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*Review Essay*  
**A MODERN *MIDRASH* MOSHE:  
METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

*Moses: Envoy of God, Envoy of His People*  
by RABBI MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN  
KTAV-Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2008, 286 pages<sup>1</sup>

**I. MIDRASHIC METHODOLOGY**

Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein has contributed an original and inspiring study on Moshe Rabbenu's leadership career. As he remarks in his foreword (pp. xiii-xiv), most *midrashim* and earlier *mefarshim* focused primarily on the superiority of Moshe's prophecy and its religious implications for later generations. Until now, there had been no traditionally faithful systematic treatment of Moshe Rabbenu's leadership. Non-Orthodox scholars have written copiously on this subject, but their deficient respect for the sanctity of the Torah and Moshe's greatness renders their works largely unhelpful for believing Jews. In his final chapter (pp. 241-262), R. Lichtenstein elaborates on the delicate religious balance of viewing biblical heroes such as Moshe Rabbenu as exalted beyond our comprehension, yet human enough to guide our lives by example.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his book, R. Lichtenstein offers insight into critical issues of leadership, including: (1) the naïveté of young leaders who want to change the world on their own, expect instant results, and refuse to accept failure; (2) the need for spiritual leaders to be involved in society, rather than remaining isolated from society and overly focused on their personal religious development; and (3) the struggles of leaders to galvanize their communities into action.

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R. Lichtenstein does more than simply present ideas about leadership. Following his expositions on Moshe Rabbenu, R. Lichtenstein devotes a chapter to explain his methodology (pp. 221-239). He raises several significant issues that require scrutiny.

### *A. Peshuto shel Mikra vs. Midrasho shel Mikra*

The first and most basic point that must be emphasized is that the theories and interpretations suggested in this book do not aspire to exclusivity, nor do they claim to be the definitive meaning of the text. There is no pretense that these are the only possible interpretations or reasonable answers to the questions raised in these pages; there most definitely are others. Rather, they are a literary reading of the text that does not preclude other readings. To formulate this point in more literary parlance, the ideas advanced in these chapters are *midrash* and not *peshat* . . . (p. 221).

R. Lichtenstein sets out a working definition of *peshat* and *derash* (pp. 221-227). *Peshat* explicates the text itself, whereas *derash* explains dimensions beneath or beyond the simple meaning of the text. While *peshat* looks for correspondence to the text, *derash* seeks internal coherence that does not contradict the text. As a result of these classifications, it follows that there are multiple valid *derash* readings to any biblical text.

Had R. Lichtenstein's discussion ended with the contention of multiple possible readings in *derash*, one might have concluded that he views his *derashot* as his own religious teachings, acknowledging that other legitimate options exist. However, he then submits an additional argument that requires further attention.

### *B. Can Derashot Become Normative?*

After acknowledging that many *ge'onim* and *rishonim* believed that the *aggadot* of *Hazal* were not authoritative or binding, R. Lichtenstein remarks, "many other scholars supported the view that the *aggada* is binding" (p. 233). R. Lichtenstein then develops a far-reaching jump about *aggada* within this latter approach:

Just as we assign a special status and validity to the halachic *drashot* of the Rabbis, deeming them part of the *Torah Shebe'al Peh*, let us apply the same model to the aggadic *midrash*, and grant such *midrashim* the status of Torah, because they are an extension and development of the *Torah Shebe'al Peh*, and are based on the *Torah Shebichtav*. The signifi-

cance of this may be limited to granting the ontological status of Torah to aggadic *midrash*, deeming it part of the holy Torah. However, it may also lead to the adoption of a particular interpretative line as normative—if a wide enough consensus were to accept it—in a manner analogous to the halachic process. Thus, for example, *Chazal* formulated a clear-cut position on the character of Esav, the observance of *mitzvot* by the forefathers, God’s attitude to Bnei Yisrael after the sin of the Golden Calf, and many other issues that the *aggada* deals with. If we accept the halachic analogy, we may regard these accepted opinions as authoritative and binding (p. 235).

R. Lichtenstein thus advances the following progression: (1) *midreshei halakha* may be viewed as an integral part of the Torah, even in cases when the Sages derived *derashot* based on their interpretive principles; (2) *midreshei aggada* of the Sages similarly can become a normative and binding part of our tradition; (3) *derashot* of later writers, by extension, can become elevated to the realm of *Torah she-be’al peh*, assuming that a wide enough consensus forms to support their ideas.

Perhaps *midreshei halakha* have text-like stature, at least in terms of their binding authority.<sup>3</sup> But the assertion that a *midrash aggada* may become a normative layer of the Torah raises serious questions: (1) Who is qualified to create this consensus? (2) How long does it take for an *aggada* to be elevated into a normative part of our tradition? (3) What does it mean that a given *aggada* is authoritative and binding?

Consider his examples of *midreshei aggada* that he assumes to be normative: many later rabbinic authorities, well aware of the *midrashim* that claim that our Patriarchs observed the *mitsvot*, did not consider this *derasha* as binding in their commentaries.<sup>4</sup> The other two examples he cites—Esav’s character and God’s relationship with Israel after the Golden Calf—are difficult to define. In the final analysis, R. Lichtenstein stresses that others still may learn the text differently, even after a *derasha* has become an integral aspect of Torah (pp. 238-239). But if one is permitted to accept or reject these *derashot*, then it is difficult to consider them normative, authoritative, or binding.

### C. Two Aspects of Derasha

Often, *derashot* represent an author’s insights, using the biblical text as a springboard for his or her ideas. A second aspect of *derasha* reads between the lines of the Torah. This is a genuine interpretive approach, based on text subtleties, wordplays, parallels, and the overall spirit of a

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passage. Such exegesis is motivated at least in part by the text itself. Within this latter category, there also is more room for critical scrutiny. Before claiming to read between the lines, we need to accurately represent the lines themselves. While the Torah indeed supports multiple viewpoints, as R. Lichtenstein stresses, some interpretations are more faithful to the text than others.

To furnish an analogy from R. Lichtenstein's book: on several occasions, R. Lichtenstein cites *midrashim* or *mefarshim*, and then acknowledges that his ideas do not correspond to the original intent of that midrash or *parshan*.<sup>5</sup> With that disclaimer, the reader readily understands that R. Lichtenstein received conceptual inspiration from the earlier writers, but is developing his own ideas. Were R. Lichtenstein to state, however, that he is reading between the lines of these earlier rabbinic comments—or, even more, asserting that his insights may become another normative layer of what these commentators were saying—that would be a surprising claim. How much more sensitive should this distinction be with regard to the Torah, where the stakes are much higher.

In this essay, we will focus on the chapter on Moshe's development as a leader, as portrayed in Exodus 2-7, 32-34 (pp. 3-83). After a consideration of R. Lichtenstein's perspective, we will present an alternative *derash* approach that appears closer to the text. R. Lichtenstein's book should not be viewed as a potentially normative layer of *Torah she-be'al peh*; rather, it is a valuable and insightful exposition on issues in religious leadership that draws inspiration from the career of Moshe Rabbenu.

## II. EVALUATION OF R. LICHTENSTEIN'S ANALYSIS

### A. Moshe's Youthful Naïveté

The Torah introduces Avraham when the Patriarch is already seventy-five years old. With Moshe, however, the gap in the narrative spans from his earlier years until he is close to eighty at the time of the burning bush. This gap in the middle of Moshe's life is an essential component of the Torah's story of Moshe.

The young Moshe anticipates instant results and mistakenly believes that he can solve the problems of the world on his own. Both expectations reflect Moshe's youthful inexperience at that stage in his development. When he kills the Egyptian, Moshe believes that he will trigger a process that ultimately would terminate Israel's servitude.

R. Lichtenstein interprets *va-yar ki ein ish* (he saw no one about,

Ex. 2:12) as referring to Moshe's conclusion that there was no spirit of activism among the people.<sup>6</sup> Moshe wanted the Israelites to witness his killing the Egyptian so that they would be stirred to fight their oppressors. Moshe then goes out on the second day to see how the Israelites have responded to his act of bravery.

R. Lichtenstein submits two theories to explain Moshe's flight from Egypt: perhaps Moshe, disappointed in the Israelites' continued passivity, decides to abandon his people. Alternatively, it is possible that the Israelites *did* respond to Moshe's call to action. Perhaps the two fighting Israelites (Ex. 2:13) were debating how to respond to Moshe's call for active resistance. Although Moshe could appreciate political debate, he could not tolerate their personal attacks against one another, and therefore no longer felt comfortable living among them. In either case, Moshe's flight from Egypt reflects youthful impatience, since he could not accept failure or rejection. Over time, he would need to gain perspective and learn that the world is a harsh place, but there yet exists the possibility for change.

Although it explores important ideas, this reading appears to be against the Torah's account of Moshe's deliberate efforts to conceal his act of killing the Egyptian, and his subsequent surprise that the matter had become known. Moshe did not abandon his community out of disgust for the Israelites' apathy or because they were fighting one another; he fled for his life (Ex. 2:14-15).

### ***B. Flight to Midian: An Effort to Escape the Historical Stage***

Yitro is the quintessential ivory tower religious philosopher. He lives apart from mainstream society, searching for God on his own. Moshe's flight to Midian represents a deliberate choice to embrace Yitro's path, abandoning the historical stage in favor of personal religious growth in isolation.

To support his characterization of Yitro, R. Lichtenstein quotes a midrash that Yitro had sampled all religions.<sup>7</sup> He notes further that Yitro (=Hovav) withdrew from the nation (Num. 10:29-32) when the time approached to enter the Land of Israel, because they were about to reenter the historical stage. Similarly, Yitro's descendants lived apart from other communities and allied with both Israel and her enemies. Hever and Yael had relations with both Canaanites and Israelites (Judges 4), and the Kenites neighbored the Amalekites before being spared by Shaul (1 Samuel 15).

Although Yitro passionately seeks truth, he has no faith in the ability of society to change. Consequently, he lives in the wilderness to pur-

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sue his private religious-philosophical quest. He has no desire to take part in history.

This line of reasoning is good text-inspired *derush*, reading between the lines of the Torah and later biblical texts that portray Yitro and his descendants as being isolated from mainstream communities. Moshe in fact had withdrawn from both Egyptian and Israelite society. Had God not appeared to Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe likely would have died a Midianite shepherd, permanently distanced from the world in which he had grown up, and which he had tried, unsuccessfully, to change.

### *C. The Burning Bush: Return to the Historical Stage*

R. Lichtenstein views the burning bush encounter as a call from God for Moshe to abandon his isolation in the desert and return to the historical stage. Moshe stalls, doubtful whether one person could achieve national salvation, and uncertain whether to abandon the appealing ivory tower world of Yitro. God responds:

I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you.  
And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship  
God at this mountain (Ex. 3:12).<sup>8</sup>

Moshe would be able to serve God at that mountain only after having redeemed his people. The encounter at the burning bush was to teach Moshe that acting on the historical stage was more important to his religious growth than meditative isolation. He would attain true revelation only by leaving the wilderness and redeeming the Israelites. In fact, Moshe reaches great spiritual heights during the Golden Calf episode and its aftermath, specifically when interceding on behalf of his community.

Once again, R. Lichtenstein's analysis receives support from the texts he cites—both at the burning bush, and later with the Golden Calf. There is no question that God wanted Moshe to reenter the historical stage, and Moshe did attain his greatest spiritual achievements while serving his nation.

### *D. Moshe's Desire for Human Input vs. God's Plan of Passivity*

Although God wants Moshe to return to the historical stage, He intends to use Moshe as an agent to rescue the Israelites while the people remain passive:

Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt (Ex. 3:10).

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Moshe, in contrast, retains his youthful idealism and insists that the people should take an active role in their own redemption:

Moshe said to God, “When I come to the Israelites and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is His name? What shall I say to them?” (Ex. 3:13).

By invoking the nation, Moshe petitions that they be involved in the process. God temporarily goes along with Moshe’s request in order to demonstrate conclusively that the people would not participate (Ex. 3:14-18).

Moshe’s first mission to Pharaoh ends in disappointment, with the people cursing him (Ex. 5:20-21), and then ignoring God’s subsequent promise of redemption (Ex. 6:9). After Moshe’s initial failure, God again proposes His original plan. Noting that he does not have the people’s support, Moshe indicates—by invoking the Israelites—that he still wants them involved. God again temporarily supports Moshe, mentioning the Israelites as well:

The Lord spoke to Moshe, saying, “Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land.” But Moshe appealed to the Lord, saying, “The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh heed me, a man of impeded speech!” So the Lord spoke to both Moshe and Aharon in regard to the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, instructing them to deliver the Israelites from the land of Egypt (Ex. 6:10-13).

If the above analysis is correct, however, where does the Torah mention Moshe’s continued attempts to win the support of the people? R. Lichtenstein addresses this question by tackling a separate problem: the sudden interjection of Moshe’s pedigree (Ex. 6:14-25). R. Lichtenstein proposes that the genealogical “interruption” alludes to Moshe’s approaching the leaders of the families mentioned in that genealogy, trying to galvanize them. Moshe begins with the family elders of Reuven and Shimon without success. After failing with even his own tribe of Levi, Moshe finally gives up, and therefore the Torah’s genealogy stops here. Moshe concedes that God’s original plan of no human involvement is the only available path to redemption. R. Lichtenstein adduces support for his thesis from the recapitulation:

And the Lord said to Moshe, “I am the Lord; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I will tell you.” Moshe appealed to the Lord, saying,

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“See, I am of impeded speech; how then should Pharaoh heed me!”  
(Ex. 6:29-30).

Rather than viewing this passage as a resumption of an interrupted narrative (as do Rashi and Ibn Ezra), R. Lichtenstein interprets this dialogue as Moshe’s admission of defeat. God focuses exclusively on Moshe’s mission to Pharaoh, and Moshe likewise no longer refers to the nation (unlike 6:12-13)—only to his credibility with Pharaoh.

Although this analysis is conceptually appealing, it runs counter to the flow of the text. At the burning bush, God promises Moshe that the Israelites would listen to him:

They will listen to you; then you shall go with the elders of Israel to the king of Egypt. . . . (Ex. 3:18).

It specifically is Moshe who displays no confidence in the people, to the point where God must give several signs to reassure him:

But Moshe spoke up and said, “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: The Lord did not appear to you?” (Ex. 4:1).<sup>9</sup>

Although several *mefarshim* justify Moshe’s concerns, some *midrashim* criticize Moshe’s lack of faith in God’s promises.<sup>10</sup> Others similarly interpret the miraculous signs of the serpent and *tsara’at* as God’s rebuke of Moshe for exhibiting insufficient faith in the people.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it is farfetched to assert that the genealogical roster in Ex. 6:14-25 alludes to efforts at galvanizing the nation to assume an active role in the redemption.

Were one to view this book as the wisdom of R. Lichtenstein, all the foregoing textual criticisms would be obviated, since he is using the text as a springboard to develop his own ideas in the realm of *derash*. So long as there is an interpretive dimension of explicating the Torah by reading between the lines, however, his analysis is vulnerable to textual criticism. Because “*derash*” takes both forms of analysis, it is vital to distinguish between these two areas of inquiry.

It is worth stressing further that one interpreter’s inconsistency or forced reading is another’s complexity or ingenious subtlety. That readers can differ so significantly over the plausibility of each point in the Torah is a hallmark of learning. At the same time, this caveat should stimulate readers to evaluate each argument against the text with greater diligence.



### III. A MORE TEXTUALLY-BASED *DERASHA*

In order to develop a more textually-based *derasha*, we will present an alternative approach to the development of Moshe's career. The textually compelling elements from R. Lichtenstein's analysis discussed above fit seamlessly into this framework.

#### *A. How Moshe Developed His Moral and Israelite Identity*

As discussed above, R. Lichtenstein illuminates the significance of the gap in the Moshe narrative from his experience with the Egyptian and Israelite communities as a teenager to his encounter at the burning bush as an eighty year-old shepherd. However, there also is a narrative gap from Moshe's infancy to his killing of the Egyptian taskmaster. What led Moshe to develop such a strong moral personality, and to identify with the Israelites from the beginning?

R. Elhanan Samet<sup>12</sup> observes that Pharaoh's daughter had flouted the immoral command of her own father, thereby exhibiting remarkable moral courage. Following the sequence of the text, Ramban (on Ex. 2:1) suggests that when Pharaoh decreed that Israelite boys should be drowned, Amram and Yokheved defied him by having a son. From this perspective, Moshe's very birth—in addition to his salvation and upbringing—resulted from acts of moral heroism. Moreover, Pharaoh's daughter never shielded Moshe's true origins from him even after assuming educational responsibilities for his upbringing.

This line of interpretation offers fertile ground to expound on the roots of Moshe's Israelite identity, his moral resolve, and his courage to fight slavery and oppression.<sup>13</sup> From a broader contextual standpoint, one also might be inclined to include the defiance of Shifrah and Puah in chapter 1 as a factor in this discussion, and R. Elhanan Samet indeed elsewhere develops this dimension.<sup>14</sup>

#### *B. Moshe's Alienation from the Egyptians and Israelites*

Although Moshe left the palace to identify with his brethren, he was shocked to find that the Israelites were willing to betray him. Disgusted, Moshe gave up on his people.<sup>15</sup> R. Yonatan Grossman notes that even after Moshe's withdrawal from the Israelites, he still possessed a strong moral sense, fighting oppression in Midian (Ex. 2:16-17).<sup>16</sup>

In this context, R. Lichtenstein's development of Moshe's alienation from society after learning that the Midianite shepherds were immoral

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fits perfectly. Gershom's name (Ex. 2:22—*ki ger hayiti be-erets nokhriyya*: “for I *have* been a stranger in a strange land,” or “for I *had* been a stranger in a strange land”) also reflects ambiguity: did Moshe consider Midian a strange land and Egypt home, or did he conclude that he had been a stranger in Egypt, and only now found a home in Midian?<sup>17</sup> The narrative gap between Moshe's idealistic youth and Moshe as an eighty year-old shepherd illuminated by R. Lichtenstein likewise enhances this theme—Moshe's alienation and distance from the historical scene is conveyed poignantly by the Torah's silence on Moshe's life from his youth in Egypt until the encounter at the burning bush. Additionally, R. Lichtenstein's characterization of Moshe's seeking God outside of history calls attention to Moshe's spiritual development in the world of Yitro, even as he was distanced from the covenantal people.

R. Yonatan Grossman further suggests that Moshe's profound estrangement from the Israelites may have accounted for his neglect in circumcising his son (Ex. 4:24-26). God taught Moshe that he could not lead the Israelites until he rejoined his nation's unique covenantal destiny.

After Moshe's initial failure in chapter 5, he returned to God, criticizing Him while standing staunchly on behalf of his people. For the first time since his youth, Moshe fully identified with his brethren. One midrash captures the spirit of this transition: while critical of Moshe for protesting so strongly against God, it praises Moshe for his faithfulness to his flock:

What right had he to question God's ways. . . . For this reason did the Attribute of Justice seek to attack Moshe, as it says: And God spoke (*va-yedabber*) unto Moshe. But when God reflected that Moshe only spoke thus because of Israel's suffering, He retracted and dealt with him according to the Attribute of Mercy, as it says: And he said (*va-yomer*) unto him: I am the Lord (Ex. 6:2) (*Ex. Rabba* 6:2).<sup>18</sup>

Moshe was now prepared to lead his people not only as a moral hero who wanted to fight oppression, but also as a fully identified member of the covenantal people.

Following R. Yonatan Grossman's analysis, one might suggest that specifically at this juncture was it appropriate to introduce Moshe's pedigree (Ex. 6:14-25). Now fully identified with his people again, even willing to confront God on their behalf, Moshe could be introduced to true covenantal leadership. The Torah therefore places Moshe contextually into his pedigree only now. Identity with the nation of Israel had become an integral and everlasting feature of Moshe's character and

leadership. Moshe now merited association with his illustrious ancestry, and assumed his rightful place among them.

*C. Moshe's Confidence (or Lack Thereof) in the Nation*

As noted earlier, Moshe needed to regain confidence in his people after their life-threatening betrayal in chapter 2. Ramban (on Ex. 4:1) insists that Moshe's concern that the people would not listen to him was legitimate. God had promised (Ex. 3:19) that Pharaoh would be stubborn. Moshe therefore worried that while the Israelites might listen to him initially (as they did in Ex. 4:31), they no longer would heed Moshe's words after the promised failure with Pharaoh. These reservations were validated by what occurred in chapters 5-6.

In contrast, several *midrashim* criticize Moshe for doubting God's explicit assurances that the Israelites would believe Moshe.<sup>19</sup> Following their lead, Rashi similarly maintains that Moshe did not believe that the people deserved their redemption. God therefore rebuked him.<sup>20</sup>

It appears that a balance between the views of Ramban and Rashi lies at the heart of Moshe's career. Throughout the Torah, Moshe legitimately worried whether his people would ever reach the desired level of faith. At the same time, God constantly prodded Moshe to remain with his people since it is impossible to lead a nation one does not believe in. One midrash captures this tension:

He gave them a charge concerning the children of Israel (Ex. 6:13). God said to them: "My children are obstinate, bad-tempered, and troublesome. In assuming leadership over them, you must expect that they will curse you and even stone you" (*Ex. Rabba* 7:3).<sup>21</sup>

This midrash reads beyond the flow of Ex. 6:9-13, where the people refused to listen to Moshe. God therefore had to command Moshe to lead them *despite* their unwillingness to listen.

As R. Lichtenstein points out in his chapter on methodology (pp. 221-239), the foregoing is but one possible approach, but many other facets still may be pursued in reading between the lines of the early Moshe narratives. The text serves as an interpretive constraint, but there is room for multiple interpretations and reconstructions, as a result of the nature of *derash*.

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### IV. CONCLUSION

Several principal components of R. Lichtenstein's analysis fall short in terms of interpretive reading between the lines of the Torah's text. Nevertheless, his comments become valuable once they are viewed as the *derashot* of a Rosh Yeshiva who uses the Torah's narratives about Moshe as a springboard to teach about the nature of religious leadership.

R. Lichtenstein's first address explores the inevitable conflicts facing the young Yeshiva student (one appreciates why R. Lichtenstein expresses his preference that Moshe is no older than twenty years old when he begins his career in Egypt<sup>22</sup>). The young idealist naïvely thinks that he will be able to change the world on his own. Facing a harsh reality outside, the student is potentially demoralized by setbacks to the point of wanting to withdraw to the safety of the *bet midrash*. Do not retreat to the isolationist world of Yitro, exhorts the Rosh Yeshiva. Remain with the broader community, as you will truly encounter God there. This is a lesson all Yeshiva educators should stress to their students—teaching them methods of approaching God after they leave their Yeshiva, showing them that their future roles in society can help them realize the highest goals of the education they received while in the *bet midrash*. This is a lesson all adults should take to heart: their greatest religious encounter with God can occur in society.

The leader who passionately desires communal involvement, sacrificing in order to inspire that community, is another compelling theme. Although the potential for frustration is daunting and ever-present, the leader must learn to be patient, gradually teaching others to become more active participants in shaping their own destiny.

R. Lichtenstein's book is a valuable contribution. It provokes further thought in *derash* methodology, and it can inspire both intellectually and emotionally. Perhaps its most effective feature is its ability to galvanize others to take an active role in the learning process. The reader stands to learn much from R. Lichtenstein's guidance, and also may use his expositions as a springboard for further exploration of the career of our teacher and leader, Moshe Rabbenu.

NOTES

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1. This book appeared originally in Hebrew, entitled *Tsir va-Tson* (Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2002). Page references in this review correspond to the English edition. In his foreword (p. xvi), R. Lichtenstein notes that he modified the final chapter from the Hebrew original.
2. See also R. Yaakov Medan, “*David u-Bat Sheva: ha-Het, ha-Onesh, ve-ha-Tikkun*” (Hebrew), (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2002), pp. 7-24; R. Joel B. Wolowelsky, “‘*Kibbud Av*’ and ‘*Kibbud Avot*’: Moral Education and Patriarchal Critiques,” *Tradition* 33:4 (Summer 1999), pp. 35-44.
3. The assertion that *midrash halakha* enjoys a status equal to that of explicit biblical commandments is far from clear. See p. 230 (especially n. 7), where R. Lichtenstein elaborates on the complexity of that statement.
4. For a survey of medieval opinions, see Uriel Simon, “*Peshat* Exegesis of Biblical History—Between Historicity, Dogmatism, and the Medieval Period” (Hebrew), in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg*, Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler & Jeffrey Tigay (eds.), (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), Hebrew section, pp. 171\*-203\*.
5. See, for example, p. 79, notes 13, 16, 19.
6. Cf. *Ex. Rabba* 1:29; Netsiv.
7. *Mekhilta Amalek* 1, quoted in Rashi on Ex. 18:11.
8. Translations of biblical passages (with minor modifications) are from the New Jewish Publication Society translation of Tanakh, 1985.
9. Although the NJPS translation mitigates Moshe’s statement by rendering it as a question, many earlier *midrashim* and commentators understand Moshe to be saying, “They will not believe me nor listen to my voice; rather, they will say that the Lord has not appeared to you.”
10. See Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot*, *Shemot* #7 (vol. 1, pp. 75-82), for a discussion of Ex. 4:1 with the defenses of Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Rambam. Nehama personally preferred the *midrashim* (e.g., *Ex. Rabba* 3:12; *Deut. Rabba* 9:6) that criticize Moshe for doubting God’s explicit promise (see further discussion below).
11. *Tanhuma Shemot* 23, cited by Rashi (on Ex. 4:2-6). See also sources and discussion in *Torah Shelema Shemot* 4:4, 5, 7, 13, 18, 19. Rashi similarly maintains that Moshe did not believe that the people were worthy of redemption. See, for example, his comments on Ex. 2:14 and 3:11.
12. R. Elhanan Samet, *Iyyunim be-Parashot ha-Shavua*, second series, vol. 1 (Hebrew) (Ma’aleh Adumim: Ma’aliyot Press, 2004), pp. 230-246.
13. *Torah Shelema Shemot* 2:83 cites R. Efrayim, who suggests that Moshe grew up in the palace among the wise men of Egypt. As a result, he learned to pursue truth, and he had a sense of freedom. Cf. Ibn Ezra, *Perush ha-arakh* (on Ex. 2:3). For further discussions, see Bryna Jocheved

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- Levy, "Moshe: Portrait of the Leader as a Young Man," in *Torah of the Mothers: Contemporary Jewish Women Read Classical Jewish Texts*, Ora Wiskind Elper & Susan Handelman (eds.) (New York: Urim, 2000), pp. 398-429; David Tai, "Moshe—The Boy and the Man" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 22 (1994), pp. 30-42.
14. R. Elhanan Samet, *Iyyunim be-Parashot ha-Shavua*, first series, vol. 1 (Hebrew) (Ma'aleh Adumim: Ma'aliyot Press, 2002), pp. 156-166.
  15. Rashi (on Ex. 2:15) quotes *Tanhuma Shemot* 10, that the two quarreling Israelites personally informed Pharaoh of Moshe's having killed the Egyptian.
  16. R. Yonatan Grossman, Yeshivat Har Etzion, *Va'era* 5759, at [www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.59/14vaera.htm](http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.59/14vaera.htm). See a further discussion in Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Shemot*, *Shemot* #4 (vol. 1, pp. 39-48). See also *midrashim* and discussion in *Torah Shelema Shemot* 2:87, 143, 144; Abarbanel on Ex. 2:15.
  17. See Amos Hakham, *Da'at Mikra: Shemot*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1991), p. 31.
  18. Soncino translation, with minor modifications.
  19. See, for example, *Ex. Rabba* 3:12; *Deut. Rabba* 9:6.
  20. See, e.g., his comments on Ex. 2:14 (from *Ex. Rabba* 1:30); 3:11 (from *Ex. Rabba* 3:4); 4:2-6 (from *Shabbat* 97a).
  21. Soncino translation, with minor modifications. Rashi quotes this midrash on Ex. 6:13, and also on Num. 11:12. The connection between God's encouraging Moshe to remain strong in his leadership despite the Israelites' complaining is prominent in both accounts. See further discussion in *Torah Shelema Shemot* 6:73-74; R. Elhanan Samet, *Iyyunim be-Parashot ha-Shavua*, first series, vol. 2 (Hebrew) (Ma'aleh Adumim: Ma'aliyot Press, 2002), pp. 168-182.
  22. See *Torah Shelema Shemot* 2:81, which cites different midrashic opinions suggesting that Moshe was 12, 18, 20, 21, 29, 32, 40, 50, or 60 years old when he killed the Egyptian. R. Lichtenstein (p. 77, n. 1) prefers Ramban's view (on Ex. 2:23), that Moshe was not yet twenty.