

# Torah Table Talk

## Who Buried Moses?

Parshat V'Zot HaBerachah  
Deuteronomy Chapters 33-34



The final chapter in the book of Deuteronomy, Parshat V'Zot HaBerachah is the only Parshah which is not read on a Sabbath. We read this Torah Portion on Simchat Torah. It contains a series of blessings which Moses offered on behalf of the twelve tribes of Israel as well as a description of the death of Moses. Because it describes his death, some of the sages questioned whether Moses could have written this passage. They attributed it to Joshua, his disciple and successor. Other sages suggested that since Moses was a prophet he wrote these words while under the influence of the divine spirit.

### Deuteronomy 34:5-6

So Moses, the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab at the command of the Lord. He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beit Peor; and no one knows his burial place to this day.

1. According to this verse how did Moses die? The verse says "He buried him." Who is the "He" in this verse?
2. The verse seems to tell us where he is buried but then it says that, "no one knows his burial place." Why aren't we told where Moses was buried? If we are not told then why make mention that he was buried in the land of Moab?
3. Compare Moses final blessing for the tribes of Israel with the blessing that Jacob offered his sons while on his death bed (See Genesis, Chapter 49). How are they different from one another? How does Moses farewell blessing compare with the poem he recites in the previous chapter, Parshat Ha'azinu?
4. Why do you think both Genesis and Deuteronomy both end with a blessing of the tribes? What type of statement does this make about the connection between Jacob and Moses?
- 5.

**Rashi, Deuteronomy Chapter 34:6** He buried him: The Holy One did so to honor him; Rabbi Ishmael said, "He buried himself."

**Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra Chapter 34:6** He buried him: he buried himself; he entered a cave in the valley....There he died and there he remained as his burial place....It seems clear that wherever he died was his burial place.

1. How did Rashi and Ibn Ezra each understand the pronoun at the beginning of this verse? Why do you think they arrived at different conclusions about its meaning?
2. What is the problem with Ibn Ezra's understanding of the verse? How does he reconcile this problem?

### **Babylonian Talmud Sotah 14a**

Rabbi Hama son of Rabbi Hanina said: “You shall walk before the Lord your God,” (Deuteronomy 13:5). Is it possible then for a human being to follow the shekhinah; has it not been said, “For the Lord your God is a devouring fire?” The meaning of this verse is to follow the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He...The Holy One, blessed be He, buried the dead for it is written, “And He buried him in the valley,” so do you bury the dead.... Rabbi Simlai expounded: The Torah begins with acts of loving kindness and ends with acts of loving kindness. It begins with acts of loving kindness as it is written, “And the Lord made for Adam and his wife coats of skin and clothed them.” (Genesis 3:21) And it ends with acts of loving kindness, for it is written, “And he buried him in the valley.”

1. What do the passages us teach us about the importance of personally seeing to the burial of the dead?
2. What other examples of God’s loving kindness do we make reference to in the prayer book and in the Bible?

### **Sefer Aggadah, Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 13b**

R. Hama bar Hanina asked: Why was the burial place of Moses hidden from the eyes of mortals? and answered: Because it was revealed and known to the Holy One that the Temple was to be destroyed and Israel banished from their Land; hence [the spot was hidden], lest at that time Israel should come to the sepulcher of Moses and stand there, weeping and beseeching Moses, saying, "Moses our teacher, rise up for prayer in our behalf." Then Moses would rise and nullify the decree [of banishment]. For after their death, the righteous are even more beloved by God than while alive.

1. Why does Rabbi Hama believe that Moses’ burial place was hidden from the Jewish people? What other reasons might there be for hiding the burial place of Moses?
2. Why would God not have wanted Moses to convince him to annul his decree of exile against the Jewish people? Did God really want to punish the children of Israel?

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#### ***How to use Torah Table Talk***

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind  
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”***

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