

## Why was Moshe Punished for Hitting the Rock with his Staff? *Moshe, the Staff, and Winnicott's Transitional Object:*

### 1. במדבר כ, ז-יב | Bamidbar 20, 7-12:

וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:  
קַח אֶת־הַמַּטֵּה וְהַקְהֵל אֶת־הָעֵדָה אֹתָהּ וְאַהֲרֹן אַחִירָךְ וְדַבַּרְתֶּם אֶל־הַסֶּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם וְנָתַן מִמֵּיּוֹ וְהוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מַיִם מִן־הַסֶּלַע וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת־הָעֵדָה וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם:  
וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמַּטֵּה מִלִּפְנֵי ה' כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ:  
וַיִּקְהֵלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַקְהָל אֶל־פְּנֵי הַסֶּלַע וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַמְּרִים הַמִּן־הַסֶּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצִיא לָכֶם מַיִם:  
וְיָרֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת־הַסֶּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ פַּעַמַיִם וַיֵּצְאוּ מַיִם רַבִּים וַתִּשְׁתַּהֲעֵדָה וּבְעִירָם: (ס)  
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַל־אַהֲרֹן יַעַן לֹא־אִמַּנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקְהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם:

(7) Hashem spoke to Moses, saying, (8) "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you, and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water. And you shall bring forth to them water out of the rock; so you shall give the congregation and their livestock drink."

(9) Moses took the rod from before Hashem, as he commanded him. (10) Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring you water out of this rock for you?" (11) Moses lifted up his hand, and struck the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.

(12) Hashem said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you didn't believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

### The Transitional Object Theory:



**Donald Woods Winnicott** (7 April 1896 – 25 January 1971) was an English paediatrician and psychoanalyst who was especially influential in the field of object relations theory and developmental psychology. He was a leading member of the British Independent Group of the British Psychoanalytical Society, and the President of the British Psychoanalytical Society twice (1956–1959 and 1965–1968)

The experience of distancing during a child's development can trigger anxiety and frustration. To navigate these challenges, the child often turns to a symbolic object representing the absent mother, a concept Donald Winnicott termed the "transitional object," be it a blanket, teddy bear, or toy. According to Winnicott, over time, the mother's figure becomes a generalized presence in the child's consciousness, serving as a comforting source during moments of distress. Consequently, the child gradually relies less on a tangible transitional object. This transitional object assists the child in handling crises such as separation, falling asleep, or other frustrations, contributing more broadly to the development of independence and autonomy. Additionally, it facilitates the baby's transition from internal experiences to engagement with the external world, acting as a tool for mediation and support amid real-life challenges. (I. Ofran, תורה של הנפש, page 55)



### A. Moshe and the Staff:

#### 2. שמות ד', א-ה | Shmot 4, 1-5:

- (א) וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהֵן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים ה'.
- (ב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו ה' [מַה זֶּה] [מַזָּה] בְּיָדְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר מִטָּה.
- (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁלִיכֶהוּ אַרְצָה וַיִּשְׁלַכְהוּ אַרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנָחָשׁ וַיִּנָּס מִפְּנֵי.
- (ד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה שְׁלַח יָדְךָ וְאַחַז בְּזַנְבוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּחֲזֵק בּוֹ וַיְהִי לְמִטָּה בְּכַפּוֹ.
- (ה) לְמַעַן יֵאֱמִינוּ כִּי נִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים ה' אֶל-לוֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵם אֶל-לוֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב.

- (1) Moshe replied and said, "But, behold, they will not believe me and will not listen to my voice, for they will say, 'Hashem did not appear to you!'"
- (2) Hashem said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff."
- (3) He said, "Throw it to the ground." He threw it to the ground and it became a serpent; and Moshe fled from before it.
- (4) Hashem said to Moshe, "Send forth your hand and hold onto its tail", – Moshe sent forth his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand –
- (5) "so that they will believe that Hashem, the God of their fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak and the God of Yaakov, has appeared to you."

#### 3. שמות ד', יג-כ | Shmot 4, 13-20:

- (יג) וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי שְׁלַח נָא בְיָד תִּשְׁלַח.

(יד) וַיִּחַר אֵף ה' בְּמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא אֶהְרֵן אָחִיךָ הַלֵּוֹי יִדְעֵתִי כִּי דַבֵּר יַדְבֵּר הוּא וְגַם הִנֵּה הוּא יֵצֵא לִקְרֹאתְךָ וַיִּרְאַךְ וְשָׂמַח בְּלִבּוֹ.  
(טו) וַדְּבַרְתָּ אֵלָיו וְשָׁמַתָּ אֶת הַדְּבָרִים בְּפִיו וְאַנְכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם פִּיךָ וְעִם פִּיהוּ וְהוֹרִיתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן.  
(טז) וַדְּבַר הוּא לֵךְ אֶל הָעָם וְהָיָה הוּא יְהִיֶּה לְךָ לִפְהָ וְאַתָּה תְהִיֶּה לוֹ לְאֱלֹהִים.  
(יז) וְאֵת הַמַּטֵּה הַזֶּה תִקַּח בְּיָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בוֹ אֶת הָאֹתוֹת.  
(כ) וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת אֲשֶׁתּוֹ וְאֵת בָּנָיו וַיִּרְכָּבֵם עַל הַחֲמֹר וַיָּשֻׁב אֶרְצָה מִצְרָיִם וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת מַטֵּה הָאֵל-לוֹהִים בְּיָדוֹ.

(13) He said, "Please, Adonai, please send by whomever You shall send."

(14) Hashem grew angry at Moshe, and He said, "Is there not your brother, Aharon, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. And behold, he is even coming to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart.

(15) You shall speak with him and place the words in his mouth and I shall be with your mouth and his mouth and instruct you what you should do.

(16) He shall speak for you to the people, and he will be for you as a mouth and you shall be for him as a god.

(17) And this staff you shall take in your hand, through which you will perform the signs."

(20) Moshe took his wife and his sons and mounted them on the donkey and returned to the land of Egypt; and Moshe took **the staff of God** in his hand.

### ***B. The Staff and Pharaoh:***

#### **4. שמות ז, ח'י | Shmot 7, 8-10:**

(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֶהְרֵן לֵאמֹר.

(ט) כִּי יַדְבַּר אֲלֵכֶם פְּרַעֲהַ לֵאמֹר תִּנּוּ לָכֶם מוֹפֵת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל אֶהְרֵן קַח אֶת מַטְּךָ וְהִשְׁלַךְ לִפְנֵי פְרַעֲהַ יְהִי לְתַנּוּן.

(י) וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאֶהְרֵן אֶל פְּרַעֲהַ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶהְרֵן אֶת מַטְּהוֹ לִפְנֵי פְרַעֲהַ וְלִפְנֵי עַבְדָּיו וַיְהִי לְתַנּוּן.

(8) Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon, saying,

(9) "When Paroh speaks to you, saying, 'Make a wonder,' you shall tell Aharon, 'take your staff and throw it down before Paroh and let it become a crocodile.'"

(10) Moshe and Aharon came before Paroh and did so, as Hashem commanded them. Aharon threw his staff down before Paroh and before his servants, and it became a crocodile.

#### **5. שמות ז, יז | Shmot 7, 14-17:**

(יד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה כִּבֵּד לֵב פְּרַעֲהַ מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעָם.

(טו) לֵךְ אֶל פְּרַעֲהַ בְּבִקְרֵה הִנֵּה יֵצֵא הַמִּימָה וְנִצַּבְתָּ לִקְרֹאתוֹ עַל שַׁפְתֵי הַיָּאֵר וְהַמַּטֵּה אֲשֶׁר נִהַפֵּךְ לִנְחָשׁ תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ.

(טז) וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו ה' אֵל-לוֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר שְׁלַח אֶת עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי בְּמִדְבָּר וְהִנֵּה לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ עִד כֹּה.

(יז) כֹּה אָמַר ה' בְּזֹאת תִּדְעֶה כִּי אֲנִי ה' הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מִכָּה בַמַּטֵּה אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדִי עַל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר וְנִהַפְּכוּ לְדָם.

(14) Hashem said to Moshe, "Paroh's heart is heavy; he refuses to send out the nation.

(15) Go to Paroh in the morning. Behold, he goes out to the water, and you shall station yourself to meet him by the river bank, and the staff that turned into a serpent you shall take in your hand.

(16) And you shall say to him, 'Hashem, God of the Hebrews, has sent me to you, saying, 'Send out My people that they may serve Me in the wilderness;' and behold you have not listened until now.

(17) Thus says Hashem, 'By this you shall know that I am Hashem.' Behold, with the staff in my hand, I will strike the waters that are in the river and they will turn into blood.

### 6. שמות ח, א | Shmot 8, 1:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל אַהֲרֹן נָטָה אֶת יָדְךָ בְּמִטְּךָ עַל הַנְּהָרוֹת עַל הַיְּאֵרִים וְעַל הָאֲגָמִים וְהֵעַל אֶת הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם עַל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

Hashem said to Moshe, "Tell Aharon, 'Stretch forth your hand with your staff over the rivers, over the canals, and over the ponds, and bring up the frogs over the land of Egypt.'"

### 7. שמות ח, ד-ט' | Shmot 8, 4-9:

(ד) וַיִּקְרָא פְרַעֲוֹה לְמֹשֶׁה וְלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הֶעֱתִירוּ אֵלַי הַיּוֹסֵר הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִמֶּנִּי וּמֵעַמִּי וְאֲשַׁלְּחָה אֶת הָעָם וְיִזְבְּחוּ לַיהוָה.  
(ה) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפְרַעֲוֹה הַתְּפָאֵר עָלַי לְמַתִּי אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וְלַעֲמָךְ לְהַכְרִית הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִמֶּךָ וּמִבְּתִיךָ רַק בַּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאָרְנָה.  
(ו) וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַחֵר וַיֹּאמֶר כְּדַבְּרְךָ לְמַעַן תִּדַּע כִּי אֵין כֵּה' אֶ-לוֹהֵינוּ.  
(ז) וְסָרוּ הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִמֶּךָ וּמִבְּתִיךָ וּמֵעֲבָדֶיךָ וּמֵעַמְּךָ רַק בַּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאָרְנָה.  
(ח) וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מֵעַם פְּרַעֲוֹה וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוָה עַל דְּבַר הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם אֲשֶׁר שָׂם לְפְרַעֲוֹה.  
(ט) וַיַּעַשׂ ה' כְּדַבְּרֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיָּמָתוּ הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִן הַבָּתִּים מִן הַחֲצֵרוֹת וּמִן הַשָּׂדֶה.

(4) Paroh called for Moshe and Aharon, and he said, "Entreat Hashem that He remove the frogs from me and from my people, and I will send out the people that they may sacrifice to Hashem."

(5) Moshe said to Paroh "Gloat over me! For when should I entreat on behalf of you, your servants, and your people, to cut off the frogs from you and your houses, that they shall remain only in the river?"

(6) He said, "For tomorrow." He said, "As you say, so that you know that there is none like Hashem, our God.

(7) The frogs shall depart from you, your houses, and your servants; they shall remain only in the river."

(8) Moshe and Aharon went out from Paroh, and Moshe cried out to Hashem regarding the frogs that He had set on Paroh.

(9) Hashem did according to the word of Moshe, and the frogs died, from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the fields.

**8. הרב אילעאי עופרן, תורה של הנפש, 62 | Rabbi Ilai Ofran:**

לאורך כל מכות מצרים, סילוק המכה, הנעשה לבקשתו של פרעה המקבל על עצמו, באופן זמני, את דבר ה', אינו כרוך בשימוש במטה. בעת סילוק המכה די במעשה המופשט של צעקה או תפילה אל ה', שהרי פרעה מאמין בו ומקבל את דברו.

Throughout the plagues of Egypt, the removal of the plague, carried out at Pharaoh's request as he takes responsibility temporarily, does not necessarily involve the use of the staff. When removing the plague, a simple action such as a cry or prayer to Gd suffices, as Pharaoh believes in Gd and accepts Gd's word.

**C. The Staff and the Nation:**

**9. שמות יד, יטז | Shmot 14, 10-16:**

(י) ופרעה הקריב וישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם והנה מצרים נסע אחריהם ויראו מאד ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה'.  
(יא) ויאמרו אל משה המבלי אין קברים במצרים לקחתנו למוות במדבר מה זאת עשית לנו להוציאנו ממצרים.  
(יב) הלא זה הדבר אשר דברנו אליך במצרים לאמר חדל ממנו ונעבדה את מצרים כי טוב לנו עבד את מצרים ממתנו במדבר.

(יג) ויאמר משה אל העם אל תיראו התיצבו וראו את ישועת ה' אשר יעשה לכם היום כי אשר ראיתם את מצרים היום לא תספּו לראתם עוד עד עולם.

(יד) ה' ילחם לכם ואתם תחישו.

(טו) ויאמר ה' אל משה מה תצעק אלי דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו.

**(טז) ואתה הרים את מטף ונטה את ירך על הים ובקעהו ויבאו בני ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה.**

(10) Paroh approached, and the Children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were traveling after them. They were very afraid, and the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem.

(11) They said to Moshe, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness? What is this that you have done to us, to bring us out from Egypt?!"

(12) Is this not the thing that we spoke to you of in Egypt, saying, 'Leave us alone and let us serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness!'"

(13) Moshe said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Station yourselves and see Hashem's salvation that He will do for you today, for as you have seen Egypt today, you shall not see them ever again.

(14) Hashem will fight for you, and you shall be silent."

(15) Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to me? Speak to the Children of Israel that they travel!"

**(16) And you, raise your staff, and stretch forth your hand over the sea and split it, and the Children of Israel shall go into the midst of the sea on dry land.**

**10. שמות יז, ח-ט | Shmot 17, 8-9:**

(ח) ויבא עמלק וילחם עם ישראל ברפידם. (ט) ויאמר משה אל יהושע בחר לנו אנשים וצא הלחם בעמלק מחר אנכי נצב על ראש הגבעה ומטה האל לזהים בידי.

(8) Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

(9) Moshe said to Yehoshua, "Choose men, and go out; fight against Amalek tomorrow. I will stand at the top of the hill **with the staff of Hashem in my hand.**

### שמות יז, ג-ו | Shmot 17, 3-6

(ג) וַיִּצְמָא שָׁם הָעָם לַמַּיִם וַיִּלְן הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה הַעֲלִיתֵנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהָמִית אֹתִי וְאֶת בְּנֵי וְאֶת מִקְנֵי בְּצִמָּא.

(ד) וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' לֵאמֹר מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּעָם הַזֶּה עוֹד מֵעַט וְסִקְלֵנִי.

(ה) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹר לִפְנֵי הָעָם וְקַח אֶתֶּךָ מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִטֶּבֶל אֲשֶׁר הִכִּיתָ בּוֹ אֶת הַיָּאֵר קַח בְּיָדְךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ.

(ו) הִנְנִי עֹמֵד לְפָנֶיךָ שָׁם עַל הַצּוּר בְּחָרֵב וְהִכִּיתָ בַּצּוּר וַיֵּצְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מַיִם וְשָׁתָה הָעָם וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

(3) The people thirsted there for water, and they grumbled against Moshe and said, "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to kill me and my children and my livestock with thirst?"

(4) Moshe cried out to Hashem, saying, "What shall I do for this people? A little longer and they will stone me!"

(5) Hashem said to Moshe, "Pass before the people, and take with you from the elders of Israel; and the staff with which you struck the river, take in your hand and go.

(6) Behold, I am standing before you there, by the rock at Chorev, and you shall strike the rock, and waters will go forth from it, and the nation will drink." And Moshe did so before the eyes of the elders of Israel.

### D. Weaning from the Staff:

### 11. במדבר יז, טז-כז | Bamidbar 17,16-26

(טז) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.

(יז) דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְקַח מֵאֵתֶם מִטָּה מִטָּה לְבַיִת אָב מֵאֵת כָּל נְשִׂיאֵהֶם לְבַיִת אֲבוֹתָם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מִטּוֹת אִישׁ אֶת שְׁמוֹ תִּכְתֹּב עַל מִטָּהוּ.

(יח) וְאֵת שֵׁם אֶהֱרֹן תִּכְתֹּב עַל מִטָּה לְוִי כִּי מִטָּה אֶחָד לְרֹאשׁ בֵּית אֲבוֹתָם.

(יט) וְהִנַּחְתָּם בְּאֵהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִיעַד לָכֶם שָׁמָּה.

(כ) וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אֶבְחַר בּוֹ מִטָּהוּ יִפְרֹחַ וְהִשְׁכַּחְתִּי מֵעַלִי אֶת תְּלוּנֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְלִינִים עֲלֵיכֶם...

(כג) וְהָיָה מִמִּחֲרַת וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֵהֶל הָעֵדוּת וְהִנֵּה פָּרַח מִטָּה אֶהֱרֹן לְבַיִת לְוִי וַיֵּצֵא פָּרַח וַיִּצָּץ צִיץ וַיִּגְמַל שְׁקָדִים.

(כד) וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַמִּטּוֹת מִלִּפְנֵי ה' אֶל כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִטָּהוּ.

(כה) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה הֲשֵׁב אֶת מִטָּה אֶהֱרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי מְרִי וְתִכַּל תְּלוּנֹתֶם מֵעַלִי וְלֹא יָמָתוּ.

(כו) וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ כֵּן עָשָׂה.

(16) Hashem spoke to Moses, saying,

(17) "Speak to the Children of Israel, and take from them rods, one for each fathers' house, of all their princes according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods: write every man's name on his rod.

(18) You shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there shall be one rod for each head of their fathers' houses.

(19) You shall lay them up in the Tent of Meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you.

(20) It shall happen that the rod of the man whom I shall choose shall bud: and I will quell from me the murmurings of the Children of Israel, which they murmur against you."

(21) Moses spoke to the Children of Israel; and all their princes gave him rods, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods.

(22) Moses laid up the rods before Hashem in the tent of the testimony.

(23) It happened on the next day, that Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded, and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.

(24) Moses brought out all the rods from before Hashem to all the Children of Israel: and they looked, and every man took his rod.

**(25) Hashem said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept for a token against the children of rebellion; that you may make an end of their murmurings against me, that they not die."**

(26) Moses did so. As Hashem commanded him, so he did.