

June 14, 2020 - Deut. 34:1-12 - The Death of Moses
Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 34:1-12 - The Death of Moses
Psalm 148-150
Haftarah: Joshua 1:1-9

The Death of Moses

Deuteronomy 34:1-3 - "And Moses went up from the plains of Moab to the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead, to Dan, And all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, And the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar."

Nebo was one of the mountains of the Abarim range, and Pisgah was the highest point of Nebo, and this was over against Jericho on the eastern side Jordan.

The 120-year-old Moses - whose eye was not dim nor his natural force abated - made the climb "in one step" according to Rashi. Josephus says that Eleazar, Joshua, and the elders of Israel accompanied him.

Many believe Joshua wrote down this chapter recording Moses' death.

Rashi - He showed him the entire Land of Israel in its tranquility, and the oppressors who were destined to oppress it. — [Sifrei 33:30]

- **All the land of Gilead:** this was the trans-Jordan occupied by Gad, Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh

- **Dan:** He showed him the children of Dan practicing idolatry, as Scripture states, "And the children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image" (Jud. 18:30), and He showed him Samson, who was destined to issue from him [Dan] as a savior [for Israel]

- **Naftali:** He showed him his land in its tranquility and in its destruction, and He showed him Deborah and Barak of Kedesh-Naftali, waging war against Sisera and his troops. — [Sifrei 33:31]

- **Ephraim and Manasseh:** He showed him their land in its tranquility and in its destruction; and He showed him Joshua, who was descended from Ephraim, waging war against the kings of Canaan, and Gideon, who was descended from Manasseh, waging war against Midian and Amalek. — [Sifrei 33:31]

- **Judah:** in its tranquility and in its destruction, and He showed him the kingdom of the house of David and their victories. — [Sifrei 33:31]

- **Unto the utmost (western) sea:** Do not understand the verse as stating הַיָּם הָאַחֲרֹן, but read it as though it had said הַיּוֹם הָאַחֲרֹן, "until the very last day," meaning that the Holy One, blessed is He, showed Him all the incidents that were destined to happen to

Israel [until “the last day,” namely,] until the time that the dead would return to life. — [Sifrei 33:31]

- **the south:** the Machpelah Cave [which is in Hebron, in the south of Israel (where the patriarchs were buried)], as Scripture states, “And they went up to the south בְּנִגְבַּב, and they came to Hebron” (Num. 13:22). - [Sifrei 33:32]

- **and the plain:** He showed him Solomon molding the vessels of the Holy Temple, as Scripture states, “In the plain (בְּכַרְר) of the Jordan, the king molded them in thick clay” (I Kings 7:46). - [Sifrei 33:31]

The Targum of Jonathan adds:

"and the deeds of strength to be wrought by Gideon bar Yoash of the tribe of Menasheh, and all the kings of Israel, and of the kingdom of Beth Jehudah, who would have dominion in the land until the latter sanctuary should be destroyed. ... and the punishment of Armilus the wicked (a rabbinic version of who Christians would call the antichrist), and the battle of Gog, when in the time of that great tribulation Michael will rise up to deliver by his arm."

Deuteronomy 34:4 - "And the LORD said unto him, This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither."

He also saw the future fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, **Genesis 15:18**; to Isaac, **Genesis 26:3**; and to Jacob, **Genesis 28:13**.

Rashi - I have let you see it: so that you [Moses] can go and say to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, “The oath that the Holy One, blessed is He, swore to you - He has fulfilled it!” This is what is meant by the word “saying” [i.e., Moses should say this to them] (Ber. 18b). “For this reason,” [God says to Moses,] “I have shown it to you. However, a decree has been made before Me, that you shall not cross over there, for otherwise, I would keep you alive until you would see Israel implanted and settled in the Land, and then you would go and tell them [the forefathers].”

Moses' view of the Promised Land is a picture of all the Old testament saints:

- **Hebrews 11:13** - "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Moses Died by a Divine Kiss

Deuteronomy 34:5 - "So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD."

The rabbis wondered whether Moses actually wrote this verse about his own death.

Were the Torah scrolls given earlier to the tribes and placed in the side of the ark (**Deuteronomy 31:26**) incomplete?

Rashi - This cannot be! Rather, [continues Rabbi Meir, we must say that] The Holy One, blessed is He, dictated this [i.e., the verse "And Moses... died there"], and Moses wrote it in tears. — [B.B. 15b, Sifrei 33:34]

Moses' Death was "according to the word of the LORD" or by the "mouth" or the "kiss" of God.

Rashi - Moses died by a Divine kiss - referencing **Song of Solomon 1:2** - "Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth, For better are thy loves than wine."

Moses' Breath

Through teaching the Torah to our children, Moses' "breath" infuses each new generation. His words become our words.

"As soon as a child knows how to speak, his parent must teach him Torah. And what does 'Torah' mean? Rav Hamnuna said: The verse 'Moses charged us with the Teaching as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.'" (Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah 42a)

When Moses dies, his soul departs "*al pi Adonai*," literally, "by God's mouth" (**Deuteronomy 34:5**). Mouth to mouth, the breath of Moses is drawn in and subsumed into the breath of God. God tenderly inhales Moses's final breath and then pauses.

In the 7-year cycle of Torah readings (3 1/2 plus 3 1/2 years) the death of Moses by God inhaling his last breath is followed immediately by the reading in **Genesis 1**, where the breath/spirit of God hovers over the waters in the creation and as God exhales, He fills Adam's nostrils with the breath of life, and he becomes a living soul (**Genesis 2:7**). See <https://reformjudaism.org/moses%E2%80%99s-death-god%E2%80%99s-breath>

Traditions about the Death of Moses

Targum of Jonathan: "A voice fell from heaven, and thus spake: Come, all ye who have entered into the world, and behold the grief of Mosheh, the Rabban of Israel, who hath labored, but not to please himself, and who is ennobled with four goodly crowns: the crown of the Law is his, because he brought it from the heavens above, when there was revealed to him the Glory of the Lord's Shekinah, with two thousand myriads of angels, and forty and two thousand chariots of fire. The crown of the Priesthood hath been his in the seven days of the peace offerings. The crown of the kingdom they gave him in possession from heaven: he drew not the sword, nor prepared the war horse, nor gathered he the host. The crown of a good name he possesseth by good works and by his humility. Therefore is Mosheh, the servant of the Lord, gathered in the land of Moab,

by the kiss of the Word of the Lord.

"Blessed be the Name of the Lord of the world, who hath taught us His righteous way. He hath taught us to clothe the naked, as He clothed Adam and Hava; He hath taught us to unite the bridegroom and the bride in marriage, as He united Hava to Adam. He hath taught us to visit the sick, as He revealed Himself to Abraham when he was ill, from being circumcised; He hath taught us to console the mourners, as He revealed Himself again to Jakob when returning from Padan, in the place where his mother had died. He hath taught us to feed the poor, as He sent Israel bread from heaven; He hath taught us to bury the dead by (what He did for) Mosheh; for He revealed Himself in His Word, and with Him the companies of ministering angels. Michael and Gabriel spread forth the golden bed, fastened with chrysolites, gems, and beryls, adorned with hangings of purple silk, and satin, and white linens. Metatron, Jophiel, and Uriel, and Jephphya, the wise sages, laid him upon it, and by His Word He conducted him four miles, and buried him in the valley opposite Beth Peor; that Israel, as oft as they look up to Peor, may have the memory of their sin; and at sight of the burying place of Mosheh may be humbled: but no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day."

Some sources in the Talmud say Moses did not die but was translated to heaven, where he ministers; others say that he was an angel, and could not die (ignoring the next verses about his burial.)

Deuteronomy 34:6-7 - "And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

Midrash on the Death of Moses

The midrash on this chapter (Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:5-10) gives a long and dramatic account of the death of Moses:

[The Torah says: And this is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, bestowed upon the children of Israel before his death. [Deut. 33:1] What is meant by "before his death"? The Rabbis say: What did Moses do? He seized the Angel of Death and cast him down in front of him and [then] blessed the tribes, each according to its [appropriate] blessing. Rabbi Meir said: The Angel of Death came to Moses and said to him: "God has sent me to you, for you are to depart this life today."

Moses replied to him, "Go away, for I wish to praise the Holy One, Blessed be He."... The Angel of Death said to Moses: "Moses, why are you so arrogant? There are others in creation who can praise God. Heaven and earth praise [God] all the time."... Moses replied to him, "I shall silence [heaven and earth] and praise [God]." The Angel of Death then came to [Moses] a second time. What did Moses do? He pronounced over him the Ineffable Name [of God] and [the Angel of Death] fled. When he came to him a third time, Moses said, "Since [this decree] is from God, I must accept the righteousness of

His judgment.” Rabbi Yitzhaq said: The soul of Moses struggled to leave. Moses was conversing with his soul, saying: “My soul, perhaps you think that the Angel of Death is seeking to gain dominion over you?” [His soul] replied: “God will [surely] not permit it.” [Moses then said to his soul]: “Perhaps you have seen Israel weeping and you wept with them?” Whereupon she replied:

[You have delivered] my eyes from tears. [Ps. 116:8]. Said Moses to her: “Do you think then that they have sought to thrust you into Gehinnom?” Whereupon she replied: [You have delivered] my feet from stumbling. [Ps. 116:8]. Said Moses to her: “And where are you destined to go?” She replied:

I shall walk before the Lord in the lands of the living. [Ps. 116:9]. When Moses heard this he gave her permission [to leave], saying to her:

Return, O my soul, to your rest, [for God has been kind to you]. [Ps. 116:7] When Moses was about to depart this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him:

Behold, your days are drawing near [to die.] [Deut. 31:14] [Moses] replied before [God]: “Master of the Universe, after all my toil [for You and for Israel], You say to me, “Behold, your days are drawing near [to die.]”! I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. [Ps. 118:17]” Thereupon God said: “You cannot prevail [in this matter], for this is [the destiny of] all men.” [Eccl. 12:13]. Moses then said: “Master of the Universe, I ask of You one favor before I die, that I may enter [the Land of Israel] and that all the gates of heaven and in the depths be opened so people will see that there is none beside You.” Whereupon God replied: “You said [regarding Me]:

There is none else. [Deut. 4:39] I, too, say, And there has not arisen a prophet like Moses in Israel...” [Deut. 34:10]

3 [God said to Moses:]

Behold, your days are drawing near [to die.] [Deut. 31:14] Rabbi Evu said: Moses said: “Master of the Universe, with the word [behold! (hinne!)] that I have used to praise You among the 600,000 Israelites who hallowed Your name, you decreed the death penalty upon me! [Deut. 10:14] [Don't you reward] measure for measure? [Why then do you repay me] a bad measure for a good measure, a short measure for a full measure, a grudging measure for an ample measure?” The Holy One, blessed be He, answered: “Moses, My use of the expression “behold” is also a good measure, as it is said [in Exodus, Proverbs and Malachi]:

Behold, I send an angel before you. [Ex. 23:20] Behold, the righteous shall be requited in the earth. [Prov. 11:31] Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet. [Mal. 3:23]. And just as you have exalted Me before 600,000, so will I elevate you in the Time to Come among 550,000 altogether righteous men.”... [Moses thought: “When I prayed for God to have mercy on Israel, God granted my request.] Since I have not sinned from my youth, does it not stand to reason that when I pray on my own behalf God should answer my prayer?” And when God saw that Moses made light of the matter and that he was not engaging in prayer, He seized the opportunity to swear by His great Name that Moses should not enter the Land of Israel... When Moses saw that the decree against him had been sealed, he resolved to fast, drew a small circle, and stood inside it. He said, “I will not move from here until You nullify that decree.” What else did Moses do then? He... wrapped himself with sackcloth, rolled himself in the dust and stood in prayer and supplications before the Holy One, blessed be He, until the heavens and the order of nature were shaken. They said: “Perhaps it is the desire of the Holy One, blessed be

He, to renew His world.” Whereupon a heavenly voice was heard proclaiming: “It is not yet the desire of the Holy One, blessed be He, to renew His world...” What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do at that time? He proclaimed in every gate of each of the [seven] heavens, and in every Court, that they should not receive Moses' prayer, nor bring it before Him, because the decree against him had been sealed. God hastily summoned the Angel in charge of Proclamations, whose name was Achreziel, and commanded the ministering angels: “Descend quickly, bolt all the gates of every heaven, because the voice of [Moses'] prayer threatens to force its way to heaven.” And the angels sought to ascend to heaven because of the sound of Moses' prayer, for his prayer was like a sword which tears and cuts its way through everything, and spares nothing, seeing that his prayer was of the nature of the Ineffable Name which he had learned from Zagzag-el the Master Scribe of the children of heaven...

4 It is to that hour that [the prophet Ezekiel] alludes when he says:

And I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing: Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place. [Ezek. 3:12] And “rushing” surely means trembling, and “great” surely refers to Moses... What is the meaning of, “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place”? When the wheels of the [Divine] Chariot and the fiery Seraphim saw that God commanded that Moses' prayer should not be accepted and that He did not favor [Moses], did not grant him more life, did not bring him into the Land of Israel, they exclaimed: “Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place,” for [from His position and station] there is no favoritism for persons great or small... Moses said to God: “Master of the Universe, the hard work and the effort I have devoted to making Israel believe in Your name are manifest and known to You, as is the trouble I have taken to teach them Torah and commandments. I thought that, just as I witnessed their troubles, so too will I witness their good fortune. But now that the time of good fortune for Israel has arrived, You say to me:

You will not cross this Jordan. [Deut. 31:2] You thus make Your Torah into a fraud, because in it You wrote [in regard to a paid worker:]

You will pay him on the same day [that he worked]. The sun shall not set upon him [without his being paid], for he is poor, and his life depends on it... [Deut. 24:15] Is this the reward I get for forty years of work, during which I toiled so that [Israel] should become a holy and faithful nation?” Samael, the wicked angel, the chief of all the accusing angels, was awaiting the death of Moses every hour, saying, “When will the time arrive for Moses to die, so that I may descend and take away his soul from him?” ...There is no one among the accusing angels as wicked as Samael and there is none so righteous among the prophets as Moses... So Samael the wicked was waiting for Moses' soul saying, “When will [the angel] Michael [Protector of Israel] be weeping and I be filling my mouth with laughter?”... Meanwhile, only one hour [of life] remained for Moses. Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Master of the Universe, if You will not allow me to enter the Land of Israel, leave me in this world [outside the Land] so that I may live [there] and not die.” The Holy One, blessed be He, then said to Moses: “If I do not put you to death in this world, how can I bring you back to life in the World to Come? And what is more, you [would] make of My Torah a fraud, for in My Torah, written by your hand, it says:

And no one can rescue from My hand.” [Deut. 32:39] Moses said to God: “Master of the Universe, if You will not bring me into the Land of Israel, let me become like the beasts

of the field that eat grass and drink water, and live and enjoy the world. Likewise let my soul be like one of them.”

5 Whereupon God replied:

Enough! [Speak no more to me of this matter!] [Deut. 3:26] Moses then prayed: “Master of the Universe, let me at least become in this world like a bird that flies about in every direction, and gathers its food daily, and returns to its nest towards evening. Let my soul likewise become like one of them.” Whereupon God answered: “Enough!” What is the meaning of “Enough!”? God said to him: “You have spoken sufficiently.” When Moses saw that no creature could save him from the path of death, he exclaimed:

The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and righteous is He. [Deut. 32:4]. What did Moses do? He took a scroll and wrote down upon it the Ineffable Name. The Book of the Song [of Haazinu] had not been completely written down when the moment of Moses' death arrived. At that hour the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel: “Gabriel, go out and bring Moses' soul.” He, however, replied: “Master of the Universe, how can I witness the death of one who is equal to 600,000, and how can I behave harshly to one who possesses such qualities?” Then [God] said to Michael: “Go out and bring Moses' soul.” He, however, replied: “Master of the Universe, I was his teacher, and he was my student. I cannot therefore witness his death.” [God] then said to Samael the wicked: “Go out and bring Moses' soul.” Immediately [Samael] clothed himself with anger, girded on his sword, wrapped himself with cruelty, and went out to meet Moses. When Samael saw Moses sitting and writing down the Ineffable Name, and how the radiance of his appearance was like the sun and he was like an angel of the Lord of hosts, he became afraid of Moses and declared: “It is certain that angels cannot take away Moses' soul.” Now before Samael showed himself to Moses, Moses knew of his coming, and when Samael caught sight of Moses, trembling and fear took hold of him, as of a woman in travail, and he did not have the effrontery to speak to Moses, until Moses said to him: “There is no peace for the wicked, said God. [Isa. 57:21]. What are you doing here?” He replied: “I have come to take away your soul.” Moses asked him: “Who sent you?” He replied: “He who created all the creatures.” Moses then said to him: “You shall not take away my soul.” Whereupon he replied: “The souls of all who come into this world are delivered into my hands.” Whereupon Moses said: “I have more power than all who come into this world.”

6 [Samael] then asked: “And what [demonstrates] your power?” Moses replied:

“I, the son of Amram, emerged from my mother's womb circumcised. I did not need to be circumcised. On the very day I was born, I found myself able to speak, walk and converse with my father and mother, and I had not yet even sucked [my mother's] milk. When I was three months old I prophesied and declared that I was destined to receive the Law from the midst of flames of fire. Once when I was walking in the street I entered the palace of the king and removed the crown from his head. When I was eighty years old I wrought signs and wonders in Egypt and took out 600,000 before the eyes of all Egypt. I divided the sea into twelve parts, I made the bitter waters sweet; I ascended heaven [to receive the Torah], I engaged in battle with the angels, I received the Torah of Fire, and I dwelt under [God's] Throne of Fire. I took shelter under the pillar of fire, and spoke with God face to face. I prevailed over the Heavenly Assembly, and revealed

[the angels'] secrets to the sons of man. I received the Law from the right hand of God, and taught it to Israel. I made war on Sihon and Og, the two giants of the heathens to whose ankles the waters of the flood did not reach because of their [great] stature. I caused sun and moon to stand still on high, and I smote [the two giants] with the staff in my hand and killed them. Is there any other man who can do the same? Go away from here, wicked one, and [do not dare compare me with other men]. Go, flee from before me. I will not surrender my soul to you." Immediately Samael went back and reported to the Almighty. Whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded Samael, "Go out [again] and bring Moses' soul." Immediately [Samael] drew his sword from its sheath and stood over Moses. Immediately Moses raged against [Samael], took the staff on which the Ineffable Name was engraved, and struck Samael with all his might until [Samael] fled from before him. [Moses] ran after him with the Ineffable Name, took a ray of majesty from between his eyes and blinded him. At this point Moses' final moment arrived. A heavenly voice was heard, declaring: "The time of your death has come." Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Master of the Universe, remember the day when You revealed Yourself to me in the bush and said to me: Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may take My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. [Ex. 3:10] ? Remember the time when I stood on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights? I implore You, do not deliver me to the hand of the Angel of Death." Thereupon a heavenly voice was heard saying to him: "Fear not, I Myself will attend to you and to your burial."

7 At that hour, Moses arose and sanctified himself like the Seraphim, and God came down from the highest heavens to take away the soul of Moses. With Him were three ministering angels, Michael, Gabriel, and Zagzag-el. Michael laid out Moses' bed, Gabriel spread out a fine linen cloth at Moses' head, and Zagzag-el one at his feet. Michael stood at one side and Gabriel at the other side. God said: "Moses, fold your eyelids over your eyes." And he did so. He then said: "Place your hands on your chest." And he did so. He then said: "Put your feet next to each other." And he did so. Then the Holy One, blessed be He, summoned [Moses'] soul from the midst of [Moses'] body, saying to her: "My daughter, I have fixed the period of your stay in the body of Moses at 120 years. Now your end has come. Depart without delay." Whereupon she replied: "Master of the Universe, I know that You are the God of all spirits and all souls, the souls of the dead and the living are in Your keeping, and You have created and formed me and placed me within the body of Moses for 120 years. And now, is there a body in the world purer than the body of Moses in which there has never been an offensive smell, nor worm nor maggot, nor any kind of vermin? Therefore I love him and I do not desire to leave him." Whereupon God exclaimed: "Soul, go out, do not delay, and I will raise you to the highest heavens and will place you under the Throne of Glory next to the Cherubim, the Seraphim, and other troops of angels." The soul replied: "Master of the Universe, two angels, Uzah and Azael, came down from near Your Divine Presence, coveted the daughters of the earth, and corrupted their way upon the earth until You suspended them between earth and heaven. But...from the day You revealed Yourself to [Moses] at the Bush, he has had no marital relations with his wife [and is therefore greater than the angels]... I beg You: Let me remain in the body of Moses." Thereupon God kissed Moses and took away his soul with a kiss of the mouth. And subsequently, the Holy One, blessed be He, wept, as it were... And the Holy Spirit said:

And there has not arisen since, in Israel, a prophet like Moses. [Deut. 34:10] The heavens wept and said:

The devout one has disappeared from the earth. [Micah 7:2] The earth wept and said: And the upright among men is no more. [Micah 7:2] And when Joshua was looking for his master and did not find him, he also wept and said:

Help, O Lord; for the devout one is no more, for truthful people have vanished from mankind. [Ps. 12:2] And the ministering angels said:

He executed the righteousness of the Lord. [Deut. 33:21] And Israel said: And His ordinances with Israel. [Deut. 33:21]

8 All were saying:

He enters into peace. They rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness [Isa. 62:2] The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing. [Prov. 10:7] And his soul [is destined] for life in the World to Come. [Deuteronomy Rabbah 11:5-10]

The Dispute over the Body of Moses in Jude

We see a reflection (and validation) of some of these stories in the New Testament book of Jude:

Jude 1:19 - "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."

"The Lord rebuke thee!" is a quote from **Zechariah 3:2**.

The Septuagint version of **Deuteronomy 34:6** - "And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" instead has "And they buried him in Gai near the house of Phogor; and no one has seen his sepulchre to this day," probably indicating angels acting at God's command.

Jude could be quoting The Assumption of Moses, an apocryphal book, or an earlier similar work called The Testament of Moses. Richard Bauckham believes the lost ending of this first-century work is the source for Jude's reference. But there was a general belief in Jewish tradition about this dispute over Moses' body.

Samael (Satan) argues that he deserves to get the body of Moses because Moses was a murderer of an Egyptian (**Exodus 2:12-14**) and thus did not deserve an honorable burial. When Michael appeals to God with "The Lord rebuke you!" Satan withdraws, knowing God would decide in favor of Moses' honor rather than his slanders.

Moses' Burial Place

Rashi quotes one rabbi who claims the use of the reflexive form of the verb means that Moses buried himself! [Sifrei Nasso 32:124]

Rashi - His burial site was already there [at Beth Pe'or], since the six days of Creation, to atone for the [sinful] act of Pe'or. — [see Num. 25:1-8; Sotah 14a] This [Moses's burial site] was one of the things created at twilight, on the eve of [the first] Sabbath. — [Avoth 5:6]

According to tradition, although Moses died in the territory of the tribe of Reuben, he was buried in that of tribe of Gad at a spot four miles distant from the place of his death. He was carried this distance by the Shekinah, while the angels said to him that he had practised God's justice (**Deuteronomy 33:22**). At the same time the "*bat kol*" cried out in the camp of the people: "Moses, the great teacher of Israel, is dead!"

Another tradition says God Himself buried Moses in a grave which had been prepared for him in the dusk of Friday, the sixth day of the Creation. This tomb is opposite Beth-peor, in atonement for the sin which Israel committed with the idol Peor. Yet it cannot be discovered; for to a person standing on the mountain it seems to be in the valley; and if one goes down into the valley, it appears to be on the mountain.

Why was Moses' grave kept secret?

Because of his miracles, succeeding generations might make a god of him and worship him, as they did the brass serpent.

Bearing in mind the appearance of Moses at the Transfiguration (**Matthew 17:1-10**) and what is said in **Jude 1:9**, we might speculate that Moses after death passed into the same state with Enoch and Elijah; and that his grave could not be found because he was shortly translated (transported) from it. That would align with the tradition mentioned earlier that Moses was translated to heaven.

Deuteronomy 34:7 - "And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated."

Rashi says even after his death, Moses' eye was not dimmed [see Sifrei 33:36]. [Even after his death,] decomposition did not take over his body, nor did the appearance of his face change.

Deuteronomy 34:8 - "And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended."

As they did for Aaron, his brother (**Numbers 20:29**), was the usual time of mourning for persons of high place and eminence.

The month of grief ended on the eighth of Nisan, according to the Targum of Jonathan, and on the "ninth" they prepared their vessels and their cattle for a march, and on the tenth passed over Jordan, and on the "sixteenth" the manna ceased.

Deuteronomy 34:9 - "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 unto him, and

did as the LORD commanded Moses."

- **Numbers 27:18** - "And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him"

Jesus/Joshua did not separate himself from the Law of Moses, but fulfilled it, and personified it. So that to "hearken unto Joshua" means to do as the Lord commanded Moses, seeing the Law through spiritual eyes, having it written on our hearts. And to do for us what the law could not do:

- **Romans 8:2-4** - "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Deuteronomy 34:10 - "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like to Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,"

Targum of Onkelos - "For the Lord was revealed to him face to face"

And yet it is said (**Deuteronomy 18:15**) that God would raise up a prophet, from the midst of Israel, like unto Moses. Moses was the founder and mediator of the old covenant. As long as this covenant was to last, no prophet could arise in Israel like unto Moses. It would not be fulfilled till the Messiah came, Jesus Christ, the Founder and Mediator of the new and everlasting covenant.

Deuteronomy 34:11 - "In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel."

The 'Denial of Death'

The final scene of the Torah is the death of Moses. **Why end with a death?**

Ever since the fall, when Adam and Eve were cursed, death has loomed for every human.

- **Genesis 2:17** - "...in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

- **Romans 6:23** - " For the wages of sin is death..."

Death usually lurks in the back of our minds, exerting its influence only on a subconscious level.

Animals don't think about death. They aren't self-conscious in the way we are, and usually act on instinct. Some researchers propose that when humans became self-

conscious, they also became aware that they could and would die, and the fear of death enveloped us. This is basically what the Genesis story relates.

But at the same time humans would have also had to develop a way to ignore or deny the truth about their own mortality. Without the "denial of death," we would "lose heart," sink into despair and probably not reproduce or even have the will to eat and survive.

Bondage to The Fear of Death

- **Hebrews 2:14-15** - "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

God gave Adam and Eve the hope of a Deliverer, ultimate victory over the Serpent, and the hope of the resurrection.

- **Genesis 3:15** - "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Adam and Eve knew there was a tree of life in the Garden too, and it was possible at some point to "take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (**Genesis 3:22**).

- **Romans 6:23** - " For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Like the first couple, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all died "not having received the things promised" (**Hebrews 11:13**). But they had the hope.

As mankind scattered over the world, the specifics of the Deliverer/Messiah were lost by everyone except the lineage of those who would become the Jews. But it is necessary to have a coping mechanism against the fear of death. So every religion constructs an escape route to an afterlife of some kind. The not-so-religious adopt habits or ways to push death out of their consciousness.

'Terror Management'

But if you don't have the hope of the resurrection, even the mention of "death" changes your behavior - this is what scientists call "terror management." We grasp for reasons that the world has meaning, and that our lives have value – in order to fend off what would otherwise be paralyzing existential terror. We become more biased in favor of people who are part of our "tribe." We become more contemptuous and violent towards people who do not share our beliefs, culture or race. And we are more inclined to vote for heavy-handed charismatic leaders who incite fear of outsiders. We also become more nihilistic - drinking, smoking, spending and eating in excess – and we are less concerned about caring for the environment.

- <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20180618-what-if-we-knew-when-we-were-going-to->

die

Even a 42.8 millisecond flash of the word "death" across a computer screen causes us to react by this kind of "hunkering down."

Having an effective coping mechanism, though, elicits a different response. People become more altruistic, tolerant and compassionate.

Buddhist monks, for instance, don't display this "terror management" reaction. They believe in a cycle of death and rebirth called *samsara*, which you can break free from by attaining *nirvana*. Monks are trained in *Maraṇasati* (mindfulness of death) that consists of various visualization and contemplation techniques. Some will often have human skeletons on display in the meditation hall. According to Buddhism, when the mortal body dies, consciousness and all mental activities cease. There is no soul, or self at all.

What Buddhists *don't* have is hope, and their strategies do not always work. Heavily Buddhist countries like Japan, Korea, and Sri Lanka have some of the highest suicide rates.

'Coping' vs. Hope and Victory over Death

- **1 Thessalonians 4:13** - "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."

Jesus expressed anger toward death

For Christians, we have experienced the resurrection life of Christ. We believe human life, although temporary and fleeting, is valuable and worth living because it was created by God.

- **Isaiah 40:6,7** - "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. ...The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

- **2 Corinthians 4:14,16** - "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you....For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

To "faint not" is to "not lose heart" because of the fear of death.

Christ is the Resurrection and the Life (that Tree of Life mentioned in Genesis). Christians who die are said to have "fallen asleep" and will awake on the Day of Resurrection.

- **Isaiah 25:8** - "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces"

- **1 Corinthians 15:54-55** - "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

- **2 Corinthians 4:18** - "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Job and Suffering

Job's arguing with God was on behalf of all of humanity, which is burdened with suffering. Why did Job have to suffer when he was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil"? But in the end, he was left without a "valid" explanation except for faith alone.

- **Job 42:6** - "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

i.e. he "repented" of, or turned away from, his cursed humanity, his lineage from Adam, the old man, whose sin brought in death.

Jesus

Jesus was not stoic or emotionless when facing death.

Concerning the death of his friend Lazarus, He was angry and grieved, even though He knew He would raise him up out of the tomb.

- **John 11:33-35** - "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept."

"groaned" = *embrimaomai* - to snort with anger and indignation

"troubled" = *tarassō* - agitated, disquieted, to be distressed and stirred up, troubled

This same word *tarassō* is used to describe Jesus contemplating His own death:

- John 12:27 - "Now is my soul troubled (*tarassō*); and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour."

His anger (*embrimaomai*) was directed not at God but at Satan, for the temptation of Eve that caused the sin that brought on the death sentence for humankind.

Jesus then wept for Lazarus - and possibly for the whole human race condemned to die.

Terror and the Law

- **1 Corinthians 15:56** - "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law."

The Torah ends with a reference to "all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel" (**Deuteronomy 34:12**).

There was terror at the giving of the Law (**Exodus 19:9–20, Deuteronomy 9:19**):

- **Hebrews 12:21** - "And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake"

The Law struck fear into Israel, just as Israel, being led by the Law, struck fear into the Canaanite tribes. The Law strikes us with fear as it exposes our sin, and thereby reminds us that "the wages of sin is death" (**Romans 6:23**).

The Old Testament itself ends with a curse, not a blessing:

- **Malachi 4:6** - "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

This is all in preparation of Christ's coming to bring the gospel of grace and peace.

Moses gives way to Joshua; the Law gives way to its fulfillment in Christ.

- **Romans 6:23** - "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This concludes our 3 1/2-year cycle of Torah Readings!