

## *The Prince of Egypt: Moses' Conflicted Identity*

By: MOSHE PINCHUK

The animated Biblical adaption *The Prince of Egypt*<sup>1</sup> has been reviewed, critiqued, and analyzed extensively<sup>2</sup> and almost continuously ever since

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<sup>1</sup> Philip LaZebnik and Nicholas Meyer, *The Prince of Egypt*, directed by Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner, and Simon Wells (1998, United States: DreamWorks Pictures), film.

<sup>2</sup> P. Jennifer Rohrer-Walsh, "A Genre(s) Approach to The Prince of Egypt," in: T&T Clark, *Companion to the Bible and Film* (ed. Richard Walsh), (London, 2018), pp. 300-308 and bibliography (pp. 308-310); Watanabe T., "An Ecumenical 'Prince of Egypt'" (1998, December 12). Retrieved December 4, 2023, from: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-dec-12-me-53174-story.html>; Purity and Precision (a Christian website, no date or author), "Does the Movie Line Up with the Bible?" Retrieved December 4, 2023, from: <http://www.purityandprecision.com/2010/03/movie-review-prince-of-egypt.html>; Al Hamadi, Y. (2020, November 25). "The Prince of Egypt: Between Facts and Fictions," and bibliography. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from: <https://www.reddotfilms.net/the-prince-of-egypt-between-facts-and-fictions/>; Weinraub, B. (1998, December 14). "A Cartoon's Dancing Teapots? Funny Camels? Not for 'Prince of Egypt'." Retrieved Dec 4, 2023, from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/14/movies/a-cartoon-s-dancing-teapots-funny-camels-not-for-prince-of-egypt.html>; Dowell P. (1998, December 18),

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its release over a quarter of a century ago. This paper is a contribution towards a deeper and fuller appreciation of one aspect of the Biblical character of Moses that the film brings to light. *The Prince of Egypt* highlights the emotional and mental stresses Moses had to bear in his passage from an Egyptian in the House of Pharaoh to an Israelite and the savior of his nation. Little, if any, attention has been given to the fact that Moses was torn between two loyalties and identities: an Israelite, and an Egyptian. This inner dissonance was Moses' personal challenge he had to resolve while executing the task of the *Exodus*. This insight now enables us to re-read some midrashim and later exegesis concerning Moses, and more fully understand Moses' conflicted identity.

A subject prevalent in almost every essay about *The Prince of Egypt* is the degree of accuracy and fidelity of the film.<sup>3</sup> Based on the available primary sources and archeological data, most Biblical archaeologists and Egyptologists today agree that the Exodus took place during the reign of Ramesses II (ca. 1279-1213 BCE). How historically accurate is the depiction of life in Egypt during the reign of King Ramesses II?<sup>4</sup> The verdict is succinctly summarized: "This is a quality film that anyone interested in the history of the late bronze Age or ancient Egypt is sure to enjoy."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, how accurate is the film in portraying the events as described in the Bible<sup>6</sup> (or the Quran)<sup>7</sup>? The verdict is that the film does not represent the Biblical narrative as accurately as it portrays the

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[Radio Broadcast] "The Making of *Prince of Egypt*," Morning Edition, NPR, December 18. Retrieved December 7, 2023 from: <https://www.npr.org/1998/12/18/1023829/the-making-of-i-prince-of-egypt-i> (the recording itself was not available). And other works cited henceforth.

<sup>3</sup> DreamWorks consulted with hundreds of experts in all relevant fields. (Curiously, there are discrepancies concerning the number of experts consulted: Walsh (ibid., note 2), p. 301, "hired almost six hundred experts"; Al Hamadi (ibid., note 2), misquotes Walsh, "hired six hundred experts"; Watanabe (ibid., note 2), "more than 300"; Weinraub (ibid., note 2), "consulted about 700.")

<sup>4</sup> Krebsbach, J. (2019, March 7). Is the Film the Prince of Egypt Historically Accurate? Retrieved December 4, 2023, from: [https://www.dailyhistory.org/Is\\_the\\_Film\\_the\\_Prince\\_of\\_Egypt\\_Historically\\_Accurate](https://www.dailyhistory.org/Is_the_Film_the_Prince_of_Egypt_Historically_Accurate); Al Hamadi (ibid., note 2).

<sup>5</sup> Concluding remark in Krebsbach (ibid., note 4).

<sup>6</sup> Some of the deviations from the Biblical account are listed in the trivia section of the film available through Amazon streaming. Purity and Precision (ibid., note 2), lists thirty-one deviations from the Biblical text.

<sup>7</sup> Al Hamadi (ibid., note 2).

ancient Egyptian world.<sup>8</sup> Just how important this second question is can be gauged from the disclaimer shown at the beginning of the film:<sup>9</sup>

The motion picture you are about to see is an adaptation of the Exodus story. While artistic and historical license has been taken, we believe that this film is true to the essence, values and integrity of a story that is a cornerstone of faith for millions of people worldwide. The Biblical story of Moses can be found in the book of Exodus.

The consensus was that deviation from the precise Biblical account may be detrimental to “the essence, values and integrity of a story that is a cornerstone of faith.”<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, deviations from the Biblical narrative can at times serve to edify and illuminate aspects of the original text. Indeed, much of midrashic texts diverge moderately or considerably from *psbat*, the face-value meaning of the Biblical verse. These deviations are a source for endless insights into the meaning and message of the Bible. Watanabe quotes Prof. Burton Visotzky:<sup>11</sup>

Each generation interprets scripture, often reading between the lines—that’s called midrash. What Katzenberg has done is a great, late-20th century midrash on the Exodus that speaks to our generation in a way that is very powerful.

Adopting this midrashic way of reading texts, I wish to address three deviations from Biblical narrative in *The Prince of Egypt*. To the best of my knowledge, two of them have not been previously noted, and to the best of my understanding they are all linked. I will argue that these deviations contribute towards a deeper and fuller appreciation of the Biblical character of Moses, brought to light by *The Prince of Egypt*.

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<sup>8</sup> This conclusion readily emerges from the reviews and has been clearly stated in: Megan Hollinger, “The Prince of Egypt and the Book of Exodus: An analysis of the film through narrative criticism and socio-rhetorical interpretation,” *Undergraduate Journal of Religious Studies* 7:1 (2018): 91-112.

<sup>9</sup> The disclaimer was suggested by one of the experts consulted. See Watanabe (*ibid.*, note 2).

<sup>10</sup> See the severe language and conclusion in the review in Purity and Precision (*ibid.*, note 2), after listing thirty-one deviations from the Biblical text: “I do not suggest viewing The Prince of Egypt. I do not suggest selling it or giving it away. My suggestion, based on the content of the movie itself, is that you throw away your copy.”

<sup>11</sup> Watanabe (*ibid.*, note 2); Walsh (*ibid.*, note 2), p. 301 quotes Dowell (*ibid.*, note 2) about *The Prince of Egypt*, “a midrash ... of the Biblical text.”

It has been noted in some of the reviews, that in *The Prince of Egypt*, Moses is found and adopted by Pharaoh's wife rather than by Pharaoh's daughter, *Bat Pharaoh*, as described in Exodus 2: 5-10:

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile ... She spied the basket ... she saw that it was a child ... She took pity on it ... Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it ..." When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses.

Rather than focus on the powerful clash of titans, a confrontation between G-d and god, *The Prince of Egypt* focuses on the non-Biblical relationship between stepbrothers: Ramesses and Moses.<sup>12</sup> This sibling relationship is set up by having Pharaoh's wife rather than his daughter find Moses.<sup>13</sup> This is the essence of the first sentence spoken by Pharaoh's wife in the film, "Come, Ramesses, we will show Pharaoh your new baby brother, Moses."

From whence the inspiration for this non-Biblical scene? Von Tunzelmann<sup>14</sup> suggests that it may have been the Birth Legend of Sargon.<sup>15</sup> Freud, however, has already observed that the Moses episode is the opposite of the Sargon type of myths:

In the typical form of the legend, it is the first family, the one into which the child is born, which is the aristocratic one ... The second family, the one in which the child grows up is the one that is humble ... With Moses things were quite different. In his case the first family, elsewhere the aristocratic one, was sufficiently modest. He was the child of Jewish Levites. But the place of the second family, elsewhere the humble one, was taken by the royal house of Egypt; the princess brought him up as her own son. This deviation from type has puzzled many people.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Watanabe (ibid., note 2), and Walsh (ibid., note 2), p. 303.

<sup>13</sup> Watanabe (ibid., note 2).

<sup>14</sup> Von Tunzelmann, A. (2009, December 17). *The Prince of Egypt: a bratty Moses in a whale of a tale*. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/dec/17/prince-of-egypt-reel-history>.

<sup>15</sup> Sargon of Akkad, a Sumerian king of the 24th century BCE (around a millennium before Moses). Sargon's mother, a high priestess, conceived and bore him in secret, sealed him in a basket of rushes with bitumen and cast him into the river. He was found and adopted by Akki the water drawer who appointed him as his gardener. The goddess Ishtar discovered Sargon and granted him her love. Eventually, he became king.

<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, PFL 13, pp. 249-250.

The provenance may be much closer. In the Quran (Sura *Al-Qasas*), Moses is found and adopted by Pharaoh's wife:<sup>17</sup>

We inspired Moses' mother saying: 'Suckle him, and then when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and have no fear and do not grieve, for we shall return him to you' ... Then Pharaoh's household picked him up ... and Pharaoh's wife said, He will be a joy to the eye for me and you. Do not slay him: he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son (28: 7-9).<sup>18</sup>

The Quranic account highlights yet another, previously unnoticed, deviation from the Biblical account. The opening scene in *The Prince of Egypt* shows Moses' mother putting the basket with Moses into the river. The Bible (Exodus 2:3) clearly states that the basket was not put in the river but "She placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile" (וַתִּשָּׂם (בְּסוּף עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּאָר), and that is where the basket was found (Exodus 2:5), "She spied the basket among the reeds" (וַתִּרְאֶה אֶת הַתִּבָּה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, a mother would be out of her mind to abandon her child to the dangers and vicissitudes of a flowing river as we soon witness in the river scene in *The Prince of Egypt*. Yet this is exactly what is done according to the Quran. It is no wonder that the Quran adds a divine promise: "Cast him into the river and have no fear ... for we shall return him to

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<sup>17</sup> It is firmly established that there is significant influence of Talmudic and mid-rashic traditions in the Quran. There may thus be a (lost) Jewish tradition behind this Quranic account: The Hebrew expression *Bat Pharaoh* (בת פרעה) can conceivably be interpreted as *Beit Pharaoh* (בית פרעה), the household and wife of Pharaoh, both of which appear in the Quranic account. Indeed, Rabbi Meir (*Megillah* 13a) offers such an interpretation to the verses in Esther (2: 7, 15), תנא משום רבי מאיר אל תקרי לבת אלא לבית - לקחה מִרְדְּכָי לֹו לְבַת.

<sup>18</sup> Quran (trans. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Farida Khanam), Birmingham, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> The idea of a stationary basket invites the possibility that it was strategically placed to be discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. It stands to reason that Pharaoh's daughter had a permanent bathing spot with all required amenities—and Moses was put there for her to find. Revealingly, the verse (Exodus 2: 4) states that the sister was not stationed on site to guard Moses, but rather "at a distance, to learn what would befall him" (וַתִּתְּצֵב אֶחָתָם מֵרֶחֶק לְדַעַת מֶה יֵעָשֶׂה לוֹ). For development of this interpretation, see: Moshe Pinchuk, *Kankanim: A multifaceted approach to Biblical Episodes* (Jerusalem, 2009), pp. 142-148 (Hebrew); Randall Bailey, "Is That Any Name for a Nice Hebrew Boy?" Exodus 2: 1-10: The De-Africanization of an Israelite Hero" in: *The recovery of Black presence: an interdisciplinary exploration: essays in honor of Dr. Charles B. Copher* (ed. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant), (Abingdon, 1995), p. 34.

you.” It would seem that the first scene in *The Prince of Egypt* is drawn entirely from the Quran.<sup>20</sup>

As mentioned, the river scene culminating in Pharaoh’s wife adopting Moses is pivotal to the plot, to develop the sibling relationship and rivalry between Moses and Ramesses. This brings us to the third deviation from the Biblical account: The film title crowns Moses as the “Prince of Egypt.” This is patently not the case.<sup>21</sup> *Tout au contraire*, Prince of Egypt is an antithesis to Moses the savior, leader, and king of the Israelites.<sup>22</sup> Or is it?

This question brings us to the essence of *The Prince of Egypt*, and to a meaningful insight to be derived from it. Reviewers have noted that although *The Prince of Egypt* begins as a story about sibling rivalry between the two stepbrothers, Ramesses and Moses, this theme is not developed further. The film begins with a Ben Hur-style chariot race, and then goes on to show how Moses is constantly getting Ramesses into trouble with impunity. But rather than exploring this rivalry, the film shifts to Moses’ identity crisis after discovering in a chance meeting with his Israelite siblings that he was born an Israelite. From here on, the film focuses on Moses’ journey of self-discovery and consolidation of his identity.<sup>23</sup> Even in the penultimate scene, it is not clear if Moses has completely severed all emotional ties from his Egyptian identity. Ramesses is seen

<sup>20</sup> (Or from Josephus, Ant. 2: 221, 224). Strangely, most Jewish people nowadays are convinced that Moses was set to drift in the river. Indeed, a common Hebrew nursery rhyme, penned by Kadish Yehuda Silman, describes Moses in his basket drifting down the river:

דומם שטה תיבה קטנה, על היאור הזך,  
ובתיבה משה הקטן, ילד יפה ורך.  
הס, הגלים השובבים, משה הקטן פה שט.  
לא יטבע, חיה יחיה, ילד זה הקט.

<sup>21</sup> Ziffer Y. (December 1998), *The Prince of Egypt: An Orthodox Look at Hollywood’s Latest Version of the Exodus Narrative*. Retrieved December 13, 2023, from: [https://files.lookstein.org/resource/articles/prince\\_guide.htm](https://files.lookstein.org/resource/articles/prince_guide.htm).

It is noteworthy that Dorothy Clarke Wilson’s 1949 novel *Prince of Egypt*, which influenced DreamWorks’s production of *The Prince of Egypt*, has been renamed in subsequent printings as *Moses—The Prince of Egypt*. (Walsh, *ibid.*, note 2, p. 301). Howard Fast’s 1958 novel *Moses* has three parts; part one is titled “The Prince of Egypt” and ends just as Moses discovers his true origin.

<sup>22</sup> *The Prince of Egypt* would have been a better title for the prequel, *Joseph: King of Dreams*, another animated Biblical adaptation released by DreamWorks, two years later (2000), about Joseph who was precisely the Prince of Egypt!

<sup>23</sup> Walsh (*ibid.*, note 2), pp. 303-304; Al Hamadi (*ibid.*, note 2); Hollinger (*ibid.*, note 8), p. 3, 8.

crying “Moses” out loud from one shore and Moses sadly saying “Goodbye, brother” from the other side.

According to all accounts, Moses’ early and impressionable years were spent in two opposing cultures: the Israelite House of Levi and the Egyptian House of Pharaoh. Moses would surely have developed significant emotional and cultural ties and loyalties to both houses. Reconciliation between the two would have been daunting to anyone. Tasking Moses as redeemer of the Israelites from Egypt would only serve to exacerbate this identity crisis. *The Prince of Egypt* highlights this issue and delineates the dissonance and personal challenge that Moses had to cope with simultaneously with his efforts of opposing Pharaoh with the ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, and the freeing of the Israelites.<sup>24</sup>

This important crisis in Moses’ life and its resolution is not discussed, to the best of my knowledge, in any Jewish analysis or interpretation of the character of Moses.<sup>25</sup> However, after *The Prince of Egypt* advanced this insight, hints of this crisis can now be identified in some midrashim and later commentators:<sup>26</sup>

1. Exodus (2:10): “The child grew up, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, who made him her son.”<sup>27</sup>

The midrash elaborates:

And she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he was to her a son. Pharaoh’s daughter kissed and embraced him as if he were her son, and she would not take him out of the king’s palace ... And Pharaoh took and embraced him, and he took Pharaoh’s crown from his head and put it on his head, as he was destined to do

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<sup>24</sup> Pharaoh’s daughter too, must have experienced a similar dissonance and challenge upon finding Moses in the basket. She had to choose between loyalty to her father and nation or loyalty to morality. The midrash expresses this inner conflict as a dialogue between Pharaoh’s daughter and her maids: “They said to her, Our Lady, the custom of the world is that when a king makes a decree the whole world does not observe it, but at least his sons and members of his household observe it, and you wish to violate your father’s commandments? Immediately Gabriel came and hit them to the ground” (כג, א, רבה א, כג). (שמות רבה א, כג).

<sup>25</sup> F.V. Greifenhagen briefly touches upon this in a reading of Exodus as how Israel establishes an identity separate from that of Egypt (in: Roncace, Mark, and Patrick Gray, eds. [2016], *Teaching the Bible: Practical Strategies for Classroom Instruction* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature] p. 112.)

<sup>26</sup> For the sake of clarity and continuity, I have organized the sources according to the Biblical verses they refer to, rather than to the chronological order of the sources.

<sup>27</sup> וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבֹאֶהוּ לְבֵת פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי לָהּ לְבֵן

when he grew up ... Pharaoh's advisors said we fear ... lest he be the one we say is going to take the kingdom from you ... and Jethro was sitting among them. He said to them: 'This boy has no mind, let us test him. Bring before him gold and embers in one bowl. If he puts his hand to an ember—he has no mind and there is no sentence of death on him; and if he reaches for the gold—he has a mind of his own and kill him. Immediately gold and embers were brought before him, and Moses reached out his hand to take the gold. Gabriel came and pushed his hand away and he took an ember and put his hand in his mouth with the ember and his tongue was burned and from it he became heavy in the mouth and heavy in the tongue.<sup>28</sup>

In this well-known midrash, Moses has become a beloved member of the extended Pharaoh family. Nevertheless, after he playfully crowned himself with his grandfather's (Pharaoh's) crown, the ministers and advisors become suspicious that Moses is not what he seems. He may be the Israelite savior. They recommend putting him to death. Jethro suggests putting him to the test. The mixed result of the test demonstrates Moses' torn identity: his heart and mind go for the gold, yet his hand goes for the flickering coals. The midrash offers this event as the cause of Moses' speech impairment. Interestingly, current research in psychology points to a relationship between speech alterations and identity disorders.<sup>29</sup>

2. Exodus (2:11-12): "When Moses grew up, he went out to his brethren and witnessed their sufferings. He saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man of his brethren. He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> ותביאנהו לבת פרעה ויהי לה לבן היתה בת פרעה מנשקת ומחבקת אותו כאילו הוא בנה ולא היתה מוציאתו מפלטרין של מלך ... והיה פרעה נוטלו ומחבקו והוא נוטל כתריו של פרעה מעל ראשו ונותנו על ראשו, כמו שעתידי לעשות לו כשיהיה גדול ... והיו חרטומי פרעה יושבין ואומרים: מתיראין אנו מזה שנוטל כתרך ונותנה בראשו, שלא יהא זה אותו שאנו אומרים שעתידי ליטול המלכות ממך ... והיה יתרו יושב ביניהן. אמר להם: הנער הזה אין לו דעת, אלא בחנו והביאו לפניו בקערה אחת זהוב וגחלת. אם יושיט ידו לגחלת - אין בו דעת ואין עליו משפט מות; ואם יושיט ידו לזהוב - יש בו דעתו והרגו אותו. מיד הביאו לפניו זהוב וגחלת ושלה משה ידו ליקח הזהוב. בא גבריאלי ודחה את ידו ותפש ידו בגחלת והכניס ידו לתוך פיו עם הגחלת ונכוה לשונו וממנו נעשה כבד פה וכבד לשון (שמות רבה שניאן, א, כו).

<sup>29</sup> Colin A. Ross, *Dissociative Identity Disorder: Diagnosis, Clinical Features, and Treatment of Multiple Personality* (John Wiley & Sons, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו ויבא בסבלתם ויבא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו. ויפן פה וכה ויבא כי אין איש ויד את המצרי



The first verse has generated much discussion among medieval and modern commentators trying to understand how Moses, who grew up in the Egyptian palace, came to be cognizant of his Israelite roots. This knowledge would be a prerequisite to the identity dissonance he is later to fully experience.

Ibn Ezra offers a cryptic comment on the redundancy of “brethren” in the verse:

He went out unto his brethren—the Egyptians, for he was in the king’s palace. “Of his brethren” means one of his family, as in “for we are brethren.”<sup>31</sup>

Some commentators cannot accept that “brethren” could possibly mean “Egyptians” and suggest various emendations in the Ibn Ezra. However, Ibn Ezra may very well be interpreting the first “brethren” as Egyptians and the second “brethren” as Israelites. After all, both Egyptians and Israelites were Moses’ brethren.<sup>32</sup>

Concerning Moses striking down the Egyptian, long ago I heard a Hassidic metaphoric interpretation, but am unable as of yet to locate its source:

Moses looked introspectively into himself; on the one hand he was Egyptian, on the other hand he was Israelite. He realized that this is not a viable duality. He had to choose, so he struck down the Egyptian that was within him.

3. When Jethro inquires of his daughters why they returned so soon from the fields: “They answered, an Egyptian man rescued us from the shepherds” (Exodus 2:19).<sup>33</sup> The midrash expresses surprise at Jethro’s daughters’ identification of Moses as an Egyptian man:

Was Moses an Egyptian? Rather his attire was Egyptian, but he was an Israelite.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ויצא אל אחיו המצרים, כי בארמון המלך היה. וטעם מאחיו, אחר הזכיר עברי ממשפחתו, כמו אנשים אחים

<sup>32</sup> See: *Five Early Commentators on R. Abraham Ibn Ezra: The earliest supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra's Torah commentary* (Eds. Howard Kreisel, Ofer Elior, David Ben-Zazon, Eliezer Davidovich, Orly Soshan) (Be'er Sheva, 2017), pp. 272-274.

<sup>33</sup> ותאמרן איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרעים

<sup>34</sup> וכי מצרי היה משה אלא לבושו מצרי והוא עברי (שמות רבה, שניאן, א, לב) The midrash then goes on to offer an alternate reading in which “Egyptian man” refers not to Moses but to the prime cause of Moses’ presence in Midian. The author of this midrash perhaps is not willing to accept a Moses with a split identity:

Later, in a midrash describing Moses' prayers to enter the Land of Israel, Moses is taken to task for not immediately correcting Jethro's daughters' misconception of his identity:

Rabbi Levi said: Moses said before G-d almighty, the bones of Joseph entered the land, and I am not to enter the land?! G-d replied: He who proclaimed his country is buried in his country, he who did not proclaim his country is not buried in his country ... you did not proclaim your country, you will not be buried in your country. How could you have heard Jethro's daughters say "We were saved by an Egyptian man" and remained silent? Therefore, you do not merit to be buried in your own country.<sup>35</sup>

4. At the burning bush Moses is quite hesitant to accept the mission of redeeming the Israelites from Egypt. A lengthy discourse between G-d and Moses ensues. Moses' first response is: "Moses said to G-d: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11).<sup>36</sup> G-d's final response to Moses is: "There is your brother Aaron the Levite ... Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he is glad of heart to see you" (Exodus 4:14).<sup>37</sup>

This could encapsulate one of Moses' main reasons to refuse the appointment: Who am I to redeem the Israelites? At best, I am only half Israelite. To which G-d responds: But you are a whole-bred Israelite, as proof—"Aaron is your brother!"

This insight into the internal dissonance of loyalty and identity within Moses can send quite a meaningful and important message. People with integrity may shirk duty and responsibility because they fear internal, opposing interests and loyalties, because they have a tainted past. Indeed, this is what Moses did at the burning bush. But ultimately it was Moses with his complex identity who is remembered and celebrated as the quintessential Israelite leader. ❧

דבר אחר: איש מצרי - כך אמרו בנות יתרו למשה: יישר כחך שהצלחנו מיד הרועים. אמר להם משה: אותו המצרי שהרגתי הוא הציל אתכם. לפיכך אמרו לאביהם איש מצרי. מי גרם לזה שיבא אצלנו? איש מצרי שהרג.

<sup>35</sup> א"ר לוי אמר לפניו רבש"ע עצמותיו של יוסף נכנסו לארץ ואני איני נכנס לארץ אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא מי שהודה בארצו נקבר בארצו ומי שלא הודה בארצו אינו נקבר בארצו ... את שלא הודית בארצך אין אתה נקבר בארצך כיצד בנות יתרו אומרות איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרועים והוא שומע ושותק לפיכך לא נקבר בארצו (דברים רבה, וילנא, ב, ח).

<sup>36</sup> ויאמר משה אל האלקים מי אנכי כי אלה אל פרעה וכי אוציא את בני ישראל ממצרים

<sup>37</sup> הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי ידעתי כי דבר ידבר הוא וגם הנה הוא יצא לקראתך ויראה וישמח בלב