Sotah 36b. See also Genesis Rabbah 97:3.

ingratitude for their blessings. This ingratitude might bring on "the evil eye," which causes misfortune to befall those who are not appreciative of what they possess. In this midrash, Joshua both rebukes the tribe of Joseph and tries to protect them. He rebukes them for not being thankful to God for their great numbers. Then he tries to protect them by suggesting that they flee to the forest to hide from the curse that might befall them. Joshua is not afraid to rebuke when necessary, but he also wants the best for the people he leads. Here again, Joshua is both strong and compassionate at the same time, both qualities of a good leader.

These qualities made Joshua a leader who was respected and beloved. This next midrash reflects how the tribes felt about him.

Since it is already written, '*So Joshua blessed them and sent them away; and they went to their tents*' (Joshua 22:6), why is it further stated, '*Moreover when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them*' (Joshua 22:7)?⁹⁸ The reason is because when the Israelites were engaged in conquering and dividing the land, the tribes of Reuben and Gad were with them and likewise spent fourteen years there in conquering and dividing the country. After the fourteen years they received permission from Joshua to return home, but they stayed there another few days, and then asked permission a second time. Therefore it is written, '*Moreover, when Joshua sent them away,*' etc. Rabbi Judan said: The tribes of Reuben and Gad formed Joshua's personal retinue, and he accompanied them to

⁹⁸ They are questioning the repetitive language in the biblical text.

the Jordan. When they saw that his retinue was thus diminished, they turned back and escorted him to his home. His last blessing was greater than the first, as it is written, '*And he spoke to them saying, "Return with much wealth to your tents"*' (Joshua 22:8).⁹⁹

This midrash is long but quite beautiful. The tribes of Reuben and Gad have been fighting with the Israelites as they conquered the Land. Once that process is completed, they receive permission to leave and return home. It is noteworthy that they seek permission from Joshua even though Moses granted it to them on the other side of the Jordan. This demonstrates the respect that they had for Joshua. Joshua grants them permission to leave but they do not leave right away. This is evident because the text says twice that Joshua sent them away - once when they asked to leave and again after they lingered.

Rabbi Judan then suggests another explanation. He suggests that the tribes of Reuben and Gad were Joshua's personal retinue and so out of love, Joshua walked with the tribes towards the Jordan as they returned home. However, when they saw that Joshua's retinue was so diminished without them, they accompanied Joshua back to his own home. In their great love and respect for Joshua, they could not bear to see him diminished in any way by their departure. As a result Joshua blesses them with plenty in their homes. Great mutual affection exists

⁹⁹ Genesis Rabbah 35:3.

between the two tribes and Joshua. Such affection can only come about through years of mutual respect. Joshua must have engendered this respect by his actions as a leader of the tribes.

One of the possible reasons that Joshua has earned the respect of the people is because he had past experiences which gave him credibility. One example is when Joshua sends out spies to view the land of Jericho. Joshua himself was sent out as a spy by Moses and this makes Joshua cognizant of the risks of such a mission. Primarily because of his past experience can Joshua turn around and ask his people to go out as spies. The following midrash portrays the risk of the mission.

No other people sent to perform a religious duty and risking their lives in order to succeed in their mission can compare with the two men whom Joshua the son of Nun sent, as it is written, '*And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two spies secretly . . .*' (Joshua 2:1). Who were they? Our Rabbis taught: They were Pinchas and Caleb. They went out and risked their lives and succeeded in their mission.¹⁰⁰

This midrash is saying that of all the people who have been sent to perform their religious duty, none can compare with this mission. This mission was apparently even more risky and dangerous than any other. Great accord is granted

¹⁰⁰ Numbers Rabbah 16:1.

to Pinchas and Caleb for embarking on this mission. However, it says quite a lot about Joshua who was able to send the men on this journey without objection. One can only assume that Joshua must have been able to garner some of this respect because he had gone on a risky spy mission himself before the Israelites crossed the Jordan. This next short midrash suggests that Joshua was able to give the spies some advice on how to gain information while on their mission.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught: The word '*HERESH*' is to be taken literally. Joshua said to them, "Make yourselves as mutes and you will discover their secrets." Rabbi Shimon ben Eleazar said: By pretending to be mutes, you will find out all about their affairs.¹⁰¹

In this midrash the Rabbis are trying to explain the word '*HERESH*,' frequently translated as "secretly."¹⁰² The Hebrew meaning is somewhat unclear which prompts the inquiry. After other suggestions are put forth that require an alternate pointing of the Hebrew, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai suggests that the word can be understood as it is currently pronounced. The word is to be translated "mute." Thus the passage is to be read as Joshua giving advice to the spies about how to conduct themselves on the mission in order to gain information. Here too, one might imagine that Joshua speaks from experience. Perhaps it is only because of Joshua's past experience that he is able to effect the spy mission at all.

¹⁰¹ Ruth Rabbah 2:1.

¹⁰² See verse quotation above - Joshua 2:1.

Joshua's past experience as a spy helps him to be effective as a leader when he is in charge of the people. However, his role in the past introduces a different problem for Joshua. Before he became leader of the people, Joshua was a regular member of the group, albeit Moses' trusted servant. In effect, Joshua was "promoted from within." This leads to a dilemma for him in the midrash as he struggles with what leadership style he should employ.

One text reads, '*For you must go with this people*' (Deuteronomy 31:7) and another text reads, '*For you shall bring the children of Israel*' (Ibid. 31:23). Rabbi Yochanan said: You shall be like the elders of the generation and be among them. But the Holy One, blessed be He said to Joshua, "Take a stick and strike them on their heads. There is only one leader to a generation, not two."¹⁰³

The bases for this midrash are two seemingly contradictory verses in Deuteronomy. The first suggests that Joshua is to be an equal to the people because Joshua is instructed to go "with" the people. The word "with" implies *with* them but not ahead of them. Thus Joshua is more on an equal level with the people. This style of leadership is known as "leadership from within." In the second verse Joshua is told to "bring" the Israelites. This suggests that Joshua is leading them from the front. This style of leadership is more autocratic. Both

¹⁰³ Bavli Sanhedrin 8a.

styles of leadership can be effective depending on the situation, but they cannot be used simultaneously. This begs the question: On which style should Joshua base his leadership? Because he was one of the people for so long, Joshua may have wanted to lead from within the group rather than distinguish himself as the sole leader. This would be consistent with Joshua's persona as a patient and gentle leader. In the midrash, God makes the answer very clear. Joshua is to be the one and only leader of the people. The midrash goes so far as to say that Joshua should strike the Israelites upon their heads with a stick, if necessary, in order to assert his authority. The answer is unequivocal: Joshua is to be the indisputable leader. That Joshua has to be told this suggests that he might have preferred to lead in a different way.

Several different messages emerge out of this midrash. In the first place, it reflects the rabbinic preference for autocratic leadership. They did not want to cast doubt on their role as the leaders of the people. With all of the competing ideas of the time, they wanted to make it clear where the authority should rest. The emergence of early Christianity may also have been an underlying motivation for this midrash. In other words, the Rabbis are saying, "We are the leaders of your generation and there is not room for another leader."

Finally, the Rabbis have a keen sense in this midrash of how to lead a people in a time of crisis or insecurity. The Rabbis recognized that the newly formed Israelite nation needed strong leadership in order to survive and prosper.

They needed clear direction from one and only one source. Otherwise, success would have been much more difficult, if possible at all. The Rabbis are very savvy about the different styles of leadership and how they can best be utilized to suit the times. In our day and age, this message is especially important. Certain times require a more group-led style, but others require clear direction. What is remarkable is how these texts remain so very relevant to periods of history long after they were written and delivered.

Regardless of which style Joshua uses, he proves to be a caring and conscientious leader. The following midrash describes just one of the tasks that Joshua attempts out of his concern for his people.

Joshua, being a friend of Israel, undertook the task of preparing roads and highways for them. Wherever they were easy to use, he made them for public use. Those that were not easy to use he designated for private use.¹⁰⁴

This midrash portrays Joshua's long-term vision for his people. He loves them and wants to help them become established in the Land. Consequently, he sets up roads and highways for them. In addition, he gives the people the means to distinguish between different types of roads. Only a leader who believed in his people and believed in the future for his people would go to such lengths to

¹⁰⁴ Bavli Erubin 22b.

provide for them.

While Joshua exhibits his leadership in his concern for his people, he also demonstrates concern for other people.

'When you come near a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace to it'
(Deuteronomy 20:10). Who fulfilled this section? Joshua the son of Nun. Rabbi Shmuel ben Nachman said: What did Joshua do? He published an edict in every place he came to conquer wherein was written, "Whoever desires to go, let him go. Whoever desires to make peace, let him make peace. And whoever desires to make war, let him make war."¹⁰⁵

In many places in the biblical text, Joshua is portrayed as a brutal warrior. This midrash contradicts that image. Joshua warns the cities that are about to be invaded that an attack is coming. Even beyond that, the proclamations give the cities a chance to make peace with the Israelites and avoid battle altogether. The midrash continues by bringing examples of groups that chose different options thus proving that they had different options from which to choose.

The Rabbis were uncomfortable with any leader of the Jewish people being portrayed as blood-thirsty and war-like. Rather, they preferred an image of fairness, justice, and a willingness to work with others. This preference reflects the time in which they lived. The Rabbis did not want to be seen by the

¹⁰⁵ Deuteronomy Rabbah 5:14. See also Leviticus Rabbah 17:6.

government in power as having the desire to supersede it. One aspect of this midrash that is especially meaningful is that, even today, the State of Israel often warns a town or building that it will be attacked. The army allows any innocent civilians the opportunity to leave the area so that they are not injured. Joshua serves as the role model for this practice. He demonstrates by this action that he is a leader who cares for people and believes in justice.

As much as Joshua is concerned about the treatment of other peoples, he is first and foremost the leader of his own people. A good leader must be able to rebuke the people for wrong-doing as we have seen Joshua do already. However, it is equally important that a leader praise his people for the good deeds that they perform. The following midrash is an example of the latter.

'YOUR LIPS ARE LIKE A THREAD OF SCARLET' (Song of Songs 4:3):

When they said to Joshua, *'All that you have commanded us we will do'*

(Joshua 1:16). *'AND YOUR SPEECH IS COMELY'*: when they said,

'Whosoever he be that shall rebel against your commandment . . . shall be

put to death' (Joshua 1:18). Therefore Joshua began to praise them saying,

'YOUR TEMPLES ARE LIKE A POMEGRANATE SPLIT OPEN': them

emptiest among you is as well packed with religious observances as a

pomegranate with seeds.¹⁰⁶

This midrash takes a beautiful passage of love poetry from Song of Songs

¹⁰⁶ Song of Songs Rabbah 4:4, section 4.

and applies it to the relationship between Joshua and the Israelites. The Rabbis are trying to understand who is the subject and who is the speaker of these words. They imagine that the words constitute a conversation between Joshua and the people. First, the people demonstrate total loyalty to Joshua by pledging to follow his commands and vowing to punish those who refuse to follow the law. Because of this grand demonstration of loyalty, Joshua praises the people by comparing them to a pomegranate which is full of seeds as the Israelites are filled with religious observances. This midrash reflects how Joshua is able to praise the people when they act in a praiseworthy manner. Joshua is able to balance his leadership, not forgetting that praise is as important (and sometimes more so) as correction and instruction.

This final midrash summarizes the kind of leader Joshua was.

So you find that Moses and the Prophets were prepared to give their lives for Israel. Moses in saying, *'now if You will forgive their sin, but if not, blot me, I pray, from Your book which You have written'* (Exodus 32:32). Joshua in saying, *'Against me, O Lord'* (Joshua 7:8). David in saying, *'I have sinned and done wrong. But these sheep what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, O Lord my God, be against me and against my father's house, but not against Your people that they should be plagued'* (I Chronicles 21:17).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Pesikta Rabbati 22:4, Mekhilta, Bo 4. This midrash is my own combination of two parallel midrashim in the two sources quoted. The verse about David also appears in II Samuel 24:17.

In this midrash, Joshua is portrayed as one of three leaders in Israelite history who cared so much for the people that he was willing to sacrifice his own life to save theirs. Moses, Joshua, and David all plead with God to take His anger out on them rather than the people. They all take ultimate responsibility for the actions of the people they lead. It is the highest quality of leadership that they display. That Joshua is included in this group speaks volumes about his character and strength as a leader. He does not try to place blame on anyone. Rather, he stands between the people and God's anger, shielding the people from harm. Only the strongest and worthiest of leaders would be able to act in this way. Joshua is that kind of leader.

In summary, a great deal is revealed about the kind of leader Joshua was when looking at the midrashim surrounding his actions after entering the Land. Joshua's style and personality are revealed not only surrounding the well-known miraculous events such as Jericho and the stopping of the sun in Gibeon, but also in the simpler activities, such as his relationship with the tribes and how he handled rebellion. Joshua proves himself again and again to be patient, benevolent, strong and courageous in the manner in which he leads the people. He is not afraid of rebuke and the carrying out of justice, yet he balances that with kindness and mercy. He truly takes to heart what God says to him over and over, "Only be strong and of good courage." Joshua's leadership is a model for all leaders and all humankind.

IV. JOSHUA: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE FAMILY

JOSHUA'S FAMILY

After learning so much about Joshua's life, one begins to wonder about his family. After all, he is most commonly referred to as Joshua, son of Nun, especially to distinguish him from other men named Joshua in the Bible of which there are three.¹⁰⁸ His name presumes that he is the son of a man whose name was Nun and yet we have no mention of Joshua's father in the Torah or the Prophets. In fact, he only appears once, very briefly, in I Chronicles 7:27, "Nun his son, and Joshua his son." This mystery, of course, caused the Rabbis to seek information about Joshua's family through various midrashim. The following midrash speaks of Joshua's father.

And let them increase like fish in the midst of the earth (Genesis 48:16).

As there were sixty myriads in the midst of the earth, so there were sixty myriads in the domain of the fish. As when in the midst of the earth they did not die, so in the domain of the fish they did not die. And the son of him whose name was as the name of a fish would lead them into the land, as it says, '*Nun his son, Joshua his son*' (I Chronicles 7:27).

¹⁰⁸ These are: 1) Joshua, a man from Beit Shemesh who lived in the time of David; 2) Joshua, a minister of Jerusalem in the days of Josiah, King of Judah; 3) Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the High Priest in the days of Shivat Tzion.

This midrash is based on the interpretation of the verse in Genesis which reads the verb *"V'YIGDU,"* "Let them multiply," as being a play on the Hebrew word for fish, *"DAG."* This is possible not only because the sound is similar but also because the letters are the same except in reverse order. Thus the verse can be interpreted as multiplying like fish.

Once that word play has been established, the Rabbis can continue with the interpretation. The midrash implicitly discusses the survival of the sixty myriads of Israelites in the "midst of the earth," and in the "domain of the fish," which could mean Egypt and the Reed Sea, respectively. Then, in the way of connection to the "domain of fish," Joshua's name is mentioned. The midrash even says that his father's name is the name of a fish. The Rabbis make this statement because Nun, in Aramaic, means fish. The meaning then becomes clear: Joshua, whose name means "fish," is the perfect candidate to lead them into the land following the Israelites survival in the "domain of the fish." It bears noting also that the Israelites had to pass over the Jordan river, another "domain of the fish," in order to enter the land successfully.

After learning about Joshua's father, one might be curious to know whether Joshua had any children or was even married. Even though the Bible does not mention children or a wife, there are midrashim that do. The following midrash, which will be examined in sections, explains who Joshua's wife was and a little about his children.

Rabbi Nachman said: Hulda was a descendant of Joshua. It is written here [in connection with Hulda], '*The son of Harhas*' (II Kings 22:14) and it is written in another place [in connection with Joshua], '*In Timnat-Heres*' (Judges 2:9).¹⁰⁹

The interpretation that Rabbi Nachman puts forth is a bit of a stretch of the imagination as well as of the Hebrew language. Rabbi Nachman attempts to connect two verses using the principle of *g'zera shava*, in which verses can be connected because both contain a similar word. In this case, however, the word in one of the verses is not very similar at all. In the II Kings verse, the word is the name of a person and in the Judges verse, it is the name of a place. Furthermore, the word in II Kings has an extra letter. Just the same, Rabbi Nachman states that because the similar word occurs in both, it must mean that Hulda was a descendant of Joshua.

In the next section of the same midrash Hulda is also said to be a descendant of Rahab.

Rabbi Judah says: Hulda the prophetess was also one of the descendants of Rahab the harlot because it is written here [in connection with Hulda], '*the son of Tikvah*' (II Kings 22:14), and it is written elsewhere [in connection with Rahab], '*the line (tikvat) of scarlet thread*' (Joshua 2:18).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Bavli Megillah 14b.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

The principle of *g'zera shava* is at work in this part of the passage also. The problem that arises is that if Hulda is a descendant of Rahab then she (Hulda) is not Jewish. How then could she be a descendant of both Joshua and Rahab? The last section of this midrash poses a solution to the problem.

The truth can be found combining my¹¹¹ statement and yours. We must suppose that she [Hulda] became a proselyte and Joshua married her. But had Joshua any children? Is it not written, '*Nun his son, Joshua his son*'? He had no sons, but he had daughters.¹¹²

In the combination of the two stories, Hulda is a descendant of Rahab and thus a non-Jew. However, she is still connected to Joshua, not as a descendant but rather as his wife. Of course, in order to be Joshua's wife, she had to have converted, for it would have been unseemly for the great leader of the people to be married to a non-Jew. This is also a strong message from the Rabbis to their congregation against intermarriage.

The end of the midrash explains why the II Chronicles verse ends with Joshua. Apparently, Joshua had no sons; otherwise they would have been mentioned in the list of genealogy after Joshua. However, the Rabbis had a difficult time imagining that Joshua would not have had any children at all, so they explain that he must have had only daughters.

¹¹¹ Rabbi Nachman is speaking.

¹¹² Bavli Megillah 14b.

On the other hand, there are other midrashim which state that Joshua had no children at all. In one of these midrashim, the Rabbis wonder why Joshua did not have children. After all, in their eyes, a son is the Biblical reward of divine favor. One without sons must have done something wrong. The next midrash explores what that wrong action might have been.

Rabbi Levi stated: He who answers [a question with] a word in the presence of his master goes down to Sheol childless; for it says in Scripture, '*And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses from his youth up answered and said, "My lord, Moses, KILA-EIM [Shut them in]"*' (Numbers 11:28). And elsewhere it is written, '*Nun his son, Joshua his son*' (I Chronicles 7:27).¹¹³

According to Rabbi Levi, because Joshua answered Moses with one word he died childless. What is at issue here is the concept of respect. To answer with only one word would seem surly or disrespectful, particularly when addressing an elder. The underlying message that the Rabbis are conveying to the congregants of their own time is that they, the Rabbis, are deserving of respect and their words should be heeded by the community, as opposed to leadership from outside the community. This explanation is followed by a lengthy passage that proposes a different reason why Joshua had no children.

¹¹³ Bavli Erubin 63a-63b.

This exposition, however, differs from that of Rabbi Abba ben Pappa, for Rabbi Abba ben Pappa said: Joshua was punished for no other sin than that of preventing Israel for one night from the duty of propagation; for it is said in Scripture, '*And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho that he lifted up his eyes and saw*' (Joshua 5:13), and this is followed by the text, '*But I am captain of the host of the Lord; I am now come*' (ibid. 14). "Last evening," he (the captain of the host of the Lord) said to him (Joshua), "you neglected to offer up the evening sacrifice and *now* you are neglecting the study of Torah." "On account of which have you come?" the other asked. '*I am now come.*' . . . And we have a tradition that so long as the Ark and the *Shekhina* are not settled in their appointed place connubial intercourse is forbidden.¹¹⁴

This midrash is complex. In the Biblical text, while near Jericho, Joshua encounters a being who proclaims that he is "captain of the host of the Lord." In the midrash above, he scolds Joshua for keeping himself and the people so busy with warfare that the evening sacrifice was skipped and the people were unable to engage in Torah study. Other sins of Joshua will be examined further in this chapter. In addition, because of the battles, the Ark and the *Shekhina* were unable to settle in one place. Thus, the midrash tells us, no procreation could take place. As their leader, Joshua was to blame for the people being unable to procreate for

¹¹⁴ Bavli Erubin 63b. This midrash also appears in Bavli Megillah 3a-3b; and Bavli Sanhedrin 44a.

one night, so he was punished with the lack of children. In other words, because he prevented children from coming into the world for others, he was similarly punished. The punishment directly fit the crime.

The fact that Joshua had no children was the cause of hardship for Joshua. The hardship that resulted was after the spies returned from scouting the land. Ten of the spies are afraid and do not want to enter the land. Joshua and Caleb see the beauty of the land and try to convince the people to go and enter the land.

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses. Rabbah said: He won them over with words. When Joshua began to address them they said to him, "Would this person with the lopped-off head speak to us?"¹¹⁵

By referring to Joshua as a "person with a lopped off head," they mean one who has no children. They are reluctant to listen to Joshua who has no children, figuring that he would have no vested interest in conquering the land. Only someone whose children stood to possess the land would be able to convince them that it was worthwhile. Joshua loses the respect of the people because he has no children.

Another hardship is more of a messianic nature. A Talmudic passage speaks of a great banquet that will be thrown for the righteous "on the day He manifests His love to the seed of Isaac." This wording implies a messianic time.

¹¹⁵ Bavli Sotah 35a.

After the meal, the righteous in attendance prepare to recite the *Birkat Hamazon*, the blessing after eating. The cup of wine over which the blessing is recited is passed from man to man and all are unable to lead the blessing. Joshua is among these men. He has to turn down the honor and the reason he gives is that he was "not privileged to have a son."¹¹⁶ Joshua has to turn down a very special honor because he has no son. The passage leaves it open as to whether Joshua had daughters or not, but it almost seems irrelevant. The gender of children that represents divine favor is male. The beautiful message that emerges from all this is that children are a special gift from God and if one is given children it is a privilege. A parent should recognize this gift as a privilege and a responsibility.

SINS OF JOSHUA

The first of these incidences occurs early in Joshua's leadership.

Rav Judah reported in the name of Rav: When Moses departed for the Garden of Eden he said to Joshua, "Ask me concerning all the doubts you have." He replied to him, "My master, have I ever left you for one hour and gone elsewhere? Did you not write concerning me in the Torah, '*But his servant Joshua the son of Nun departed not out of the tabernacle*'?" Immediately, Moses' strength weakened and Joshua forgot three hundred laws and there arose seven hundred doubts. Then all Israel rose up to kill

¹¹⁶ Bavli Pesachim 119a.

him. The Holy One, blessed be He, then said to Joshua, "It is not possible to tell you. Go and occupy their attention in war, as it says, '*Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke,*' and further it says, '*Prepare your food for within three days you shall pass over this Jordan to go in and possess the land.*'¹¹⁷

This midrash contains some damaging information about Joshua's character. Moses is about to die and asks Joshua if he has any remaining questions. Joshua responds to Moses in a rather disrespectful and haughty way. This causes Moses' strength to weaken, meaning that Moses has taken deep offense at Joshua's words. In response, God punishes Joshua by making him forget many laws and causing him to doubt the answers he knew. Then, because Joshua did not know how to answer the disputes of the people, they are enraged against him. Then God refuses to give Joshua the answers, but does save his life by encouraging him to engage the people in warfare.

This midrash presents Joshua in a less favorable light. Because of Joshua's over-confidence in himself, the people have to immediately begin the conquering of the land. Only warfare will keep them occupied at this point. The message is that a student must always be respectful of the teacher, even when the student thinks he knows all one might know. The other message is that one can always

¹¹⁷ Bavli Temurah 16a; Joshua 1:1, 11.

learn more. To believe that learning has stopped is to stop growing. Joshua had to learn this lesson in a very painful way for himself and the people.

Another midrash portrays Joshua as disrespectful to his teacher Moses.

Then Rabbi Jacob ben Idi came in and said to him: *'As the Lord commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses'*

(Joshua 11:15). Did Joshua then concerning every word which he said, tell them, "Thus did Moses tell me?" The fact is that Joshua was sitting and delivering his discourses without mentioning names, and all knew it was the Torah of Moses.¹¹⁸

If one looked at midrashic literature, one feature that would be common to all is that statements are almost always quoted in some rabbi's name. Often a chain of rabbi's names is mentioned in order that every rabbi who may have said or taught a particular phrase is recognized. This concept of proper recognition and chain of tradition is extremely important to the Rabbis who compiled this body of literature. Knowing this makes Joshua's sin in this midrash quite severe. He was sitting and delivering his discourses *without* mentioning Moses' name. The situation is somewhat ameliorated by the fact that everyone knew he was teaching the words of Moses and therefore it was not as necessary to say everything in Moses' name. Even considering that, the sin is quite serious and makes Joshua

¹¹⁸ Bavli Yevamot 96b.

appear disrespectful and dishonest.

Another midrash presents a negative portrayal of Joshua's relationship to God.

Rabbi Nachman said in Rav's name: What is meant by, *The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer insolently* (Proverbs 18:23)? To Joshua. Why so? Shall we say because it is written, '*And they laid them down before the Lord*' (Joshua 7:23), which Rabbi Nachman interpreted [to mean that] he came and threw them down before God . . . No, it is inferred from the following, '*And Joshua said, "Why have you brought this people over the Jordan, would that we had been content and dwelt beyond the Jordan"*' (Joshua 7:7).¹¹⁹

In this midrash, Joshua is equated with one who would "answer insolently," which is not a favorable description. This situation is made worse with the proof texts. Not only is Joshua insolent, but he is insolent to God. The proof is that he threw down items before God, presumably in an insolent way. Another proof text has Joshua complaining to God about having taken them over the Jordan and into the land. Considering what a great gift the land was thought to be, Joshua showed disrespect in making such a drastic statement. What was especially bad about this statement is that it showed a great lack of faith on Joshua's part. For this alone he could be referred to as insolent.

¹¹⁹ Bavli Sanhedrin 44a.

The midrash continues:

And the Lord said to Joshua, "Get yourself up" (Joshua 7:10). Rabbi Shila expounded on this: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Your sin is greater than theirs, for I commanded, 'And it shall be when you are passed over the Jordan that you shall set up [these] stones' (Deuteronomy 27:4). You however advanced sixty miles¹²⁰ [before setting them up]."

But when [Rabbi Shila] had gone out, Rav set up his interpreter to speak for him, who expounded: *'As the Lord commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses' (Joshua 11:5).*¹²¹

This section of the midrash presents a third way in which Joshua might have been considered "insolent" to God--he did not directly follow God's orders. It is suggested that he delayed setting up stones that were commanded. It is interesting to note, in Joshua's behalf, that in the end, Rav defends Joshua's reputation by bringing in a text which says that Joshua did exactly as he was told. It would seem that Rav was uncomfortable criticizing Joshua too much.

In another midrash, Joshua is criticized for delay in carrying out a command from God.

¹²⁰ The distance between the Jordan and the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal is sixty miles.

¹²¹ Bavli Sanhedrin 44a.

Our Rabbis said: It is written in connection with Joshua, *'As I was with Moses, so will I be with you'* (Joshua 1:5). Joshua, then, should have lived a hundred and twenty years like Moses, our Teacher. Why was his life shortened by ten years? When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, *'Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites. Afterwards you shall be gathered unto your people'* (Numbers 31:2), he did not put off the matter, although he was given tidings of death. Rather he acted promptly as it says, *'Moses sent them'* (ibid. 6). Joshua, however, when his turn came to fight with the thirty-one kings, thought, "If I kill them at once I shall die right away, as Moses our Teacher died." What did he do? He began to dally in the wars against them, as it says, *'Joshua made war a long time with all those kings'* (Joshua 11:18). Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him, "So this is what you have done, is it? Behold, I shall shorten your life by ten years!"¹²²

According to this midrash, Joshua sinned against God by trying to outsmart Him. He decided to try to prolong the days of his life and delay the day of his death. This is clearly within the domain of God. It would seem from this midrash that God did not like Joshua's attempt to infringe on His territory. He therefore punishes Joshua with exactly the punishment that Joshua was trying to avoid--He shortened his life by ten years.

¹²² Numbers Rabbah 22:6.

While not many midrashim portray Joshua negatively, the ones that exist are particularly damaging. Joshua neglects everything that is important, Torah, sacrifice, respect for teachers, and reverence for God. Perhaps these midrashim are necessary to balance an otherwise very favorable portrait of a great leader and righteous man. They remind us that every person is human and has his or her faults. In this way, we can identify with Joshua and see greatness in ourselves despite our frailties.

GREATNESS OF JOSHUA

While only a few midrashim illustrate Joshua's faults, many portray Joshua's greatness, wisdom, and righteousness. One of the most grievous sins that Joshua is accused of in the previous section is showing disrespect to his teacher Moses. Based on what we know about the intimate relationship between Moses and Joshua, it seems somewhat unbelievable that Joshua could commit that particular sin. It seems far-fetched even to imagine that he *could* be disrespectful to his beloved teacher. It is not surprising then, that there is another midrash which portrays the opposite situation.

There is also wisdom which is either beneficial or detrimental to its possessor; beneficial, like that possessed by Joshua, of whom it says, '*And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom*' (Deuteronomy 34:9). To what was he compared? To a pool of water that gave a whole city to drink. When all were praising it, one said, "You should praise this

fountain instead, which supplies this pool.” So the people were praising Joshua for giving the whole of Israel to drink of his wisdom, but he said, “You should praise Moses who is my source of wisdom,” as it says, ‘*For Moses had laid his hands upon him*’ (ibid).¹²³

This midrash portrays Joshua as having great wisdom. In fact, his wisdom is so great that the whole of Israel is able to drink of it. For this, Joshua receives praise from the people. Joshua, however, will have none of it. He, like the pool in the *mashal*, humbly defers all the praise to *his* fountain, his source of wisdom, his teacher Moses. It would have been easy for Joshua to accept this praise but he accepts none of it. This midrash is more in keeping with how we have already seen Joshua portrayed in Rabbinic literature. Joshua has been described as thoroughly devoted to his teacher Moses and it makes sense that he would continue to be devoted even after his venerated teacher has died.

Another midrash connects Joshua to wisdom.

Another interpretation of *Wisdom is good* (Ecclesiastes 7:11). [This is the wisdom] of Joshua, *with an inheritance*, since he gave Israel possession of the land. *Yea, a profit to them that see the sun.*¹²⁴

This midrash also refers to the wisdom of Joshua, calling it “good” by connecting it to the verse in Ecclesiastes. Because the verse also mentions an

¹²³ Exodus Rabbah 31:3.

¹²⁴ Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:11, section 1.

“inheritance” and “the sun,” it is not difficult to see Joshua represented. Joshua was the leader, after all, who helped the people to gain possession of the land, and he also had a memorable incident that involved the sun.

Another midrash gives Joshua praise for bringing the people into the land.

And the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land (Song of Songs 2:12), means, according to Rabbi Jochanan, that the voice of him who turned us with great skill towards the Land of Israel was heard in the land, that is to say, the voice of Joshua, as it says, ‘*Then Joshua commanded the officers saying . . . Go in to possess the land!*’ (Joshua 1:10).¹²⁵

This Song of Songs verse is part of the wonderful love poetry found in that book. Some say that it is an allegory for the love between God and Israel. It is poignant, then, that Joshua would be part of this poetry. According to this midrash, Joshua’s voice may be compared to that of the turtle dove “heard in our land” because he was the one who led the people into the land. In order to make this interpretation possible, Rabbi Jochanan reads part of the verse in Joshua as a command spoken directly to the officers by taking out the words that appear in between the beginning and the end of the verse.¹²⁶ The meaning is that Joshua should be thought of with love for his role in bringing the people into the land.

¹²⁵ Pesikta Rabbati 15:12.

¹²⁶ The unedited verse reads, “**Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people saying, ‘Prepare your food for within three days you shall pass over this Jordan, to go in and possess the land, which the Lord your God gives you to possess it.’**”

The Song of Songs is a rich source of love poetry. It should follow then that Song of Songs Rabbah has beautiful midrashim within it. There are two short but lovely midrashim from Song of Songs Rabbah that portray Joshua in a positive way. The first is as follows:

Through whose help did Israel cross the Jordan? *Through your two breasts* (Song of Songs 4:5), namely Joshua and Eliezer.¹²⁷

In this midrash Joshua is likened to one of Israel's breasts because he played a significant role in the life of the Israelites by leading them across the Jordan river. At first glance, being compared to a breast may not seem like much of a compliment. However, if one looks closely, the meaning is quite profound. From the breast of a nursing mother comes nourishment and love for her infant. The image of a new mother nursing is powerful and beautiful. With that same kind of power and beauty, Joshua loved and nursed the people Israel in its infancy in the land. Joshua was their source of nourishment through his leadership. This short midrash then represents high praise for Joshua.

The second midrash from Song of Songs Rabbah presents a similar idea.

Another explanation, *You have ravished my heart, O my sister, my bride* (Song of Songs 4:9). Said the Holy One, blessed be He, "You had one heart when the spies were sent, and you gave me two hearts," namely

¹²⁷ Song of Songs Rabbah 4:4, section 4.

Caleb and Joshua, as it says, '*Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun*' (Numbers 32:12).¹²⁸

In the last midrash, Joshua was likened to a breast of Israel. In this one, he and Caleb are called "hearts." What is even more significant is that they are hearts that were given over to God. They are called this way because of their loyalty to the land and to God during the episode of the spies. They literally gave their hearts to the service of God. Joshua and Caleb refused to give a negative testimony about the Israelites' ability to conquer the land. For this reason, they alone were allowed to enter the land. In this midrash also, Joshua receives high praise for his good acts.

In addition to his good deeds, Joshua is recognized for his righteousness as in the following midrash:

The sun also rises and the sun goes down (Ecclesiastes 1:5). Rabbi Abba said: Do we already know that the sun rises and the sun goes down? But the meaning is that before the Holy One, blessed be He, causes the sun of one righteous man to set, he causes the sun of another righteous man to rise . . . Before the Holy One, blessed be He, caused Moses' sun to set, he caused Joshua's sun to rise, as it says, '*And the Lord said to Moses, take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun*' (Numbers 27:18).¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid. 4:9, section 1.

¹²⁹ Genesis Rabbah 68:2.

This midrash expounds on a verse from Ecclesiastes which recalls that the sun rises and sets. Since this is a commonly known fact, as Rabbi Abba points out, the verse must come to deliver a deeper, hidden message. In this case, that message is about righteous men. It would seem from this midrash that a righteous man is a gift to the people around him. Thus, when it is time for one righteous man to leave this world, God sets up another righteous man to succeed him and carry on the legacy of righteousness. In our example, these righteous men are Moses and Joshua. The message of this midrash is two-fold. The first message is to testify that Joshua was a righteous man. Joshua is praised in many ways and his righteousness is just one of them. The second message of this midrash is that *only* Joshua was righteous enough to be chosen by God to succeed Moses. This also is quite a credit to Joshua's name.

Another midrash speaks of Joshua's righteousness.

As the vine is lower than all other trees yet is predominant among all the trees, so is Israel; they appear as though they are inferior in this world, but in the Time to Come they are destined to take possession of the entire world from one end to the other. As from the vine a single bough comes out and eclipses many trees, so is Israel; one righteous man comes out of them and rules over the whole world from one end to the other, as it says in the following texts, '*Joseph was the governor over the earth*' (Genesis 42:6), [and] '*So the Lord was with Joshua and his fame was in all the*

earth' (Joshua 6:27).¹³⁰

The Rabbis are perplexed, in this midrash, as to what it means for one to be governor, "over the earth," or what it means to have one's fame recognized "in all the earth." This is the basis for this midrash. Very deep meaning is found within it. Israel may be like the small vine, but out of the small vine comes righteous men, like Joshua, who rule the world. This midrash, like the last, testifies to Joshua's righteousness. This midrash also sends an almost Messianic message of hope to the congregants that hear it. That message is that, while Israel and the people Israel may currently be subjects of another's rule (i.e. Rome), they should not despair because Israel will eventually succeed all of their oppressors and rule the world over. This kind of message could sustain people in the hardest days of Roman oppression as well as during other periods of subjugation. It is quite a testimony that Joshua and his ancestor Joseph are at the heart of this message of hope.

A related midrash incorporates the same verse from Joshua, discussing Joshua's greatness.

Rabbi Berekhiah said: Because traveling has three adverse effects, diminishing procreation, reducing one's wealth, and reducing one's fame, [God gave Abraham assurances]. Since it diminishes procreation, [God

¹³⁰ Leviticus Rabbah 36:2.

said,] *'I will make of you a great nation.'* It decreases one's wealth, hence, *'I will bless you.'* It diminishes one's fame, hence, *'And make your name great.'* . . . Rabbi Berekhiah said in Rabbi Helbo's name: It [the promise of greatness] means that his coinage was current in the world. There were four whose coinage became current in the world: . . . [Of these there is] Joshua, as it is written, *'So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land'* (Joshua 6:27), which means that his coinage was current in the world. And what was its effigy? An ox on one side and a wild-ox on the other, corresponding to, *'His firstling bullock, majesty is his, and his horns are the horns of a wild-ox'* (Deuteronomy 33:17).¹³¹

This midrash begins by explaining how God gives Abraham assurances that he will not suffer for leaving his home. The third of these assurances, the promise of fame, eventually leads to Joshua. Joshua is listed as one of four men whose fame was so great that they had coinage current in the world. The imprint on Joshua's coin is related to a blessing bestowed by Moses on the descendents of Joseph, Joshua's ancestor. According to this midrash, greatness is defined by having a coin printed in your name and Joshua is one who falls into this category. It also provides an explanation for the unusual comment that Joshua's fame "was in all the earth."

Of all of the midrashim that portray Joshua in a favorable way, perhaps

¹³¹ Genesis Rabbah 39:11.

none are as meaningful as the following:

Ben Damah the son of Rabbi Ishmael's sister once asked Rabbi Ishmael, "May one such as I who have studied the whole of the Torah learn Greek wisdom?" He [Rabbi Ishmael] then read to him the following verse, '*This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate upon it day and night*' (Joshua 1:8). "Go then," [Rabbi Ishmael continued,] "and find a time that is neither day nor night and then learn Greek wisdom." This, however, is at variance with the view of Rabbi Samuel ben Nachmani. He said in the name of Rabbi Jonathan that this verse is neither duty nor command, but a blessing. For when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that the words of Torah were most precious to Joshua, as it is written, '*His servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tent*' (Exodus 33:11), He said to him, "Joshua, since the words of Torah are so precious to you, [I assure you that] '*this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth.*'"¹³²

Often in Rabbinic literature, direct connections are made between a person's deed and the reward or consequence that follows it. In this case, too, Joshua's reward is directly related to his deed. Joshua did not depart out of the Tent but rather remained, dutifully serving Moses. Therefore, because Joshua did

¹³² Bavli Menakhot 99b.

not depart from service, the reward of Torah will *not depart* from Joshua.¹³³

Beyond the exegesis, this midrash is a beautiful summary of the greatness of Joshua. We have seen before that Joshua was devoted to Moses as a servant, but here we see that Joshua also held the words of Torah close to his heart. In fact, according to this midrash, the words of Torah are more precious to Joshua than anyone else. This is quite an amazing statement considering the other great men and women in the Bible. As a reward for revering the words of Torah more than anyone, Joshua receives the great blessing and assurance that the Torah will never depart from him.

A deeper message was delivered to the congregants who may have heard this. This very strong message is that it is extremely important to hold precious the words of Torah. Only by holding the Torah close will it never depart from one's mouth. This is so powerful because it puts responsibility and power in the hands of the people. The Torah not only belongs to them but only they, themselves, can sustain it throughout the generations. This message was not only true then, but it has been true throughout the generations of our people, even as it is true today. Torah is ours to hold precious and it is Joshua who served as the model for us to learn that.

¹³³ This device is known as a *g'zera shava*. See pp. 7 and 91 for explanation of this technique.

EPILOGUE: JOSHUA'S DEATH AND THE AFTERMATH

JOSHUA 24:29-31¹³⁴

(29) And it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died being a hundred and ten years old. (30) And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnat-Serakh, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Ga'ash. (31) And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and all who had known all the deeds of the Lord that He had done for Israel.

This passage marks the end of Joshua's life. He has been a dedicated servant of Moses, the people, and God. He is a military hero as well as a strong leader. He has played a crucial role in the life of the people Israel. One might imagine that his death affects the people deeply. Much to the contrary, the midrashim paint a different picture of the event.

Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep (Proverbs 19:15). [Israel was cast into a deep sleep] in that they were negligent in paying the appropriate honors to Joshua after his death. That is the meaning of the verse, '*And they*

¹³⁴ The passage about Joshua's death is repeated almost verbatim in Judges 2:7-9.

buried him in the border of his inheritance . . . on the north of the mountain of Ga'ash' (Joshua 24:30). Rabbi Berekhiah said: We have examined the whole of Scripture and we have not found mention of a place called Ga'ash. What then is the meaning of 'the mountain of Ga'ash'? That Israel was too preoccupied (NITGA'ASHU) to pay proper honor to Joshua after his death. The land of Israel was divided up at that time and they became unduly absorbed in the division. Israel was all occupied with their tasks. One was occupied with his field, the other with his vineyard, yet another with his olive trees, and a fourth with quarrying stones . . . They therefore neglected to show honor to Joshua after his death and the Holy One, blessed be He, sought to bring an earthquake upon the inhabitants of the world, as it is said, 'Then the earth did shake (VATIG'ASH) and quake' (Psalms 18:8).¹³⁵

According to this midrash, when Joshua dies the people are at first not "moved" at all from his loss. They have already become pre-occupied with the business of occupying the land. In some ways, this is representative of Joshua's leadership style. As with the circumcision of the people, Joshua trusted them to begin to take care of themselves. He helped to effect the transition of the people from a helpless mass of wanderers to a settled people. That the people are so established in their work, in some respects, shows how well Joshua did his job.

¹³⁵ Ruth Rabbah, Proem 2.

He trained the people until he was no longer needed. Joshua did this so well that when he died, they did not even seem to notice.

Just the same, Joshua was a great man and leader of the people. Because of this, he deserved more respect at his death than he received. In the midrash, God acts on this by causing an earthquake. In other words, if the people are not emotionally moved, they will be physically moved.

The above interpretation is possible by looking closely at the name of the location where Joshua is buried, the mountain of Ga'ash. Rabbi Berekhiah makes the comment that throughout Scripture there was no place by the name of Ga'ash. This comment is not made glibly. The reality is that the Rabbis knew Scripture so well that they could legitimately make this statement. It is worth noting as well that they were able to do this before concordances, compilations, or computers of any kind to aid them. They just knew their Bible backwards and forwards.

So, because there was no literal place named Ga'ash, the Rabbis interpret that name midrashically. In this case, the word Ga'ash has a double meaning. The first is to look at the word as related to the Hebrew word for preoccupied, "*NITGA'ASHU*."¹³⁶ This verb has the same Hebrew root as the location of Joshua's burial. This leads the Rabbis to conclude that the people were too preoccupied to pay attention to Joshua's death. The second interpretation reads the word as related to the verb for shake, "*VATIG'ASH*." This reading allows for

¹³⁶ Literally, "they were preoccupied."

the connection to the earth quaking. The above midrash cleverly combines the two meanings into one story.

A similar passage appears in Ecclesiastes Rabbah which makes an addition concerning Joshua's character.

You find that when the righteous are born nobody feels any difference, but when they die everybody feels it . . . When Joshua was born nobody felt it, but when he died all felt it, as it is said, '*And they buried him in the border of his inheritance . . . on the north of the mountain of Ga'ash.*'¹³⁷

This version also brings up the issue of the earthquake, but adds to it the comment that Joshua is among the righteous. While there have been comments that charge Joshua with wrongdoing, overall, in the balance, he is considered to be among the righteous. The message that can be derived from this is that when the righteous ones in our own lives die, it can literally "shake up" the world as we know it. We can, and should, be deeply moved by a loss of someone such as Joshua.

THE TORCH IS PASSED

JUDGES 1:1-2

(1) Now after the death of Joshua, it came to pass that the children of

¹³⁷ Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:1, section 4.

Israel asked the Lord saying, "Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them? (2) And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up. Behold I have delivered the land into his hand.

This passage marks one of Joshua's final appearances in the Bible. Other than the repetition of his death in Judges 2:7-9, he is mentioned only once briefly in I Kings 16:34, and again in I Chronicles 7:27. Joshua's time has come to an end and it is time for new leadership. A midrash tells the story.

Rabbi Judah said: Had not God set up others in their stead, the world would have relapsed into its former state . . . [as it is written,] *'Now it came to pass after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord that the Lord spoke to Joshua'* (Joshua 1:1). Again it is written, *'And it came to pass after the death of Joshua . . . And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up"'* (Judges 1:1,2).¹³⁸

This midrash speaks on different levels. God is portrayed as beyond the world of time. He sets up new leadership from generation to generation in order to keep the world functioning. As precious as an individual is, the world must go on when that individual dies. If not, then the world would cease, or as this midrash portrays, even fall backwards into a previous state. As Joshua succeeded Moses,

¹³⁸ Genesis Rabbah 62:4.

so now Judah must succeed Joshua. It is stunning indeed when one sees that it is ultimately through Judah that we survive as a people today. Through Judah we became Jews who practice Judaism. In a metaphoric sense then, Joshua's death and the succession of Judah allowed us to blossom into who we are today, nearly 4,000 years later. This is an amazing legacy indeed.

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