

The book cover features a decorative border with a repeating pattern of stylized floral motifs and geometric shapes. The central text is arranged in a formal, centered layout. The top and bottom corners of the border contain circular medallions with Hebrew text. The central text is as follows:

THE
BOOK
of
LEGENDS
SEFER HA - AGGADAH

*Legends from
the Talmud and Midrash*

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will not budge from here until You void that decree." At the same time, he donned sackcloth—indeed, wrapped himself in it—strewed ashes upon himself, and persisted in prayer and supplications before the Holy One, until heaven and earth—indeed, all things made during the six days of creation—were shaken, so that they said, "Perhaps the intention of the Holy One to remake His world is about to be executed. A divine voice came forth and said: As yet, the Holy One's intention to remake His world is not about to be executed. But the words "in whose hand is the soul of every living thing" (Job 12:10) [are in force and apply even to Moses].

What did the Holy One do then? He had it proclaimed at every gate of every firmament that Moses' prayer be not accepted nor brought up to His presence, because the decree concerning him had been sealed.

Still, as the sound of Moses' prayer to Him above grew even stronger, the Holy One summoned the ministering angels and commanded them: Go down in haste, bolt all the gates of every firmament—for Moses' prayer was like a sword, ripping and tearing, and nothing could stop it.

In that instant, Moses said to the Holy One, "Master of the universe, known and revealed to You is the trouble and pain I suffered on account of Israel, until they came to believe in Your Name. How much pain I suffered because of them, until I inculcated among them the Torah and its precepts! I said to myself: As I witnessed their woe, so will I be allowed to witness their weal. Yet now that Israel's weal has come, You tell me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan' [Deut. 3:27]. Thus Your Torah, which asserts, 'In the same day thou shalt give him his hire' [Deut. 24:15], You manifestly turn into fraud. Is such the reward for forty years of labor that I labored until Israel became a holy people loyal to their faith?" The Holy One replied, "Nevertheless, such is the decree that has gone forth from My Presence!" Then Moses said, "Master of the universe, if I am not to enter the Land alive, let me enter dead, as the bones of Joseph are about to enter." The Holy One replied, "Moses, when Joseph came to Egypt, he did not deny his identity.¹ He declared openly, 'I am a Hebrew.' But when you came to Midian, you denied yours."²

Then Moses said, "Master of the universe, if You will not let me enter the Land of Israel, allow me to remain [alive] like the beasts of the field, who eat grass, drink water, and thus savor the world—let me be like one of these." At that, God replied, "Enough. Speak no more to Me of this matter" (Deut. 3:26).

But Moses spoke up again, "Master of the universe, if not [like a beast of the field], then let me become like a bird that flies daily in every direction to gather its food and in the evening returns to its nest—let me be like one of these." The Holy One replied again, "Enough."

When Moses saw that his prayer was not heeded, he

went to implore heaven and earth, saying: Entreat mercy in my behalf. They replied: Before entreating mercy for you, we should entreat mercy for ourselves, for it is said, "The heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment" (Isa. 51:6). He then went to implore the sun and the moon, and said: Entreat mercy in my behalf. But these replied: Before entreating mercy for you, we should entreat mercy for ourselves, for it is said, "The moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed" (Isa. 24:23).

Then he went to implore the stars and the planets, and said: Entreat mercy in my behalf. But these replied: Before entreating mercy for you, we should entreat mercy for ourselves, for it is said, "All the host of heaven shall molder away" (Isa. 34:4).

Then he went to implore the mountains and the hills, and said: Entreat mercy in my behalf. But these also replied: Before entreating mercy for you, we should entreat mercy for ourselves, for it is said, "The mountains will depart, and the hills be removed" (Isa. 54:10).

Then he went to implore the sea and cried: Entreat mercy in my behalf. The sea replied: Son of Amram, why is this day different from former days? Are you not the same son of Amram who came to me with your rod, smote me, split me into twelve paths, when I could not withstand you because the Presence was proceeding at your right? What's happened to you now? As the sea reminded Moses of what he was able to do in his younger years, he cried out in anguish, "Oh that I were as in the months of old" (Job 29:2). [O sea], at the time I stood over you, I was a king in the world, but now, though I prostrate myself, no heed is given me.

Then Moses went to the angel of the Presence³ and implored: Entreat mercy in my behalf, that I not die. The angel replied: Moses my master, of what avail is this effort? For I have heard from behind the curtain above that your prayer in this matter will not be heard.

Moses put his hands on his head and lamented and wept, as he said: To whom am I to go now to entreat mercy in my behalf? In that instant the Holy One was filled with anger at Moses, so that Moses was constrained to remind God that He had described Himself as "the Lord, the Lord, God, who is merciful and compassionate" (Exod. 34:6). Whereupon the holy spirit was assuaged.

Then the Holy One said to Moses: Moses, I have sworn two oaths: one concerning Israel—after they did that deed⁴—that I would destroy them from the world; and the other that you are to die and not enter the Land. The oath I had sworn concerning Israel, I set aside at your plea when you entreated Me, "Pardon, I pray Thee" (Num. 14:19); and now you entreat once again that I set aside My oath to comply with your plea "Let me go over, I pray Thee" (Deut. 3:25). You seize the well's rope at both ends—do you not?⁵ If you wish to have "Let me go over, I pray Thee" fulfilled, you must nullify "Pardon, I pray

¹ Joseph told the chief butler, "I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews" (Gen. 40:15).

² So that Jethro's daughters, reporting to their father, said that an Egyptian helped them (Exod. 2:19).

³ Metatron.

⁴ Made the golden calf.

⁵ The rope for a well has two ends—as one comes up, the other goes down. But when a man holds both ends of the rope, he can neither lower nor raise the bucket.

Thee"; or if you wish to have "Pardon, I pray Thee" fulfilled, then nullify "Let me go over, I pray Thee." When Moses our teacher heard this, he said: Master of the universe, let Moses and a thousand like him perish, but let not a fingernail of one person in Israel be hurt.

Nevertheless, Moses said to God: Master of the universe, shall the feet that went up to the firmament, the face that confronted the Presence, the hands that received the Torah from Your hand—shall these now lick dust?

The Holy One replied: Such was My thought [from the very beginning], and such must be the way of the world: each generation is to have its own interpreters of Scripture, each generation is to have its own providers, each generation is to have its own leaders. Until now it had been your portion to serve Me, but now your disciple Joshua's portion to serve has come.

Moses said to the Holy One: Master of the universe, if I must die [to vacate my post] for Joshua, let me be his disciple [in my remaining hours]. The Holy One replied: If that is what you wish to do, go and do it.

So Moses rose early to be at Joshua's doorway, where Joshua sat and interpreted Scripture. [In order to hide his identity] Moses stooped and put his hand over his heart [thus covering his face with the crook of his arm]. At the same time, Joshua's eyes were veiled [by God], making him unable to see Moses, so that Moses would be humiliated and come to be reconciled to his dying.

In the meantime, when people came to Moses' doorway to study Torah and asked, "Where is our teacher Moses?" they were told, "He rose early and went to Joshua's doorway." They went and found him at Joshua's doorway—Joshua seated and Moses standing. They said to Joshua: What has come over you, that you allow our teacher Moses to stand while you sit? When Joshua's eyes were again clear and he recognized Moses, he rent his garments, cried out, and wept: My master, my master! My father, my father!

Then the people said to Moses, "Moses our teacher, teach us Torah." He replied, "I no longer have the authority." They: "We will not leave you." Then a divine voice came forth and commanded the people, "Be willing to learn from Joshua." With that, the people submitted to the command to sit and learn from Joshua's mouth.

Joshua sat at the head, Moses at his right, and Aaron's sons at his left, while Joshua taught in Moses' presence. At that session, the tradition of wisdom was taken away from Moses and given to Joshua.

When they went out, Moses walked at Joshua's left, and as they entered the Tent of Meeting, the pillar of cloud came down and formed a partition between the two. After the cloud departed, Moses went over to Joshua and asked, "What did the Word say to you?" Joshua replied, "When the Word used to reveal itself to you, did I know what it said to you?"

In that instant, Moses cried out in anguish and said, "Rather a hundred deaths than a single pang of envy. Master of universes, until now I sought life. But now my soul is surrendered to You."

After Moses became reconciled to his dying, the Holy One spoke up, saying: "Who will rise up for Me in behalf of evildoers?" [Ps. 94:16]. Who will rise up in Israel's

behalf at the time of My anger? Who will stand up for them during My children's warfare [with enemies]? Who will entreat mercy in their behalf when they sin before Me?"

At that time Metratron came and, prostrating himself before the Holy One, sought to comfort Him: Master of the universe, Moses during his life was Yours, and when dead he will still be Yours. The Holy One replied: Let Me tell you a parable. I am like a king who had a son. Day after day the son so provoked his father that the father wished to slay him. But his mother kept saving him from the father's hand. Then, when the mother died, the king wept on and on without cease, so that finally his servants asked, "Our lord king, why are you weeping so disconsolately?" He replied, "I weep not only for my wife; I weep for her and for my son as well. Many times when I became angry at him and wished to slay him, his mother would save him from me."

So it is with Me, the Holy One said to Metratron. I weep not only for Moses; I weep for him and for Israel as well. Many times when they provoked Me and I was angry at them, it was he who stood in the breach before Me to turn back My anger.

In that instant, the Holy One said to Gabriel: Go forth and bring the soul of Moses. Gabriel replied: He who is equal in importance to sixty myriads—how can I bear to watch him dying?

Then the Holy One said to Michael: Go and bring the soul of Moses. Michael replied: I was his teacher, and he my pupil. How can I bear to watch him dying?

Then the Holy One said to Samael: Go and fetch the soul of Moses. Now, the angel Samael, chief of all satanic spirits, had long been awaiting the soul of Moses, as he kept saying, "When will the instant arrive in which Moses is to die, so that I might come down and snatch his soul from him? When will Michael weep, while I fill my mouth with laughter?" He immediately clothed himself with anger, girded on his sword, wrapped himself in ruthlessness, and went forth to encounter Moses. Samael found him seated and writing the Ineffable Name in a scroll. The radiance of his appearance was like the radiance of the sun's visage; indeed, Moses looked like an angel of the Lord of hosts.

Samael was so frightened by the sight of Moses that trembling seized him, so that he found himself unable to open his mouth to say anything, until Moses asked Samael, "Evil one, what are you doing here?" "I have come to take away your soul." "Who sent you?" "He who created all beings." "Go away. I want to praise the Holy One—I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord" (Ps. 118:17). Samael: "Moses, why do you vaunt yourself? The Lord has those who would praise Him—'The heavens declare the works of the Lord'" (Ps. 19:2). Moses: "I shall silence them, and I will voice His praise—'Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth'" (Deut. 32:1). Samael: "The souls of all the world's inhabitants are placed under my authority." Moses: "But I have power greater than that of all the world's inhabitants." Samael: "Wherein is your power?" Moses: "I, Amram's son, at the age of three prophesied that out of flames of fire I would receive the Torah; [at that age] I

entered the palace of a king and took his crown from his head.¹ At eighty I performed signs and wonders in Egypt, and in the sight of all Egyptians brought forth sixty myriads; split the [Red] Sea into twelve paths; ascended to, and broke a path in, heaven; took hold [of the throne of glory]; and engaged in strife with angels, until I prevailed over heaven's retinue and had them disclose their secrets to the children of men.² I spoke with the Holy One face to face, received the fiery Torah from His right hand, and taught it to Israel. I waged war against Sihon and Og, two giants of the peoples of the world, struck them with the rod in hand, and slew them. I made the sun and the moon stand still in the zenith of the world. Who among the world's inhabitants could have done such things? Away, get out of my sight! I won't give you my soul!"

Samael went back and reported to the Almighty. The Holy One commanded once more: Go, bring the soul of Moses.

Samael straightaway drew his sword from its sheath and stood over Moses. At that, Moses became angry at him, took the rod upon which God's Ineffable Name was graven, and struck Samael with all his might, until Samael fled from him. With God's Ineffable Name in his hand, Moses pursued Samael until he [overtook him], plucked a radiant beam from between his own eyes, and blinded the eyes of Samael.

But a divine voice came forth and said, "The time has come for you to depart from the world." Moses pleaded with the Holy One, "Master of the universe, for my sake, remember the day when You revealed Yourself to me at the bush; for my sake, remember the time when I stood on Mount Sinai forty days and forty nights. I beg You, do not hand me over to the angel of death."

Again a divine voice came forth and said, "Fear not, I Myself will attend you and your burial."

Moses pleaded, "Then wait until I bless Israel. On account of the warnings and reprimands I heaped upon them, they never found any ease with me." Then he began to bless each tribe separately, but when he saw that time was running short, he included all the tribes in a single blessing.³

Then he said to Israel, "Because of the Torah and its precepts, I troubled you greatly. Now, please forgive me."

They replied, "Our master, our lord, you are forgiven." In their turn they said to him, "Moses our teacher, we troubled you even more, we made your burden so heavy. Please forgive us." Moses replied, "You are forgiven."

Again a divine voice came forth: "The moment has come for you to depart from this world." Moses replied, "Blessed be His Name! May He live and endure forever and ever!" Then he said to Israel, "I implore you, when you enter the Land, remember me and my bones, and say, 'Alas for the son of Amram, who had run before us like a horse, yet his bones fell in the wilderness.'"

Again a divine voice came forth and said, "Within

half a moment you are to depart from the world."

Moses lifted both his arms, placed them over his heart, and called out to Israel, "Behold the end of flesh and blood." Moses arose and washed his hands and feet, and thus became as pure as a seraphim.

Then, from the highest heaven of heavens, the Holy One came down to take the soul of Moses, and with Him the three ministering angels, Michael, Gabriel, and Zagzagel. Michael laid out his bier, Gabriel spread a fine linen cloth at his head, while Zagzagel spread it at his feet. Michael stood at one side and Gabriel at the other. Then the Holy One said to Moses, "Moses, close your eyes," and he closed his eyes. "Put your arms over your breast," and he put his arms over his breast. "Bring your legs together," and he brought his legs together. Then the Holy One summoned Moses' soul, saying, "My daughter, I had fixed the time of your sojourn in the body of Moses at a hundred and twenty years. Now your time has to come to depart. Depart. Delay not."

She replied, "Master of the universe, I know that You are God of all spirits and Lord of all souls. You created me and placed me in the body of Moses one hundred and twenty years ago. Is there a body in the world more pure than the body of Moses? I love him, and I do not wish to depart from him."

The Holy One exclaimed, "Depart, and I will take you up to the highest heaven of heavens, and will set you under the throne of glory, next to the cherubim and seraphim."

In that instant, the Holy One kissed Moses, and took his soul with that kiss.

At that, the holy spirit wept and said, "There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses" (Deut. 34:10).

The heavens wept and said, "The godly man is perished out of the earth" (Mic. 7:2).

The earth wept and said, "The upright among men is no more" (Mic. 7:2).

The ministering angels wept and said, "He executed the righteousness of the Lord" (Deut. 33:21).

Israel wept and said, "And His ordinances are with Israel" (Deut. 33:21).

These as well as those said together, "Let him enter in peace and rest on his couch" (Isa. 57:2).⁴

138. It is taught: "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there" (Deut. 34:5). Is it possible that Moses, while still alive, would have written, "So Moses . . . died"? The truth is, Scripture up to this passage was written by Moses; from this passage on, Scripture was written by Joshua son of Nun. Such is the opinion of R. Judah—some say, of R. Nehemiah. But R. Simeon said to R. Judah: Is it possible that the Torah scroll is short of even a single letter? If it were short, how could Moses have commanded, "Take this book of Torah" (Deut. 31:26)?⁵ Rather, the

¹ See above, chap. 4, §19.

² See above in this chapter, §49.

³ See Deut. 33:27-29.

⁴ Deut. R. 7:10 and 11:10; Tanhuma, *Va-et'hannan*, §6; Yalkut, *Va-et'hannan*, §821.

⁵ If he had not finished writing the Torah, he would not have referred to it as "the book of Torah."

meaning is that, up to this passage, the Holy One dictated, and Moses repeated the words and wrote them out, but from this passage on, the Holy One dictated, and Moses [without repeating the words]¹ wrote them down with tears in his eyes.²

139. It is taught that R. Eliezer the Elder said: Over an area of twelve by twelve *mil*, the dimension of the camp of Israel, a divine voice kept reverberating, "Moses is dead—Israel's great scribe!"³

140. Moses died on the seventh of Adar, and he was born on the seventh of Adar.⁴

Moses' Burial Place

141. "And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab over against Beth-peor" (Deut. 34:6). R. Berekhiah commented: Although Scripture thus provides one clue within another about its location, nevertheless [it goes on

to say], "No man knoweth of his sepulcher" (ibid.). The wicked kingdom of Rome once dispatched a request to the military garrison at Beth-peor: "Locate the spot where Moses is buried." When the soldiers stood on high ground, the spot seemed to them to be below; when they stood on low ground, it seemed to them to be above, fulfilling the words, "No man knoweth of his sepulcher to this day."⁵

142. R. Hama bar Hanina asked: Why was the sepulcher 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.⁶

¹ Because of his grief.

² B. BB 15a; B. Men 30a.

³ B. Sot 13b and En Yaakov, ad loc.; Sif Deut., §357.

⁴ B. Meg 13b.

⁵ B. Sot 13b-14a.

⁶ B. Sot 13b and En Yaakov, ad loc.