

8 Adar 5778
February 23rd, 2018

To My Dear Students,

As you can see above, today is the 8th of Adar. Yesterday, 7 Adar, was the birthdate and *yahrzeit* (date of death) of Moses. Our Torah Portion, *Tetzaveh*, is always read during this week of 7 Adar and it is, therefore, ironic that this is the one and only Portion in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy that does not mention Moses by name. In fact, during the week in which we recognize Moses' birth and death, the Portion seems to go out of its way to omit Moses by name.

Why? Moses knew G-d in greater intimacy than any human being before or since. And yet, despite his incalculable contributions, our religion is not called "Mosaism." Rather, our faith is named "Judaism," for Judaism transcends any one person, no matter how singular his gifts and soul-stirring his influence. Unlike Christianity, whose name is synonymous with its leading figure, and which would collapse without the Christ, Judaism is greater than its principal hero.

Look at the contrast between the description of Moses' birth in the Torah and the birth of Jesus recounted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the New Testament account of his arrival, a star announces Jesus' miraculous birth and the names of his father and mother are revealed. This lavish nativity scene does not find its counterpart in Torah's laconic description of Moses' birth: "Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman and she became pregnant and she gave birth to a son." Here, no stars designate his birth site; no miraculous trappings surround his arrival. Further, neither his name, nor the names of his parents are mentioned. The account of Jesus' death is replete with detail and it is ascribed cosmic significance. But the Torah tells us that Moses died and was buried in an unmarked grave.

So, during the week of Moses' birth and death, his name is not mentioned in the Torah Portion designated for that time.

I believe this is deliberate. We Jewish people are never to confuse a man with G-d or think that G-d limits Himself by taking on the life of a human being. We believe that there is the Creator and there is the creation and that it is foreign to us that the One could become the other or that a man should be worshipped as all-powerful and all knowing.

The message of Torah from the brief notice of Moses' birth to the short announcement of his death to his burial in an unmarked grave is that Moses was a man and a man only. The minimization of Moses sets the stage for our understanding of man in relationship to G-d: we do not deify human beings. We may engage in joint enterprises with G-d, but we are very junior partners, very *human* partners, indeed.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Mark S. Miller