

DEUTERONOMY RABBAH 11 (END)

Translated from the Vilna edition of *Midrash Rabbah*.

[God has asked Gabriel and then Michael to fetch the soul of Moses to heaven, but each has politely declined]. After this God said to Samael the wicked, 'Go and bring (back here) the soul of Moses!' Immediately Samael clothed himself with wrath and buckled on his sword and wrapped himself in cruelty and came into the presence of Moses. When he saw that Moses was sitting and inscribing the Ineffable Name, and that the splendor of his appearance was equal to that of the sun, and that he resembled one of the angels of the Lord of Hosts, Samael began to fear Moses. He thought, 'Surely no (mere) angel is able to take away the soul of Moses!'

Even before Samael showed himself to Moses, Moses was aware that Samael had arrived. While Samael gazed at Moses, trembling and shaking seized him like that of a woman giving birth, and he could not muster the courage to speak to Moses until Moses addressed him, saying, "'There is no peace (here probably 'greeting'), says the Lord, for the wicked" (Isa 48:22). What are you doing here?' He answered, 'I have come to take your soul.' He said, 'Who has sent you?' He answered, 'He Who created all creatures.' He said, 'You will not take my soul!' He answered, 'Every one born in this world eventually hands over their soul to me.' He (Moses) said, 'I have more power than any other person born in this world.' He responded, 'What is the nature of your power?' He said to him, 'I am the son of 'Amram. When I emerged from the womb of my mother, (I was already) circumcised, and so it was not necessary to circumcise me. On the very day of my birth I acquired courage, and was able to walk on my feet and converse with my father and my mother, and had no need to be nursed with milk. When I was three months old, I uttered a prophecy, saying that I was destined to receive the Torah from the midst of fiery flames. When I went outside, I entered the palace of the king and removed the crown from his head. When I was eighty years old, I performed signs and wonders in Egypt, and led out sixty myriads of people in the sight of the whole land of Egypt. I divided the sea into twelve parts, transformed bitter waters into sweet, ascended and traveled the road to heaven, took possession (of the Law) during the dissension of the angels, accepted the Torah of fire, lodged beneath the throne of fire, took shelter beneath the column of fire, spoke

with God face to face, and achieved victory over the entire divine retinue! I communicated their secrets to mortal humanity, received the Torah from the right hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, and taught it to Israel. I furthermore waged war against Sihon and 'Og, two idol-worshipping giants who were so tall that at the time of the Flood the waters reached only to their ankles. I made the sun and moon stand still, struck them (i.e., the aforementioned giants) with the staff in my hand, and killed them! Who is there among all those born into this world that has been able to do (all) this? Depart from here, wicked one! You cannot respond! Flee from my presence; I will not hand over my soul to you!

Immediately Samael returned (to God) and reported (what happened) before God. The Holy One, blessed be He, replied to Samael, 'Go and bring back the soul of Moses!' He quickly drew his sword from its sheath, (returned), and stood by Moses. Moses immediately became angry at him, took the staff which was in his hand and upon which the Ineffable Name was engraved, and proceeded to use it to beat Samael with all his strength. When Samael fled before him, he pursued after him with the Ineffable Name. He (Moses) removed his 'ray of glory' (halo?) from his forehead and blinded his (Samael's) eyes, which up to now had been fixed on Moses.

The time (of Moses) came to an end. A divine voice went forth, saying, 'The end, your death, draws near.' Moses responded to God, 'Master of the Universe! Remember the day when you were revealed to me in the bush, and you said to me, Go, I shall send you to Pharaoh to bring forth my people, the children of Israel, from Egypt. Remember the day when I stood upon Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights. Please do not hand me over into the power of the Angel of Death!' A divine voice answered, 'Do not be afraid. I Myself shall attend to you and to your burial.'

At that time Moses stood and purified himself like (one of) the seraphim. The Holy One, blessed be He, descended from the highest heavens to fetch the soul of Moses, and three ministering angels accompanied Him—Michael, Gabriel, and Zagzagel. Michael laid out the bier for Moses, and Gabriel spread a linen cloth at its head. Zagzagel (stood) at its foot, with Michael on one side and Gabriel on the other side. God said to Moses, 'Moses, shut your eyes,' and he closed his eyes. He said, 'Place your hand upon your chest,' and he placed his hand on his chest. He said, 'Put your feet close together,' and he put his feet close together. Then God called out to the soul in the midst of his body, saying, 'My daughter! I allocated you one hundred and twenty years to be in the body of Moses; now your time for departure has

arrived. Come out (and) do not delay!’ The soul responded, ‘Master of the Universe! I realize that You are the God over all spirits and life-forces. The soul(s) of the living and the dead are (eventually) surrendered to Your power. You created me and formed me and placed me in the body of Moses for one hundred and twenty years. Is there any body in the universe that is purer than the body of Moses? He has never experienced putrid decay, worms, or maggots. I love him and do not wish to leave him!’

God answered, ‘Soul! Come out without delay, and I will cause you to ascend to the highest heaven, and I will install you beneath My Throne of Glory¹ next to the cherubim, seraphim, and (other heavenly) hosts!’ The soul responded, ‘Master of the Universe! From right beside Your Presence on high there descended two angels, ‘Uzza and ‘Azael, and they lusted after mortal women and corrupted their (angelic) nature upon the earth. You then (as punishment) suspended them between the surface of the earth and the sky. However, the son of ‘Amram ceased marital relations with his wife from the day that You were revealed to him in the bush, as it says, “And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman” (Num 12:1). Please permit me to remain in the body of Moses!’

At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, kissed Moses, and took his soul while kissing his mouth. Then God wept, saying, ‘Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will stand up for me against evildoers?’ (Ps 94:16). Divine inspiration proclaimed, ‘There shall never again arise a prophet like Moses in Israel’ (Deut 34:10). The heavens wept and said, ‘The faithful one has disappeared from the earth’ (Micah 7:2), and the earth wept and said, ‘and there is no upright one among humanity’ (ibid.). When Joshua sought his teacher and could not find him, he wept and said, ‘Help, O Lord, for there is no longer anyone who is godly; the faithful have disappeared from humankind’ (Ps 12:1). The ministering angels were saying, ‘he executed the justice of the Lord’ (Deut 33:21), while Israel responded, ‘and His ordinances for Israel’ (ibid.). Both groups said in unison, ‘May he enter in peace! Those who walk uprightly will rest on their couches’ (Isa 57:2). May the memory of the righteous be for a blessing, and may his soul have life in the World to Come! Amen, may His will be done! Praise the Lord always, amen and amen!

¹ Cf. *Abot R. Natan* A §12 (ed. Schechter, 50).