



# CRIS NEWSLETTER

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## PERSPECTIVES: WAS MOSES A PROTO-PREPPY?

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At seminary, needless to say, this particular question arose neither in exegesis nor in homiletics classes. Biblically speaking, Moses was "*navi*," "*prophet*," and "*eved YEHWH*," the servant of Yahweh. The classical Rabbinic tradition designated him "*rabbenu*," our master, our teacher; Maimonides and the medievalists maintained that image essentially unchanged.

So had I—until our Andover Jewish Student Union's Andover-Exeter Shabbaton (Sabbath celebration) coincided with the synagogue's weekly Torah portion dealing with the birth, youth, and call of Moses. That Sabbath morning, I read:

"And the child grew, and she [the child's mother] brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses. . . . One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked upon their burdens . . ." (Exodus 2:10-11)

Imm. Rather paradigmatic of some of our students, isn't it? An attractive, talented, promising lad is sent away from home during his formative years, is educated in a social, cultural, and economic milieu different from that of his family and community of origin. At maturity, he returns home and must now try to determine who he is, where he belongs, and how he shall relate to that community from which he had earlier departed. So typical is this of many of our students that an amusing thought crossed my mind: perhaps Moses was a proto-preppy, an early version of some of our students.

But how test such a notion: what, in fact, happened to Moses between his "adoption" by Pharaoh's daughter and his achievement of "grown-up" status? About this crucial phase of his life, the Biblical narrative is terse and frustratingly incomplete. Not so the Rabbinic tradition. The Rabbis of the classical period were as curious as I concerning Moses' education and development during late childhood and adolescence, and the Midrashic tradition preserves some of their answers, perhaps purely imaginative, perhaps based on very ancient oral legacies. As I turned to them, I was more and more captivated by the half-facetious, quarter-irreverent, and quarter-illuminating notion that Moses might, indeed, be a proto-preppy!

Is such a formulation entirely absurd? Before it is summarily dismissed from consideration, let me share excerpts from a few of the Midrashim that I found intriguingly supportive of such an idea, along with brief bits of my reflections.<sup>1</sup>

The Faculty and Curriculum: ". . . his foster mother . . . had him educated with great care. . . . At great cost, teachers were invited to come to Egypt from neighboring lands to educate Moses. Some came of their own accord to instruct him in the sciences and the liberal arts."

A fine, costly faculty and a properly balanced academic curriculum: apart from possible salary discrepancies, do we offer or demand more at the strictly intellectual level?

- B. The Student: "By reason of his admirable endowments of mind, he soon excelled his teachers in knowledge. His learning seemed a process of mere recollecting, and when there was a difference of opinion among scholars, he selected the correct one instinctively, for his mind refused to store up anything that was false."

"Youth, of requisite qualifications, from every quarter" is what our schools seek. From the Rabbinic description, Moses certainly had the "requisite qualifications" intellectually, and being a lad of Hebrew parentage, he hailed from as unlikely a quarter as some could imagine.

- C. Conflicting Communal Hopes and Pressures: Supporter of the status quo or challenger of privilege? Defender of the upper class or an advocate for the under-privileged and the dispossessed? Will our valedictorian, *magna cum laude*, put his talents to use on behalf of his community of origin (in this case trapped in the Ghetto of Goshen), or will he cast his lot with the palace society that has provided his education of excellence?

Are these questions so far removed from those that confront some of our own students?

- D. The Moral Dimension: "He deserves more praise for his unusual strength of will than for his natural capacity, for he succeeded in transforming an originally evil disposition—covetous, haughty, sensual—into a noble, exalted character . . . aided by his resolution . . . strong will . . . and severe discipline."

Central as character education is in most of our school Constitutions, it was centrally present also in the Rabbinic portrayal of Moses' educational training, albeit self-administered.

- E. Resolution of the Identity and Value Conflicts: "One day--it was after he was grown up, and had passed beyond the years of childhood--Moses went to the land of Goshen, in which lived the children of Israel. There he saw the burdens under which his people were groaning. . . . The sight of his enslaved people touched Moses unto tears. . . . He did not disdain to help his unfortunate brethren at their heavy tasks as much as lay in his power. He dismissed all thought of his high station in court, shouldered a share of the burdens put upon the Israelites, and toiled in their place. . . . Moses continued to do all he could to alleviate the suffering of his brethren to the best of his ability."

So he did, after all, identify with the oppressed rather than the oppressors; he did, after all, renounce his opportunity for high position with Egypower International, Inc. The Andover Constitution's hope that students would be convinced of "the several great duties they owe to God, their country, their parents, their neighbors, and themselves" is, with Moses, certainly realized.



These, then, were some of the associations that flowed freely through my mind that Sabbath morning. Anticipations of the Andover-Exeter Shabbaton surely fed the fantasy which at first simply amused me. But on reflection I was intrigued, and I now feel challenged. However flip it may appear at first glance, doesn't this image of Moses as proto-preppy surprisingly foreshadow the stated intentions of many of the founders of our independent schools? I'd like to think so.

And thinking so, I'd like to see this image of Moses operative and effective in our academies today. Among the possible candidates for Preppy Role-Model of the Millenia, Moses strikes me as not at all a bad choice.

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<sup>1</sup>A convenient English source is Louis Ginzberg's Legends of the Bible; a more complete English source is Volumes II, V, and VII of his The Legends of the Jews.

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CRIS lost two valued friends this year into the Life Triumphant:

Rankine G. Hinman, Director of Studies Emeritus of Westminster School, CT, served CRIS as Trustee, Vice-Chairman, Chairman, Honorary Trustee. His careful stewardship nourished the Council through years of change.

Daniel D. Test, Jr., former head of Westtown School, PA, supporter and Honorary Trustee, strengthened the Council with his vision and perception.

We are grateful for their lives.

READ ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY?

Tell us about your summer reading--or any books you have recently discovered that are especially stimulating or nourishing. We'll share the compiled list with you for next summer.

Send title and author to the CRIS office: we'll do the bibliographic research. All genre acceptable from erudite essay to glorious trash.

Help us help others!

Yvonne Fast joined CRIS last spring as administrative assistant, office manager, secretary. Yvonne graduated from Low-Heywood and Hunter College, has her Master's in English from Fordham Univ., and also teaches for Mercy College in the New York State prison system. We welcome her.

CRIS PLACEMENT SERVICE

CRIS offers a limited, informal, unofficial placement service for chaplains and religion teachers and for schools seeking such personnel. We are not an employment agency and are not equipped to give placement advice. We can introduce schools where we know an opening exists to people whom we know are ready to make a change.

Attempts will be made to match candidates and schools and candidate material will be forwarded to inquiring schools. Correspondence and interview arrangements are the responsibility of the inquiring parties; CRIS is not liable for subsequent divorces.

Candidates should send resumes, transcripts, and references to the CRIS office along with a \$15 registration fee. Schools should send a job description. The service is free to member schools; non-member schools are charged \$15.