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Definition: **Moses** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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1 *Old Testament* the Hebrew prophet who led the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land and gave them divinely revealed laws

2 **Ed.** born 1956, US hurdler; winner of the 400 m hurdles in the 1976 and 1984 Olympic Games

3 **Grandma**, real name *Anna Mary Robertson Moses*. 1860–1961, US painter of primitives, who began to paint at the age of 75



Image from: [The Finding of Moses in National Gallery Collection](#)

Summary Article: **Moses**

From *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development*

Moses led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and through the Sinai Peninsula to the doorstep of their entry into Canaan and the fountainhead of Israelite law. Jewish and Christian traditions say that God revealed the law (found in the Bible in Exodus 20-Deuteronomy 30) to him at Mount Sinai and on a plain in the country of Moab, now part of the modern state of Jordan.

Indeed, tradition ascribes authorship of Genesis through Deuteronomy (except for the account of his death in Deuteronomy 34) to him. His leadership of the escapees in their travels and the high morality of the teachings ascribed to him make him a dominant figure of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament.

Narratives about Moses include that of his birth to a priestly family in servitude in Egypt (Exodus 2-3). It offers a twist on the typical story of abandonment. His life was threatened by a governmental edict to slay all Hebrew male babies as a means of population control, but his family concealed him as long as possible, and then placed him in a small watertight boat where Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe. His sister Miriam stayed close by, and offered to find a Hebrew wet nurse (his own mother) for the child when the princess found him. When he was old enough to be weaned, he was taken to the Pharaoh's daughter to live among the royalty.

Moses broke from Pharaoh's house after killing an Egyptian who he saw abusing an Israelite. He married into the family of a Midianite priest, and assumed the life of a shepherd until God summoned him to the task of leading Israel from Egypt. En route to begin that task, Moses had another experience in which God commanded Moses' wife, Zipporah, to circumcise him (Exodus 4:24-26), thus reinstating a rite that God commanded Abraham to begin. Jewish males were to be circumcised on the 8th day of their life as a permanent, visible sign of their covenantal relationship to God.

The most mysterious event prior to Israel's escape from Egypt was the Passover, during which the firstborn sons of the Egyptians died, but the sons of Israelites survived who had followed Moses' instructions to touch blood from sacrificial lambs to the lintel and doorposts of their homes (Exodus 12:22). The Passover observance features children asking about the significance of the meal and receiving instruction from the parents.

Moses, at times aided and at times opposed by Aaron, his brother, and Miriam, his sister, led the

people not only out of Egypt, but—according to tradition—for 40 years in the Sinai, perhaps in the northern region around Kadesh-barnea, before leading them to an area east of the Jordan River, where they were poised to enter it under new, younger leadership. He died after seeing the promised land of Canaan from a mountain.

Moses' other contribution was the mediation of God's law on Mount Sinai. Many modern scholars debate the extent to which that law derived from Moses himself, but many would agree that he was responsible for some or much of the law (particularly the Ten Commandments) and came to be seen as the fountainhead of all law or *torah*(instruction).

The Commandments may be divided into two parts. The first four deal with how all people, children and adults, are to relate themselves to God: worship God only, make no idols, not blaspheme God by acting badly in the name of God, and take regular times for rest and worship. The observance of Sabbath, at home or in groups, characterized Israelite life, and may have been unique to Israel in the ancient Middle East. The other six deal with how to relate to other people: Honor parents, respect the life and property of others, abstain from sexual relationships outside of marriage, do not lie, and do not covet. It is difficult to imagine six rules more basic to human development and community life.

The most important commandment for the religious development of the young is the command to honor one's parents. Modern readers often understand it to be aimed at children, and it surely was. It was also aimed at adults. Under this law, people never outlive their obligations to honor and respect their parents. This lesson, learned young, is to last throughout one's life as adult children might end up as primary caregivers to their parents.

Tradition teaches that Moses received from God the rest of the laws in Exodus through Deuteronomy. In those four books, other laws pertaining to relationships between children and parents include prohibitions against striking or cursing one's parents (Exodus 21:17, 17) and against incest (Leviticus 18:12-18). Children are to receive regular instruction and play an active role in religious observance. They are to memorize and recite laws, and along with their parents bind small representations of those laws on the doors of their houses and to their bodies (forehead and arm) to remind them to obey (Deuteronomy 6:7-9).

In the absence of formal schools, almost all instruction, behavioral and occupational, is meant to come from within the family. The Mosaic law was and still is intended both to help shape the character of the children and to regulate family life in the community and before God as a people consecrated for life before God. Dietary regulations (Leviticus 11) also shape the home and bind together the community as places of covenantal sharing, distinguishing in groups from outsiders, and preserving cultural identity.

To this day, Moses' life serves as a role model to young people. For example, a typical curriculum of a Jewish primary day school might have gradeappropriate instruction taking Moses as a role model for everything from behaving with humility to keeping the commandments, staying physically fit, and making charitable contributions. He is also venerated in Christianity, although Jesus is seen as the new Moses, the new lawgiver. In Islam, the Qur'an portrays Moses as having received the same message as Muhammad (Sura 2:81; 3:78-79), but the Jewish people did not follow it (Sura 6:83-89). Both traditions, however, look upon Moses as God's spokesperson.

See also

Judaism

FURTHER READING

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Redditt, Paul L., and Redditt. "Moses." *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development*, edited by Elizabeth M. Dowling, and W. George Scarlett, Sage Publications, 1st edition, 2006. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/moses>. Accessed 15 Nov. 2019.