

This Week In Torah *Shemot*

Drum roll please--- let me introduce you to Moses! The one who will lead the people out of bondage, across the Red Sea, bring them to Mount Sinai, delivering God's sacred commandments to them-- not just once but twice, organize them and help them develop structure, deal with battles from both external foes and internal strife; but won't be able to bring them into the Promised Land. *Sigh*

It is an impressive resume. As for not reaching Israel, let's deal with that later. In the meantime, handle as if it were an example of *Pirkei Avot*: "You are not required to finish your work, yet neither are you permitted to desist from it."

Why Moses? Well, he has what they say in Yiddish: *yeches*—credentials! Raised in the palace, he understands the challenges of leadership. He flexed some muscle—not in a good way because he killed an Egyptian taskmaster—but earned a perception that he would stand up for God's people. He was a man of compassion—there is a *Midrash* where Moses the shepherd chases a runaway goat and after seeing it drink, he carries it back to the herd. But there is another characteristic—he approached God with curiosity and wonder, rather than with judgment!

Look at Chapter 3, verse 3—"Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; **why** doesn't the bush burn up?" If one was to look up the Hebrew word *madoah*/why in a concordance, one would see that when the question usually is direct to a person with a challenging/judgmental tone, just as it is found in Leviticus 10:17—"Why did you eat of the sin offering?" But here we find an anomaly—Moses is questioning theophany, a moment of Divine revelation. There is no judgement, rather curiosity—an invitation to **know** God. In this case, the Hebrew word for "why" is in pursuit of the meaning of the Hebrew root of *Madouah*, which is *yod-dalet-ayin* which is the root to know. Moses uses his intellectual sense of wonder to enter into an existential relationship with God. It wasn't challenging but perceptive in nature. Perhaps that is why the Hebrew word for science is *madah*—same root, same pursuit of knowledge, also coupled with a sense of awe.

Why Moses? 16th century Italian biblical commentator Ovidiah Ben Jacob Sforno sees the **why** not as confrontational term where Moses challenges God's action, but sees it as

a chance for Moses to understand the divine mission of God's existence. Therein lies the difference of the many meanings/intonations of the word "**why**."

Let's learn from Moses and stand in awe of the Almighty! And thus, it is an honor to meet Moses yet again—I am curious how this relationship will grow in our reading of the book of Exodus.