

A Reconsideration on the Leadership of Moses as the Servant of the Lord

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Abstract

It is Moses that the Old Testament presents as the greatest model of leader even if some scholars opposes his historical figure. Moses was the first leader in the Old Testament whom the spirit of God has been put on. If we understand the spirituality as the communion with God, then we can find Moses' spirituality in his communion with God and we can say that Moses whom God knew face to face was the one who had the deepest spirituality. Moses' community was not merely a political liberation-purpose community but a multicultural religious community. As the leader of such a multicultural religious leader, Moses shows pastoral leadership. And his pastoral leadership shows also his pastoral spirituality which was revealed through the servanthship of God and his community, apparent mind of mission, model of change, emphasis on the word of God as the prophet, pray for his people as the role of mediator, sharing the authority of leadership with his people and finally, the selection of his successor. Such a distinguishing spirituality leads Moses to a typical model in the Old Testament.

Key word: *Spirituality, Prophet, Mediator, Multicultural community, Leader*

1. Moses as the leader of multicultural religious community

The Exodus case must have been a model of liberation. The portrait of Moses in the Old Testament is a liberator or deliverer that God sent to hear His people's sighing (Exodus 2:23) and redeem them from Pharaoh's oppression. That is why it is an important event in both Minjung theology and Liberation theology. The primary role assigned to Moses in this motif was to liberate the people from the oppression of Pharaoh. However, the Exodus event is not just a political event that signifies Israel's liberation. It means returning to a community that worships God again, not just the physical and slave liberation of God's people who lived as slaves for 430 years (Exodus 3:12; 5:1; 7:16; 9:1-9:13, 10:3).

And the Exodus was an opportunity to form a community of religion for worship outside of Israel's ethnic and kinship community. The 'many peoples' in Exodus 12:38 refers to the slaves who worked with the Israelites, indicating that the Exodus community was a multicultural community of peoples. It is these people who complained with greed for food (meat) problems in the story of the Seventy Elders in Numbers 11. They are non-Israelites who joined together when they escaped from Egypt, and were stirred up to miss the meat and other food they had enjoyed in Egypt (Num. 11:4) [1]. In addition, the community has continued for generations. In terms of age and gender ratio, the total number will be more

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than 2 million. Some scholars have translated the Hebrew word *elef* into ‘clan’ rather than ‘thousand’, so that about 600 family members participated in the exodus [2]. Fretheim believes that the number of 600,000 reflected the approximate population of the time of David and Solomon [3]. In any case, however, there is no disagreement that the Exodus community had a mix of races and generations.

The Exodus community started out as a multicultural community from the beginning, and the various peoples mixed in it excavated and assimilated into the people of Israel, and from that time the Israelites formed a worship community where not only the kinship community but also many multitudes attended worship services. Then Moses can be said to be the leader of a multicultural religious community. The purpose of this paper is to examine Moses' leadership as the leader of a multicultural religious community.

2. Servant leadership

Moses and Pharaoh in the story of Exodus in the Old Testament do not show good or evil leadership, but show two different types of leadership. For Pharaoh, the loss of expectant socio-economic benefits for the Egyptians loom large as the increase of Hebrew population endangers his effective control over them, whom he deems useful laboring sources. Anticipating potential damages to his authority and the loss of socio-economic benefits, therefore, Pharaoh renders the growing number of Hebrews as a threat to him and his kingdom. As king of a nation sensing an impending danger, Pharaoh has to take an action for defending him and his people [4]. On the other hand, Moses was responsible for freeing the Hebrews from Pharaoh and his kingdom and giving them freedom. Just as the Exodus community does not remain in a simple political community, Moses as a leader in the Old Testament is not just a political leader. The most prominent figure of Moses, the leader of the religious and multicultural community of the Exodus, is the serving servant. God's command in Moses' calling requires Moses to take off his shoes: “God replied, ‘Don't come any closer. Take off your shoes. The ground where you are standing is holy’” (Exodus 3:5).

In Moses' calling, God's call to Moses to take off the shoes can be considered to mean living as a servant of God. From now on, Moses' will disappears and becomes a servant who moves only according to the word of God. Through this meeting, Moses ends his long wandering at his own will and is reborn as a servant in the hands of God. Indeed, the representative title of Moses in the Old Testament is ‘*ebed YHWH*’ (the servant of the Lord) (Deuteronomy. 34:5).

The basic form of the Hebrew word *ebed* is *abad*. *Abad* means a person or group of people working for a certain period of time or a lifetime for another person or group. And this word has the meaning of ‘to worship God’ and ‘to serve people’ [5]. In other words, when the object of *abad* appears as God, the meaning becomes worship, and when the object becomes a person, the meaning becomes serving and service.

In Exodus 4:23, God made it clear that the object of Israel's service is God. The composition of the confrontation in Exodus does not appear between Moses and Pharaoh, but rather between God, the true object of service, and Pharaoh, the object of forced service. Here, for the leader of the community, a clear self-identity and a sense of mission are the power to make right judgment and the strong power to overcome difficulties. If Moses' self-identity was the Lord's servant as a serving leader, Moses' mission toward a religious community is first manifested in the rejection of Pharaoh's attempt to compromise during the ten plagues. Pharaoh's response (Exodus 5:2), who said that he did not know the God, may ask God to acknowledge God and end the plague or pray for himself as the disaster continues. Pharaoh's

claim that he could not send Israel is changed to a situation in which Israel is sent because he now knows the Lord. The extinction of the ten plagues did not allow the exodus, but Pharaoh allowed the exodus by knowing and experiencing the Lord's power and eventually recognizing divine power [6]. The ten plagues were to give Pharaoh, who did not know the Lord, awakening to God, while at the same time strengthening Moses' confidence in the mission and God who sent him. During the calamity, Pharaoh attempts four compromises to hinder worship, the purpose of the Exodus. His compromises include 'not to leave Egypt' (Exodus 8:25), 'not to go too far' (Exodus 8:28), 'to leave the children behind' (Exodus 10:9-11) and 'to leave the cow and sheep behind' (Exodus 10:24). The final fourth compromise can also be interpreted as meaning that the Hebrews should not make sacrifices the animals considered sacred by the Egyptians. It was because of Moses' clear commitment to serve the Lord, 'all the people together', 'with all possessions', 'out of the border of Egypt', and 'away from the border'.

Moses' distinct self-identity and mission as a servant of the Lord is that Moses led the Israelites to the land of Canaan and that the Israelites occupied the land of Canaan fulfilled what God had promised Israel's ancestors: "Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it" (Deuteronomy 30:5), "You may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them" (Deuteronomy 3:20). Already God has promised many times to give the land of Canaan to the ancestors of the Israeli faith, and entry into the land has been established as the mission of Moses leading the Exodus community. In this sense, referring to Moses as the Lord's servant can be said to mean that Moses was the owner of the servant's mind, a serving leader with worship to God and service to the Israeli community.

3. Mediating leadership

Moses was a leader who fully fulfilled the role of preaching the word of God and mediating the relationship between God and the people. The last period of his life in the wilderness journey was the period of thorough fulfillment of the office of the prophet who delivered the word of God and of the mediator for Israel. Moses' appearance as a prophet is reflected in his emphasis on God's word. The emphasis on the word serves to strengthen Moses' authority as a leader with the presence of the Spirit of God. The Hebrew words for 'hear/listen', 'obey' and 'hear and obey' that are frequently found in Deuteronomy 28 and 30 are all *shama* [7]. Although the basic meaning of *shama* is hear/listen, hearing to God's word does not end with simple listening, but it means living with obedience to what the people hear. The fate of the community is also the fate of the individuals in it. The detailed listing of the consequences of obedience and disobedience to God's word in Deuteronomy 28 and 30 sharply awakens the interrelationships between individuals and community. Here, the contents of the curse due to the failure to hear (*shama*) God's word are actually experienced by this religious community due to the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, which can be seen as a prophetic judgment. Later, Israel will become a prisoner of foreign nations because of disobedience (Deut. 30:1-5), but through a new covenant, Israel will come to God beyond the law (Deuteronomy 30:6-20; Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:22-28). Moses' insights proclaiming this future judgment and hope reflect the Old Testament's formal prophetic character. The main image of Moses, clearly described in Deuteronomy, is a prophet [8].

Moses' father-in-law Jethro was a Gentile, and Moses' wife was from Cush. Scholars disagree about the identity of the Cush woman. In the Old Testament tradition, Cush mainly

refers to Ethiopia (2 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 20:3,5; 37:9; 43:3; 45:14; Ezekiel 30:4-5, etc.) and Noth claims that Cush or Cushan is another name for Midian. Those who resisted Moses' leadership ranged from Moses' brothers and sisters to the whole community, and Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses' leadership because Moses took the Cush woman (Numbers 12:1). In particular, Miriam had the potential to represent the position of the women's community. It is said that Miriam, who felt a problem with the transformation of the organization's equality structure to men-centered, insisted on the horizontal structure of the community and represented the position of women who are becoming marginalized [9]. Miriam and Aaron's challenge soon led to the challenges of Korath, Dathan, Abiram and On. They made a faction against Moses and claimed that one of them could not be the leader of Israel because God was near to all Israel (Numbers 16). Compared to Aaron and Miriam's claim that they were 'close to God', their claims went a step further and propose a more democratic form. The story of the whole community opposing Moses appears throughout the Exodus story. However, in a community of tribes and generations, co-operatives and antagonists, Moses' leadership stands out as a mediator praying for the whole community, including the community that opposes himself.

Moses' appearance as a mediator is evident in the mediation prayer for the whole community, encompassing both his adversaries and helpers. It is Moses' mediating leadership that continues to be expressed consistently in the Exodus. He strives to save the people rather than punish them for their constant unbelief and rebellion. Moses' appearance as a mediator culminated in the golden calf. Exodus 32 contains Moses' earnest prayer to turn God's wrath against the Israelites who worshiped golden calf (Exodus 32:11-12). When Israel, who worshiped the golden calf instead of God, had to be cursed by God, Moses prayed for them to secure their lives: "Yet now, if you will forgive their sin-but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written"(Exodus 32:32). The people betrayed God and Moses and made idols. However, Moses again climbed to the top of the mountain, received a new stone tablet, and requested mediation for the sins of the people. This was to block the possibility of the people's secondary crimes [10]. Wasn't he the one who fled from Egypt early because he was afraid of killing the Egyptian and retaliating for death? Moses had a new look. Moses had a new look. In the field of history called 'Exodus', we see Moses transformed into the leader of the nation. Moses, who trembled and fled fearing of death, now asks God for forgiveness for another person's fault, not his own. It is said to have been the best intercessory prayer of the Old Testament. In his study of Moses, Miller concluded that the portrait of this leader was the 'intercessor' and 'suffering servant of God' for the people [11].

4. Transforming and succession leadership

Moses, described in the Pentateuch, is not a perfect leader from the beginning. In Moses' calling article, Moses' fear of being erected as a leader is vividly revealed. God's plan for salvation for the Israelites, who had been struggling under Egypt's oppression, was blocked from the beginning. The barrier was none other than the handicap of Moses himself. Moses wasn't happy with God's plan to use him. He has to make five excuses and reject the call of God for reasons such as lack of qualities as a leader and lack of confidence in the Israeli community and God who made him a leader (Exodus 3:11,13; 4:1,10,13). But Moses, who appears after being established as a leader, does not have the old form. Moses stood before the pharaoh, the fear of death itself, and cried out in the name of God: "The words of the Lord God of Israel, 'Send my people, and they shall keep the feast before me'" (Exodus 8:1). It

was certainly the leader Moses himself that had changed before the Israeli community changed. The most important change for the leader is himself. Numbers 12 also shows Moses full of meekness, unlike Moses, who was full of blood and killed the Egyptians: 'This man Moses was meeker than all the people of the earth' (Numbers 12:2). Also, Moses is not reluctant to share the Spirit of God upon him with the other seventy elders (Numbers 11:29). Moreover, Moses does not deny the leadership of Eldad and Medad who did not follow his orders. It would be said that such a figure shows the spirituality of sharing as a leader.

Deuteronomy 34, which contains the end of Moses, clearly shows the changed shape of Moses. God showed Moses the land of Canaan and said, 'You will not cross over there'. Moses remained alone in the land of Moab and died (Deuteronomy 34:4-5). Moses, he was not afraid of death in front of Pharaoh for his fellow Israelites, went forth to suffer for the nation, declared the lifelike law of Israel, and led the nation for 40 years. And he was buried in the land of Moab 'because of the word of God' without insisting that he would enter Canaan while looking at the land. All of these features show that Moses as the leader of the community was no longer a former man.

The composition of the succession from Moses to Joshua does not stop the Exodus events from being unfinished. It was possible because of Joshua's existence that Moses could remain the greatest leader. Deuteronomy 34:9 briefly summarizes the key elements of Moses-Joshua succession: "Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses has laid his hands on him. So the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses." Moses transferred his leadership to Joshua. Joshua took over the authority of Moses through the spirit of wisdom. Joshua is the model and measure of all future leaders who will be obligated to lead and rule Israel. If Moses' and Joshua's leadership succession structure is 'spirituality of succession' from Moses' side, it can be called 'succession of spirituality' from Joshua's side [12]. Moses' mission in the Old Testament is to return to the land where his ancestors walked. This can be seen as an enlarged form of the story of the migration of Abraham, the beginning of Israel's history. Starting with Moses' servant and walking along the path of Israel's greatest leader, Joshua can be said to be another Moses in another sense, the completion of Moses. It is no accident that Joshua is appearing as a miniature version of Moses. Moses, who was born as the son of a helpless woman and began the work of salvation in Exodus and Joshua, Moses' servant, who completed the work of salvation, are both servants of the Lord (Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 24:29). And these two people are suggested as the epitome of all the leaders in God's salvation work that will unfold later.

5. Conclusion

Referring to Moses as the Lord's servant can be said to mean that Moses was the owner of the servant's mind, a serving leader with worship to God and service to the Israeli community. It was no exaggeration to say that it was in the leadership of the leader Moses that it was possible to unite the Exodus community, a multicultural religious community, into a single unity. Moses appears as the model of the most typical leader presented by the Old Testament. The leadership that appears to Moses as the leader of the religious community should be sought from a relationship with God. Moses 'whom the Lord knew face to face' can also be said to be the deepest spirituality holder of the Old Testament.

The characteristic leadership of Moses, the leader of the exodus as a multicultural religious community, rather than a simple political community, was first to show self-identity as a servant leader and a clear sense of mission. The title of *ebed YHWH* (the servant of the Lord),

a title given to Moses, would represent the figure of a leader who serves God and the community and who shares the authority of the leader with the community.

Second, it can be said to be prophetic and intermediary leadership representing pastoral spirituality. The Old Testament presents Moses as a typical model of the prophet and also describes him as the greatest mediator.

Third, above all, Moses as a leader presents the changed figure of the leader himself before leading the change in the community. By passing Moses' leadership to Joshua, Joshua becomes a miniature of Moses and another servant of the Lord. By Moses presenting 'spirituality of succession', Joshua could do 'succession of spirituality'. This unique leadership makes Moses the epitome of a leader in the Old Testament.

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