

MOSES' DEATH IN TORAH AND MIDRASH: SACRED STAGES OF THE MYSTERY OF DYING

DEATH OF MOSES IN TORAH

Please let me cross the Jordan River! Let me see the wonderful Promised Land, the beautiful hills, and the mountains of Lebanon across the Jordan. But God was angry at me, and he would not listen. God angrily told me, "That is enough! Do not speak to Me any more about My decision." (Deut. 3:25-26).

"You can climb to top of Mount Pisgah, and look west, north, south, and east. Take a good look" - but nothing more: "because you will not cross the Jordan River." [Joshua not Moses will bring the people into the Land.] (Deut. 3:27-28).

I must die on this side of the Jordan River, but you will be the ones to cross over and occupy the Promised Land (Deut. 4:22).

Climb Mount Avarim, to Mount Nebo, in the land of Moab, facing Jericho; and see the land of Canaan, I am giving the Israelites as an inheritance; You will die on the mountain that you are climbing, and be gathered to your people... you shall see the land from afar; but you shall not go there to the land... (Deut. 32: 49-50; 52)

So Moses, Adonai's servant, at His command died there in the land of Moab. Adonai buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-Peor. No one even to this day, knows the place where he was buried. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, but his eyes were sharp and he was still strong and healthy (Deut. 34:5-7). For thirty days the Israelites mourned Moses on the plains of Moab (Deut. 34:8).

DEATH OF MOSES IN MIDRASH - DENIAL

... it was decreed that Moses should not enter the Land of Israel.. however Moses made light of this saying: Often the Israelites committed great sins, and whenever I prayed for them, God immediately answered my prayer;..." So seeing then that 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? (Deut. R. XI, 10)

...he took a resolve to fast, and drew a small circle and stood therein, and exclaimed: ' I will not move from here until You annul that decree.' (Deut. R. XI, 10).

DEATH OF MOSES IN MIDRASH - ANGER

Was it for nothing that my feet stepped on the clouds? Was it for nothing that I have run before you like a horse, and now I will become as a worm... God said to him: I have already decreed death on the **first human**. Said Moses: Then let the first human die, for you commanded him one small mitzvah and he transgressed it, but don't let me die!... God said to him: But **Abraham** who sanctified in my name in the world died. Said Moses: Abraham begat Ishmael, whose descendants provoke you... God said to him: **Isaac** who spread his neck on the altar died. Said Moses to God. Isaac who begat Esau who destroyed the Temple and burnt your sanctuary. God said: Look at **Jacob** who begat twelve tribes of whom none were unfit. Said he to God: Jacob did not go up to heaven; neither did he step on the clouds, nor was he like the ministering angels. You did not speak to him face to face and he didn't receive the Torah from you. (Tanhuma V'Ethchanan 6)



DEATH OF MOSES IN MIDRASH - BARGAINING

"Master of the Universe" said Moses, "if You will not bring me into Eretz Israel... 1) leave me in this world so that I may live and not die"; 2) "...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 as one of them"; 3) "...let me become in this world like the 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." (Deut. R. XI, 10).

DEATH OF MOSES IN MIDRASH - DEPRESSION

[In response to his pleading, Sar Panim says to Moses:] "Moses my Master, why all this trouble? I have already heard from behind the curtain that your prayer will not be listed to in this matter." [Realizing inevitability of death] "Moses put his hands on his head, and cried, who will pray for me?... 'I am afraid of the angel of death'" (Tanhuma, V'Ethchanan 6). [Moses begs:] "Do not hand me over into the hand of the Angel of Death" (Deut. R. XI, 10). [In response to his fear, Bat Kol, a divine emissary, comforts Moses]: "Fear not, I myself will attend to you and your burial" (Tanhuma, V'Ethchanan 6).

DEATH OF MOSES IN MIDRASH - ACCEPTANCE

"Master of the Universe, until now I have asked for life, now my life is given to you". Once Moses accepted his death, God opened and said: "Who will take my part against evil men?" (Psalms 94:16). Who will stand up for Israel in the time of my anger, who will fight the battles of my children, who will seek mercy for them when they sin before me?" (Tanhuma, v'Etchanan 6).

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, and with Him were 3 ministering angels, Michael, Gabriel, and Zagzagel. Michael laid out his bier, Gabriel spread out a fine linen cloth at his bolster, Zagzagel 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 upon your breast," and he did so. He then said: "Put your feet next to one another," and he did so. Forthwith the Holy One, blessed be He, summoned the soul from the midst of the body, saying to her: "My daughter, I have fixed the period of thy stay in the body of Moses at a hundred and twenty years; now thy end has come, depart, delay not... Thereupon **God kissed Moses and took away his soul with a kiss of the mouth...** (Deut. R, XI, 10).

MOSES IN THE AFTERLIFE

At that time a Heavenly Voice (Bat-Kol) came forth and said: "Moses, my servant! You have ascended the seven heavens, and I have shown you my treasures and I have given you my Torah. You have come and you have seen the Throne of Glory. Thus, you shall be worthy and you shall see two realms - one of Gan Eden and one of Gehinnom. ...Moses saw all these godly and pleasant things he felt great joy, and exclaimed: "Oh! how great is Your goodness reserved for those that fear, bestowed on those who take shelter in you, for all humanity to see." (Psalm 31:19).

