

When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining: 'I drew him out of the water.' Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. --- Exodus 2:10-11

Why is it written "*When the child grew up*" and "*Moses had grown up*," twice? Rabbi Yehudah son of Rabbi Ilai said: The first time means in physical stature, the second time means in greatness. What was his greatness? That *he went out to his kinsfolk*. Alternatively, Pharaoh said to Moses: "Whether I want it or not, you are my daughter's son. Whatever part of my greatness you want, speak and I will give it to you." Moses said to him, "I want to be appointed head of your works." ---

Midrash Tanchuma

Moses did not grow in the normal way. --- **Midrash Shemot Rabbah** 1:32

The "normal way" is that when a person becomes famous, he forgets – or pretends to forget – his brothers, his relatives and his friends, and ignores their problems. However, we are told that even though Moses had "grown" – meaning, he had attained a high rank in the country, becoming a member of Pharaoh's household – he nevertheless did not grow "in the normal way." Even after he had attained that rank, he did not forget his brothers and friends, and *he went out to his kinsfolk*. It was then that he took an interest in their fate and sought ways to save them from their distress. --- **Yalkut ha-Derush**, early 20th c.; similarly **Malbim** (Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, 19th c. Ukraine)

When Moses matured and came to know his family, he was enraged to see their state of affairs. He therefore left the palace, put himself in their shoes, *and witnessed their labors*. --- Abarbanel

He went out to his kinsfolk: Because Moses risked his life for Israel, they were called his people... --- **Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael**

The Torah explains Moses' greatness here as *he went out to his kinsfolk*; that is, every individual was in his eyes as a literal brother, and he was ready for self-sacrifice on their behalf. Thus we say in the Shabbat morning Amidah, "Moses rejoiced at the gift of his portion." This was his joy, that he gave his soul for Israel, the soul being the divine portion from above. --- **Tiferet Shlomo**, Rabbi Shlomo Hakohen Rabinowitz, 19th c. Chasidic master, Poland

Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. --- Exodus 3:1

It means beyond the wilderness, for in the wilderness there is no forage. --- Yosef Bekhor Shor

It says: *Every word of God is tried* (Prov. 30:5); before God confers greatness on a man, He first tests him by a little thing and then promotes him to greatness. You have two great leaders whom God first proved by a little thing, were found trustworthy, and then promoted to greatness. He tested David with sheep, which he led through the wilderness, in order to keep them from robbing [private fields, by grazing there], thus teaching us that he fulfilled the Mishnah: "One must not rear sheep and goats in the Land of Israel." (Because of overgrazing, AND the sheep and goats eating other people's crops. **Bava Kamma 7:7**) Similarly in the case of Moses it says he drove the flock far into the wilderness, in order to keep them from robbing. God took him to tend Israel, as it says: *You led Your people like a flock in the care of Moses and Aaron* (Ps. 77:21). --- **Midrash Shemot Rabbah 2:3**

And came to Horeb, the mountain of God: He came alone, to seclude himself and pray to God. --- Sforno

Our Rabbis said that when Moses was tending the flock of Jethro in the wilderness, a little kid escaped from him. He ran after it until it reached a shady place. When it reached the shady place, a pool of water appeared and the kid stopped to drink.

When Moses approached it, he said: “I did not know that you ran away because of thirst; you must be weary.” So he placed the kid on his shoulder and walked away. Thereupon God said: “Because you have mercy in leading the flock of a mortal, you will assuredly tend my flock Israel.” --- **Midrash Shemot Rabbah 2:2**

Tending the flock taught Moses his first lesson in leadership. Leadership and shepherding both involve certain management skills, for people are in a certain sense the most civilized of herds. The experience of hunting offers good skills for people of warlike disposition, for generals must first familiarize themselves in the chase, and the pursuit of wild animals affords hunters the opportunity to coordinate their attack. This same principle applies no less to shepherding, for the care and management of tame animals is a training ground for people aspiring to leadership positions. This also explains why kings have always been called “shepherds” as a title of respect and honor. The shepherd’s occupation has been a respectful form of employment since the days of antiquity. --- Philo, 1st c.

Even though a leader establishes the land through justice and “the law must pierce the mountain” (a Talmudic phrase expressing strict justice), even so leaders of Israel must mix within the qualities of the soul the two traits as one: righteousness and justice, mercy and judgment, lovingkindness and truth. Furthermore, the essence of true and righteous justice will not come except out of feelings of the quality and lovingkindness and the depth of mercy, to stand at the right hand of the oppressed against their oppressors, to save the downtrodden from those who crush them, to help the dispossessed from the hands of the dispossessors, to save the pursued from their pursuers, and to redeem the slaves from the house of slavery. --- Maimonides

Drove the flock into the wilderness: Because of Moses’ fear of Pharaoh, he agreed to become a shepherd, as the sage Ibn Ezra writes, so that travelers to and from Egypt would not spot him. In my opinion, that is why he led the flock far into the wilderness, choosing good pastureland for the sheep there, for that location was safe from the travelers’ eyes. --- Gersonides