

# THE MISSING YEARS

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

## The Mission

*"Go to Pharaoh and take My nation, the Bnai Yisroel, out of Egypt." (3:12).*

## The Challenge

What did G-d expect Moshe to do, and what abilities and experiences did he have in order to accomplish the task?

## Preparation

The Torah records that Moshe was first raised in the house of Pharaoh under the joint influences of Basya (Pharaoh's daughter) and Yocheved (Moshe's birth mother). According to the Medresh, Moshe remained in the palace until the age of 20 (or 40) when he was forced to flee for his life. >From 20 (or 40) to 60, Moshe had a variety of experiences, including ruling the nation of Kush (Ethiopia). At 60 he met the daughters of Yisro, married Tziporah, and settled down as a member of Yisro's family to become a shepherd. Moshe's first recorded encounter with prophecy took place at the "Burning Bush," when he was 80 years old.

Why did Moshe have to be raised in the palace of Pharaoh by the daughter of Pharaoh? Why did Moshe have to become ruler of Kush? Why did he have to spend 20 years at the home of Yisro? During his long years of forced exile, what were Moshe's thoughts and feelings about his family and nation? Did he yearn to see them? Did he ever attempt to see them? Did he pray for their salvation? Had he accepted that the fate of the Jews was to be enslaved and persecuted? What were his thoughts about the Covenant Between the Halves that promised an end to the slavery and the nation's triumphant return to the Promised Land? What about his early years as a prince of Egypt and having "gone out to his brethren and observed their burdens?" (2:11). What had happened to his concern, hard work, and desire to right the injustices perpetrated against his nation? What had happened to the one time crowned prince of Egypt who had zealously defended the life of a lowly Jewish slave and had paid for the privilege with his future throne? Had he retained his youthful idealism, or had he retired from battling windmills and dreams?

The Rambam at the end of the Laws of Kings 11:4 details the prerequisites for being the Mashiach, the anointed Redeemer. 1. He must be a descendent of the house of David. 2. He must conduct himself according to Torah laws and principles. 3. He must motivate all the Jews to follow the laws of both the Written and the Oral Torah. 4. He must wage the wars of G-d. 5. He must build the Bais Hamikdash. 6. He must gather the exiled and bring them to Eretz Yisroel.

The Rambam writes that the man who will do all these things is certainly the Mashiach and he will be the one to accomplish "Tikun Olam", teaching all the nations to serve G-d and fixing the wrongs of the world. (Note that the Rambam does not include Tikun Olam as one of the prerequisites. He presents Tikun Olam as a divine consequence of the Mashiach's reign).

I would like to suggest that except for being a descendent of the house of David/Yehudah, the basic goals for being the Mashiach were accomplished by Moshe in his capacity as the Redeemer. If so, the prerequisites for becoming the Redeemer must have also been similar. Therefore, Moshe's behavior during his 60 years of forced exile away from his family and nation must have been consistent with belief in G-d's promises to the Forefathers and trusting in the eventual redemption of the Jews from Egypt.

Moshe's upbringing involved elements of divine intervention as well as human initiative. It is clear from the Torah that Moshe's birth and early years were divinely ordained. However, it also involved the initiatives of Amram, Yocheved, Miriam, and Basya to bring G-d's plan into fruition. Moshe's own initiative when saving the Jewish slave also had a profound affect on the direction of G-d's plan for freeing the Jews. Therefore, Moshe knew from his mentors and from experience that beliefs alone do not guarantee success. The Avos, Yoseph, and the brothers acted on their convictions to accomplish the first stages of the Covenant Between The Pieces. Moshe would also have to act on his beliefs and convictions to facilitate the concluding stages of the Covenant-freedom from Egypt and return to Eretz Yisroel.

Once Moshe was forced to flee from Pharaoh's wrath, he had two issues to confront. 1. His disappointment and hurt in having been "turned in" by a fellow Jew, the very same person whom he had risked everything to save! 2. What to do about the impossible situation in Egypt.

I would like to suggest that the first concern would not be dealt with until the scene of the Burning Bush. The later concern became the passion of his life and the focus of everything he did.

After Moshe fled from Egypt, the next recorded scene took place at the well with Yisro's daughters. According to the Medresh, this took place between 20 and 40 years after leaving Egypt. Yet, Yisro's daughters describe the man who had courageously come to their rescue as, "An Egyptian man." Why was Moshe still dressed as an Egyptian? At the very least, he had been away from Egypt for 20 years. What advantage was there in being dressed as an Egyptian and standing out from the crowd? As a traveler and a fugitive, Moshe should have wanted to blend in and remain incognito.

I would like to suggest that Moshe had been traveling from country to country seeking allies in his bid to save the Jews. That would explain the time he spent in Kush, why he was dressed as an Egyptian, and why he was searching for Yisro.

Moshe's passion was to save his brethren. Nowhere in the Torah does it suggest that Moshe had lost interest, become despondent, or forgotten about the Jews in Egypt. In fact, he named his son Gershom to commemorate the fact that he had not assimilated into Midianite society. He had not

become settled and comfortable away from his family. "I was stranger in a strange land." As my Father Shlit'a explained, Moshe praised G-d for having given him the strength not to forget that he was a stranger in Midian, Kush, or anywhere else. He was a Jew, and he belonged with his people.

For 40 years, Moshe presented himself to neighboring countries as the exiled crowned prince of Egypt. He attempted to find political allies who would join him in attacking Egypt or threatening Egypt. Moshe wanted to be recognized as an Egyptian. He did not want to be viewed as a runaway slave, a Jew. He understood that other nations would also buy into Pharaoh's anti-Semitism and hatred. He hoped to win support for a confrontation with Pharaoh and capitalize on the inevitable envy that the surrounding nations had for Egypt. However, it was not to be so. The redemption of the Jews would not happen through political intrigue or international conflicts. The redemption would happen through indisputable miracles and the revelation of G-d's power. "I shall strike Egypt with all My wonders that I shall perform in its midst" (3:19).

Once Moshe had exhausted his petitions for help from the surrounding countries, Moshe went looking for Yisro. According to the Medresh, Yisro had been among Pharaoh's closest advisors. However, when Pharaoh embarked on his campaign of enslavement and persecution, Yisro challenged Pharaoh and was forced to flee. Yisro's reputation for having defied Pharaoh as well as all conventional theologies and philosophies drew Moshe like a magnet.

The "coincidence" at the well was far more intended than the Torah writes. It was Yisro who then taught Moshe to be patient and wait for justice to happen. It was Yisro who shared Moshe's passion for knowledge and the desire to unlock the secrets of divine justice. It was Yisro who helped Moshe to find patience and acceptance, regardless of public pressure or opinion. It was with Yisro's encouragement that Moshe learned to wait for events to happen when human intervention would clearly not succeed.

During the years of his personal exile, Moshe never forgot the plight of his family and nation. In fact, he explored every possible plan to effect change and redemption. In retrospect, that was all part of the divine plan. By exhausting all avenues of natural escape, the ultimate redemption was obviously divine.

Whether or not Moshe ever returned during those long years to visit his family or if he was in communication with them during that time is not important. Clearly, his every waking moment was filled with thoughts, plans, and preparation for their redemption. The personal hurt that he suffered because his own people had turned him in to Pharaoh would be confronted and put to rest at the Burning Bush. (See Rash 3:11).

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