

## Midrash Exodus Rabbah 1:27 (date unknown)

שמות רבה א: כז

ויצא וירא בסבלותם. מהו וירא, שְׁהִיָּה רוֹאֵה בְּסַבְלוֹתָם וּבוֹכָה וְאוֹמֵר, חָבַל לִי עַלְיֵכֶם מִי יָתֵן מוֹתֵי עַלְיֵכֶם, שְׂאִין לָךְ מְלֹאכָה קִשָּׁה מִמְּלֹאכֶת הַטֵּיט, וְהִיָּה נוֹתֵן כְּתַפְּיוֹ וּמְסִיעַ לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מֵהֶן.

*"He went out and he looked on their burdens."*

What is meant by, *"And he looked?"*

He would look upon their burdens and weep, saying:

"Woe is me regarding you, I would give my life up for you!"

For there is no more difficult labor that of cement.

And he would lend a shoulder to assist each one of them.

רבי אלעזר בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר... אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אמה הנחת עסקיך והלכת לראות בצערן של ישראל, ונהגת בהן מנהג אחים, אני מניח את העליונים ואת התחתונים, ואדבר עמך, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (שמות ג, ד): וירא ה' פי סר לראות, ראה הקדוש ברוך הוא במשה שסר מעסקיו לראות בסבלותם, לפיכך (שמות ג, ד): ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה.

Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yose the Galilean said:

The *Kadosh Baruch Hu* [Holy One Blessed be He] said:

"You left aside your business and went to see the sorrow of Israel,  
and acted toward them in the way of brothers.

I will leave aside the upper and the lower

[i.e. ignore the distinction between Heaven and Earth]

and I will speak to you.

So is it written,

*"And when the LORD saw that [Moses] turned aside to see" (Exodus 3:4).*

The *Kadosh Baruch Hu* saw Moses, who left aside his business to see their burdens.

Therefore, *"God called unto him out of the midst of the bush" (ibid.).*

## Midrash Shemot Rabbah 1:30

וּרְבִּנּוֹן אָמַר אֵיךְ לִי וְהָלֹא בְּנֵה שֶׁל יוֹכֵד אֶתָּה וְהֵי אֵךְ קוֹרִין לָךְ בֶּן בַּתְּיָה וְאַתָּה מְבַקֵּשׁ לִהְיוֹת שָׂר וְשׁוֹפֵט עָלֵינוּ, נוֹדִיעַ עָלֶיךָ מָה עָשִׂיתָ לַמִּצְרַיִם. הִלְהַרְגִנִי אֶתָּה אִמֵּר, אֶתָּה מְבַקֵּשׁ לֹא נֶאֱמַר, אֲלֵא אֶתָּה אָמַר, מִכָּאֵן אֶתָּה לָמַד שְׁשֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ הַזֶּכִּיר עַל הַמִּצְרַיִם וְהַרְגוּ. כִּינּוֹן שְׁשֻׁמַע כֶּן נִתְּרָא מִלְשׁוֹן הָרַע, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲכֵן נוֹדַע הַדְּבָר, רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בַּר רַבִּי שְׁלׁוֹם בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי חֲנִינְא הַגָּדוֹל, וְרַבּוֹתֵינוּ בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי אֶלְכָסְנִדְרִי אָמְרוּ, הִיָּה מִשָּׁה מְהַרְהַר בְּלִבּוֹ וְאוֹמֵר מָה חָטְאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּשְׁתַּעַבְדוּ מִכָּל הָאֻמוֹת, כִּינּוֹן שְׁשֻׁמַע דְּבָרֵינוּ אִמֵּר לְשׁוֹן הָרַע יֵשׁ בִּינִיחֵן הֵי אֵךְ יְהִיו רְאוּיִין לְגַאֲלָה, לְכָךְ אָמַר: אֲכֵן נוֹדַע הַדְּבָר, עֲתָה יִדְעָתִי בְּאִיזָה דְבָר הֵם מִשְׁתַּעַבְדִים

*Surely the thing is known (v. 14)*

Our rabbis said that they said to him:

“Are you not the son of Yocheved? So how is it that they call you son of Batya?

Clearly you seek to be prince and judge over us!

We shall inform against you, regarding what you did to the Egyptian.”

“*You seek to kill me*” is not said, but rather “*you say to kill me.*”

From this you may learn that Moses killed the Egyptian

By speaking the Explicit Name of God.

When Moses heard this, he became afraid of *lashon hara* [the evil speech]

And said “*surely the thing is known.*”

Rabbi Yehuda son of Rabbi Shalom, in the name of Rabbi Hanina the Great,

And our rabbis in the name of Rabbi Aleksandri, said:

Moses was troubled in his heart, and said to himself:

“What sin has caused Israel to be enslaved, out of all the nations?”

When he heard this man’s words, he said to himself:

“There is *lashon hara* among them. How then shall they deserve to be redeemed?”

This is why he said, *Now the thing is known.*”

Now I know because of what thing they are enslaved.”

## RaSHI (R. Shlomo Yitzchaki, Troyes France 1040-1105)

וִירָא בַּסְבֵּלְתָם. נָתַן עֵינָיו וְלִבּוֹ לִהְיוֹת מִצָּר עָלֵיהֶם (שְׁמוֹת רַבֵּה א'):

*He looked on their burdens*

He gave his eyes and his heart to be distressed about them. (Midrash Shemot Rabbah)

אֲכֵן נוֹדַע הַדְּבָר. כְּמִשְׁמַעוֹ. וּמִדְרָשׁוֹ, נוֹדַע לִי הַדְּבָר שֶׁהֵייתִי תַמָּה עָלָיו, מָה חָטְאוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל שְׁבַעִים אֻמוֹת לִהְיוֹת נִרְדִים בְּעַבְדוֹת פְּרָךְ, אֲבָל רוֹאֵה אֲנִי שֶׁהֵם רְאוּיִים לְכָךְ (שְׁמוֹת רַבֵּה א'):

*Surely the thing is known (v. 14)*

Explain it in its literal sense: the fact that I have killed the Egyptian is known.

But a Midrashic explanation is: *Now the thing is known to me* about which I have been puzzled

how has Israel sinned more than all the seventy nations,  
that they should be oppressed by this crushing servitude?

But now I see that they deserve it (Exodus Rabbah 1:30).

**R. Abraham Ibn Ezra (b. Tudelo Spain, 1089, d.~1167)**

ומחשבות השם עמקו ומי יוכל לעמוד בסודו ולא לבדו נתכנו עלילות. אולי סבב השם זה שיגדל משה בבית המלכות להיות נפשו על מדרגה העליונה בדרך הלימוד והרגילות ולא תהיה שפלה ורגילה להיות בבית עבדים. הלא תראה שהרג המצרי בעבור שהוא עשה חמס. והושיע בנות מדין מהרועים בעבור שהיו עושים חמס להשקות צאן מהמים שדלו. ועוד דבר אחר. כי אלו היה גדל בין אחיו ויכירוהו מנעוריו לא היו יראים ממנו כי יחשבוהו כאחד מהם

The thoughts of God are deep; who can perceive His secret? To Him alone the plot is clear.

Perhaps God caused it to come about that Moshe would grow up in the royal palace,  
that his soul might be habituated to be on the highest level,  
not lowly and accustomed to being in a house of slaves.

For do we not see that he kills the Egyptian for performing an act of violence?

And he saves the Midianite daughters from the shepherds,

for they (the shepherds) perform violence

in watering their flocks from the water drawn by them (the daughters of Re'uel).

And moreover: had he grown up among his brethren,

so that they had known him since his youth, they would not be in awe of him,  
for they would consider him as one of them.

**ויצא אל אחיו.** המצרים כי בארמון המלך היה וטעם מאחיו אחר הזכיר עברי ממשפחתו. כמו אנשים אחים

*And he went out to his brothers*

The Egyptians. Because he had been in the palace of the king.

And the phrase “*of his brothers*” is different, referring to a Hebrew kinsman.

**RaMBaN (R. Mosheh ben Nachman, b. 1194 Gerona Spain, d. Akko Israel 1270)**

וטעם **ויצא אל אחיו** כי הגידו לו אשר הוא יהודי, והיה חפץ לראותם בעבור שהם אחיו. והנה נסתכל בסבלותם ועמלם ולא יכול לסבול ולכן הרג המצרי המכה הנלחץ:

The meaning of the phrase “*he went out to his brothers*” is:

They had told him that he was a Jew, and he desired to see them,  
because they were his brothers.

And when he looked on their burdens, and their labors, he was not able to bear it.

And so he killed the Egyptian who was beating the oppressed one.

**Don Isaac Abarbanel (Portugal, Spain, Italy 1437-1508)**

. ואמר ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם לפי שמשה תמיד דבקה נפשו ביוכבד אשר גדלתו ובבניה ואחרי שנתגדל ידע מהם אמתת ענינו ושהוא מילדי העברים עם היות שבת פרעה גדלתו כבן ולכן היה יוצא אל אחיו העברים שהיו חוץ לעיר בבניני המלך ומשה יצא מארמון המלכות וילך אל אחיו העברים או אל אחיו הלויים או היו אחיו ממש מקרובי עמרם ויוכבד

It says “*he went out to his brothers and he looked on their burdens*”,

because Moses’ soul was constantly attached to Yocheved, who had nursed him,

and to her children, and after he grew up he knew from them the truth of his situation,  
that he was one of the Hebrew children,

even though Pharoah’s daughter had raised him as her son.

And so he would go out to his brothers, the Hebrews outside of the city,

engaged in the king’s construction projects.

Moses went out from the royal palace and went to his Hebrew brothers, or the Tribe of Levi,  
or perhaps his actual family, the family of Amram and Yocheved.

והנה משה כשנתקיים בשכלו וידע על נכון את אביו ואת אמו והכיר את אחיו חם לבו בקרבו לראות ענינם ולכן יצא מבית המלכות וילך אל מעמדם וירא בסבלותם. והותרה בזה השאלה השלישית. ותקצר נפשו בעמלם ונתחבר לזה שראה איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו על לא חמס בכפיו ולכן התעורר להכותו.

Now when Moses became fully aware of the truth about his father and his mother,  
and recognized his brothers,  
his heart warmed up within him to see their situation.  
This is why he went out from the royal palace and went to their position and  
*Looked on their burdens.*

And his soul was “tightened” about their labor, and he joined himself to this,  
and when he saw the Egyptian man beating his Hebrew brother who was helpless,  
then he was aroused to strike him.

### **ShaDaL (Shmuel David Luzatto, Italy 1800-1865)**

ויצא אל אחיו : כי הגידו לו את מולדתו והיה חפץ לראות את אחיו (רמבמ"ן), אולי כי אמו אשר היניקתו היתה הולכת כפעם בפעם לראות את שלום הנער כדרך המיניקות, וכשגדל מעט הגידה לו שהוא יהודי ושהיא אמו.

*And he went out to his brothers*

For they had told him of his birth origins, and he desired to see his brothers. (RaMBaN).

Perhaps his mother, who had nursed him, would come from time to time to see him,

And to check on the boy's well-being (as is the way of wet nurses).

And when he had grown up a little, she told him that he was a Jew and that she was his mother.

וירא בסבלותם : טעם הבי"ת שנסתכל בענוים עין החמלה, כמו כי ראה ה' בעניי (בראשית כ"ט : ל"ב); וכן במדרש וברש"י נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מצר עליהם.

*And he looked on their burdens*

The meaning of the “bet” is that he gazed upon their suffering with a compassionate eye,

As in *for God has seen my suffering (Genesis 29:32).*

This is similar to RaSHI's comment he gave his eyes and his heart to be distressed for them.”

### **MaLBiM (Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Wisser, Ukraine 1809-1879)**

ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו, יספר מצדקת משה ואיך מנעוריו היו בו כל המעלות שבעבורם זכה לכל הכבוד הזה, שהגם שגדל בבית מלך וישראל היו אז בתכלית השפלות לא הסתיר פניו מהם ויצא אליהם מצד שהם אחיו, הפך מטבע האנשים שבעלותם לגדולה יתרחקו מאחיהם העניים והאביונים,

This tells of Moses' righteousness and how from his childhood

he already had the qualities for which he received all of this glory.

How even though he was in the palace of the king, and Israel were in ultimate degradation,

He did not hide his face from them,

But went out to them, because they were his brothers.

This is the opposite of the nature of most people, who when they rise to greatness

Distance themselves from their poor and distressed brothers.

### **Ha'amek Davar (The NeTZIV, Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, Belarus, 1816-1893)**

ויצא אל אחיו. לא היה דרכו לצאת מן הפלטין ובית לימודו בחכמות. אך אל אחיו יצא :

*He went out to his brothers.* It was not his custom to go out of the palace, from his study house.

However, to his brothers he went out.

וירא בסבלתם. הסתכל הרבה באופן הסבלה שהיה לא לתכלית עבודת המלך כ"א לענותם.  
וברבה איתא במשמעות וירא שהיה מיישב להם סבלותיהם. וא"כ פי' וירא שראה עצה  
לסבלותם מה לעשות:

*He looked on their burdens.*

He gazed for a long time at the way of their burdens,

And saw that it was not at all for the purpose of the service of the king, but to oppress them.

And in Midrash Rabbah it says about "and he saw" that he would "help them with their burdens".

And if so, the interpretation of "and he looked" is

that he perceived advice for their burdens...what to do.

R. Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, (b. Belarus 1903, d. Boston 1993)

### **Kol Dodi Dofek [The Voice of My Beloved Knocks]**

*On Yom ha-Atzma'ut (Israel's Independence Day), 1956, Soloveitchik delivered a public address at Yeshiva University entitled: Kol Dodi Dofek; The Voice of My Beloved Knocks. The address, which has become a classic of religious Zionist philosophy, enumerates, and elaborates upon, the instances of God's tangible presence in the recent history of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. It also issues a clarion call to American Orthodoxy to embrace the State of Israel, and to commit itself and its resources to its development.*

### Mournful Thoughts of Confession

Let us pose a simple question: Did we not sin with respect to the first covenant, the Covenant of Shared Fate (as in the Covenant of Encampment-Nation), with regard to our obligation to participate in the pain of the nation and to see and feel its suffering: as it is said, "And He witnessed their burdens" (**Exodus 2:11**)? Let us be honest. During the terrible Holocaust, when European Jewry was systematically destroyed in gas chambers and crematoria, the American Jewish community did not rise to the occasion, and did not acquit itself as a community with the collective consciousness of shared fate, shared suffering and shared action with which it should have been expected to act. We did not properly sense the suffering of the nation, and we did precious little to save our unfortunate brethren. It is hard to know what we could have accomplished had we been more active. I personally think we could have saved many. No doubt, however, if we had properly felt the pain of our brothers; had we raised our voices and shaken worlds, that Roosevelt issue a sharp warning of protest accompanied by action, we would have been able to significantly slow the process of mass destruction. We witnessed the most horrible tragedy in our history, and we were silent. I shall not now dwell on the particulars. It is an extremely painful chapter. We all sinned by our silence in the face of the murder of millions. Do we not all stand before God's seat of judgment charged with the grievous sin of "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (**Leviticus 19:16**), especially when the sin applies not only to one individual but to millions? When I say "we" I mean all of us: including myself, the members of rabbinic and lay organizations both Orthodox and secular, and Jewish political organizations of all persuasions. "Your leaders, tribal heads, elders, and policemen, every person in Israel ... from the hewers of your wood to the drawers of your water" (**Deuteronomy 29:9-10**). Do you know why we were so indifferent? I think it is because our sense of nationhood was damaged. We did not grasp the notion of the experience of Shared Fate and the essence of peoplehood.