

## Deuteronomy 34: 5-6

וַיָּמָת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב עַל־פִּי יְהוָה:

So Moses the servant of the LORD died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the LORD.

וַיִּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ בְּגִי בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב מִן הַבַּיִת פְּעוֹר וְלֹא־יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת־קְבֻרָתוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

S/He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor; and no one knows his burial place to this day.

Master of the world, I am afraid of the pain of the angel of death.

אָמַר, רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָם מִתְיָרָא אֲנִי מִחֲבָלוֹ שֶׁל מַלְאָךְ הַמָּוֶת

Rabbi Alan Lew:

The idea of a house is that it gives us security, shelter, haven from the storm. But no house can really offer us this. No building of wood and stone can ever afford us protection from the disorder that is always lurking all around us. No shell we put between us and the world can ever really keep us secure from it. And we know this. We never really believed this illusion. That's why we never felt truly secure in it. . .

. . .when we speak of joy here, we are not speaking of fun. Joy is a deep release of the soul, and it includes death and pain. Joy is any feeling fully felt, any experience we give our whole being to.

[Midrash Tanchuma, Vaetchanan 6:1](#)

...Moses said to the Holy One, blessed Be , 'By the word that I [used to] praise you, when I said (in Deut. 10:14), "Behold (*hen*), the heavens [and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that is in it] belong to the Lord your God!' By that [very] word (i.e., *hen*) You are decreeing

death over me, when you say (in Deut. 31:14), “Behold (*hen*), the days are drawing near for you to die.”” He said to him, “Moses, I have already decreed death over the first Adam.” He said to him, “My master, the first Adam deserved to die. You decreed an easy commandment for him, and he transgressed it. Hence it is fitting for him to die. [God] said to him, “Consider Abraham, [who] sanctified My name in My world [but still died].” He said to him, “Master of the world, From Abraham there came out Ishmael, whose race provoked You to anger, as stated (in Job 12:6) ‘The tents of robbers prosper, [and those who provoke God have security, the ones whom God brought forth in His hand].’” He said to him, “Consider Isaac, who stretched out his neck upon the altar.” He said to him, “From Isaac there came out Esau, who in the future will destroy the Temple and burn Your sanctuary.” He said to him, “Consider Jacob, out of whom there came twelve tribes without any flaw.” He said to him “Jacob did not ascend into the firmament, his feet did not trod Araphel, he was not like the ministering angels, he did not receive Torah from Your hand and he did not speak with you face to face.” The Holy One, Blessed Be, said to him (in Deut. 3:26), “Enough from you; do not [ever] speak [unto Me on this matter] again.” He said to Him, “Perhaps [future] generations will say, ‘If He had not found bad things in Moses, He would not have removed him from the world.’” He said to him, “I have already written in my Torah (in Deut. 34:10), “Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses.” He said in front of Him, “The people will say] I did your will in my youth, but I did not do your will in my old age.” He said to him, “I have already written (in Deut. 32:51), “Because you acted faithlessly with me.” He said to Him, “Please let me enter the land [and spend] two or three years there, and after that let me die.” He said to him (in Deut. 32:52), “And there you shall not go.” He said to Him, “If I am not to enter while alive, let me enter after my death.” He said to him, “Not while you are alive, and not when you are dead.” He said in front of Him, “Why all this anger against me?” He said to him (according to Deut. 32:51), “Because you did not sanctify Me.” He said to him, “With all mortals you are guided two or three times by the principle of mercy, as stated (in Job 33:29), ‘Behold, God does all these things two or three times to a man’; yet in my case, when a single sin is found in me, you do not forgive me.” The Holy One, Blessed Be, said to him, “See here, Moses, you have committed six sins, and I have not disclosed one of them. First you said, (in Exod. 4:13) ‘Please make someone else your agent’; secondly (in Exod. 5:23), ‘For ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, [he has dealt worse with this people, and You have still not delivered Your people]’; thirdly (in Numb. 11:22) ‘If the sheep and cattle would be

slaughtered for them , would it be [enough] for them'; fourthly (in Numb. 16:29), 'The Lord did not send me'; fifthly (in Numb. 20:10), 'Listen, you rebels, [shall we bring forth water for you from this rock]'; sixth (in Numb. 32:14), 'And now you brood of sinners have arisen in place of your ancestors.' But were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob sinners, for you to say this to their children?" He said to Him, "I have learned so from You, when you said (in Numb. 17:3), 'The censurers of these who have sinned [at the cost of their lives].' He said to him, "I said (ibid.), 'At the cost of their lives,' and not, 'at the cost of their ancestors.'" He said in front of Him, "I am an individual, while Israel numbers sixty myriads (i.e., 600,000). They have sinned before You a lot of times; and when I sought mercy on their behalf, You forgave them. You took care of sixty myriads [because of me], yet You are not taking care of me." He said to him, "Moses, a decree over a community is not like a decree over an individual. Furthermore, up to now [the] time was delivered into your hands, but from now [the] time is not delivered into your hands." He said to Him, "Master of the universe, rise up from the seat of judgment and sit down upon the seat of mercy for me, so that I do not die. Then my sins shall be forgiven through torments which You shall bring on my body. So do not deliver me to the pangs of the angel of death. Moreover, if You do this, I will proclaim Your praise to all who come into the world, just as David has said (in Ps. 118:17), 'I shall not die, but live [and recount the works of the Lord].'" He said to him (in vs. 20), "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall come through it." [From this it follows that] death has been ordained from time immemorial for the righteous and for all mortals. When Moses saw that they paid no attention to him, he went to the heaven and earth, where he said to them, "Seek mercy for me." They said to him, "Before seeking mercy for you, we should seek mercy for ourselves, since it is stated (in Is. 51:6), 'for the heavens shall vanish like smoke, and the earth shall wear out like a garment.'" He went to the stars and planets. He said to them, "Seek mercy for me." They said to him, "Before seeking mercy for you, we should seek mercy for ourselves, since it is stated (in Is. 34:4), 'All the host of heaven shall rot away....'" He went to the mountains and hills. He said to them, "Seek mercy for me." They said to him, "[Before seeking mercy for you,] we should seek mercy for ourselves, since it is stated (in Is. 54:10), 'For the mountains shall move, and the hills shall be shaken.'" He went to the Great Sea. He said to it, "Seek mercy for me." [The sea] said to him, "Son of Amram, how is today different from a couple of [other] days? Are you not the son of Amram, who came upon me with your rod, smote me, and divided me into twelve parts? For I was unable to stand before you because the Divine

Presence was walking at your right hand. It is so stated (in Is. 63:12), 'Who had His glorious arm walk at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them [...].' So what has happened to you today?" When the sea reminded him what he had done in his youth, he cried out and said (in Job 29:2), "O that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me!" When I passed through you, I was a world king; but now I am prostrate, and they pay no attention to me." Immediately he betook himself to the arch[angel] of the [Divine] Presence and said to him, "Seek mercy for me, that I not die." He said to him, "My master, Moses, why the exertion? This is what I have heard from behind the curtain: That your prayer is not heard on this matter." Putting his hands on his head, Moses sobbed and wept, as he said, "With whom shall I seek mercy for myself?" R. Simlay said, "At that time the Holy One, Blessed Be, was full of anger over him, as stated (in Deut. 3:26), 'But the Lord was angry with me [...],' until Moses began by uttering this Scripture (Exod. 34:6): 'Then the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "the Lord, the Lord is a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger..."' Immediately the holy spirit was cooled off." The Holy One, Blessed Be, said to Moses, "Moses, I have sworn two oaths, one that you should die and one to destroy Israel. To repeal both of them is impossible; so if you want to live, Israel will be destroyed." He said before Him, "You are coming to me with a plot. You are seizing the rope at both ends. Let Moses and a thousand like him be destroyed, but do not let one person in Israel be destroyed." He said to him, "Master of the Universe, should feet that have climbed up to the firmament, should a face that has greeted the Divine Presence, should hands that have received Torah from Your hands lick the dust? Woe! All mortals will say, "If Moses, who ascended on high, became like the ministering angels, spoke with Him face to face, and received Torah from His hand, had no reply for responding to the Holy One, Blessed Be, how much the worse it will be for [mere] flesh and blood, who comes with no [merit from] Torah and with no [merit from the] commandments?" The Holy One, Blessed Be, said to Moses, "Why all this anguish that you are experiencing?" He said, "Master of the world, I am afraid of the pangs of the angel of death." He said to him, "I am not delivering you into his hands." He said in front of Him, "Master of the universe, my mother Jochebed, who was distressed (literally, whose teeth were blunted) during her lifetime by two of her sons, will be distressed by my death." He said to him, "So has it come up in [My] mind, and so is it the way of the world: every generation with its expositors, every generation with its administrators, every generation with its leaders. Up to now it has been your lot to serve in front of Me, but now your lot is over and the

time of your disciple Joshua for him to serve [Me] has arrived.” He said to him, “My Master, if I am dying because of Joshua, let me go and become his disciple!” He said to him, “If you want to do that, go and do it.” Moses arose and went early to Joshua's door. Now Joshua was seated expounding [Torah], so Moses stopped to bend his stature and put his hand on his mouth. But Joshua's eyes were hidden, and he did not see him, so that he (Moses) would be sorrowful and resign himself to death. When Israel came to Moses' door to study Torah, they asked and said, “Where did Moshe our master [go]?” [Others] said to them, “He got up early and went to the door of Joshua.” [So] they went and found him at the door of Joshua, with Joshua sitting and Moses standing. They said to Joshua, “What has come over you that Moses our master stands, while you sit?” When he raised his eyes and saw him, he immediately rent his clothes. Then sobbing and weeping, he said, “O my master, my master! My father, my father and lord!” Israel said to Moses, “Moses our master, teach us Torah.” He said to them, “I am not allowed.” They said to him, “We are not leaving you.” A heavenly voice (*bat qol*) came forth and said to them, “Learn from Joshua.” [So] they took upon themselves to sit and learn from the mouth of Joshua. Joshua sat at the head with Moses to his right and with [Elazar and Ithamar] to his left. So he sat and expounded in the presence of Moses. R. Samuel bar Nahmani said that R. Johanan said, “When Joshua opened by saying, ‘Blessed be the One who has chosen the righteous,’ they took the traditions of wisdom from Moses and gave them to Joshua. Now Moses did not know what Joshua was expounding. After Israel arose [from the session], they said to Moses, “[Explain] the Torah [we have just heard] to us.” He said to them, “I do not know what to answer you.” So Moses our master was stumbling and falling. It was at that time that he said, “Master of the universe, up to now I requested life, but now here is my soul given over to You.” Then when he had resigned himself to death, the Holy One, Blessed Be, opened by saying (in Ps. 94:16), “Who will stand for Me against evildoers? Who will stand for Israel in the time of My wrath? Who will stand in the battle of My children? And who will stand and seek mercy for them, when they sin before Me?” At that time Metatron came and fell on his face. He said to Him, “Master of the world, [as] in Moses' life he belonged to You, so in his death he belongs to You.” The Holy One, Blessed Be, said to him, “Let me give you a parable. To what is the matter comparable? To a king who had a son. Now on each and every day, his father was angry with him and sought to kill him because he did not maintain respect for the father; but his mother rescued him from his hand. One day his mother died and the king wept. His servants said to him, ‘Our lord king, why

are you weeping?’ He said to them, ‘It is not over my wife alone that I am weeping, but for my son; for many times when I was angry with him and wanted to kill him, did she rescue him from my hand?’” So also did the Holy One, Blessed Be, say to Metatron, “It is not over Moses alone that I am weeping, but over him and over Israel, for look at how many times that they angered Me, and I was angry with them; but he stood in the breach before Me to turn back My anger from destroying them.” They came and said to Moses, “The hour has arrived for you to depart from the world.” He said to them, “Wait for me until I bless Israel, for they have not found contentment from me all my days, because of the rebukes and warnings with which I rebuked them.” He began to bless each tribe separately. When he saw that the time was growing short, he included all of them in a single blessing. They came and said, “The hour has arrived for your soul to depart from the world.” He said to Israel, “I have caused you a lot of grief over the Torah and over the commandments, but now forgive me.” They said to him, “Our lord master, you are forgiven.” Israel also arose before him and said to him, “O Moses our master, we have angered you a lot and increased the burden upon you. Forgive us.” He said to them, “You are forgiven.” They came and said to him, “The moment has arrived for you to depart from the world.” He said, “Blessed be the name of the One who lives and abides forever.” He said to Israel, “If you please, when you enter the land, remember me and my bones, and you shall say, ‘Woe (*oy*) to the son of Amram, who ran before us like a horse but whose bones have fallen in the wilderness.’” They came and said to him, “The half moment has arrived.” He took his two arms and placed them on his heart. Then he said to Israel, “See the final end of flesh and blood.” They answered and said, “The hands which received the Torah from the mouth of the Almighty shall fall to the grave.” At that moment his soul departed with a kiss (from the Holy One, Blessed Be), as stated (in Deut. 34:5), “Then Moses [the servant of the Lord] died there [in the Land of Moab at the command of the Lord (literally, by the mouth of the Lord)].” Now [the ones who] took care of his burial were neither Israel nor the angels but the Holy One, Blessed Be, [Himself], as stated (in vs. 6), “Then He (the Holy One, Blessed Be,) buried him (Moses) in the valley [in the Land of Moab].”