Marble Necks and Blunted Blows

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To access a version of the script that includes Hebrew letters for Hebrew sources, please visit: https://tinyurl.com/MarbleNecksScript.

Introductory Note on Materials Used:
Illustrated with ink using pen and paintbrush.

Introductory Note on Text:
In addition to the narrative text, some panels include Hebrew sources with English translations. This script attempts to distinguish between three categories of text:

(1) **Caption** -- Narrator's voice as well as some primary sources in Hebrew and English; usually positioned at the top or bottom of the panel or else floating in outlined boxes and bubbles; typically medium sized characters
(2) **Image Text** -- Some Hebrew sources and translations; embedded in the visual elements of the panel without outlined boxes or bubbles; typically large or medium sized characters
(3) **Footnote** -- Some Hebrew sources and translations; usually positioned at the bottom of the panel without outlined boxes or bubbles; typically small sized characters

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PAGE 1
4 square panels arranged in a 2 x 2 grid.
PANELS 1 - 4

PANEL 1
Description: A teacher sits on a chair, reading from a book called "Tiny Midrash" to five young children dressed in modern orthodox Jewish day school clothing.

Caption - Top: When I was younger, I was taught two stories with some striking similarities

PANEL 2
Description: A large menacing figure lurches toward a smaller defenseless figure.

Caption - Top: One was about Yaakov.

Caption - Floating Column on Right: At the fateful reunion between the two estranged brothers, Yaakov and Esav, Esav leaned over to BITE Yaakov's neck. Esav pretended it was a kiss to get close enough to kill Yaakov, but miraculously, God turned Yaakov's neck to marble, and the plan was foiled -- ruining Esav's teeth instead.

PANEL 3
Description: A large menacing figure raises a sword against a smaller defenseless figure on the ground.

Caption - Top: And one was about Moshe.

Caption - Floating Column on Left: When word that Moshe had killed an Egyptian supervisor reached Pharaoh, Pharaoh ordered Moshe's death. The executioner swung his sword to behead Moshe, but miraculously, God turned Moshe's neck to marble, and the sword bounced off -- killing the executioner instead.

PANEL 4
Description: A young student (narrator as a child) raises her eyebrows with some confusion and skepticism; she has messy curly hair and is wearing a long sleeve buttoned polo.

Caption - Top: Our teacher presumably meant to impress us with mighty tales of God's miracles. Other details from these stories distracted me instead.
Image:

Caption - Floating Bubble on Top Left: Did it hurt?

Caption - Floating Bubble on Bottom Left: Did their necks stay like that forever?

Caption - Floating Bubble on Top Right: What in the world is a marble neck anyway?

Caption - Floating Bubble on Bottom Right: ...and did this really happen???

PAGE 2
4 square panels arranged in a 2 x 2 grid.
PANELS 5 - 8

PANEL 5
Description: A character (narrator) faces a wall of floor to ceiling bookshelves and selects a book from the top shelf; she is wearing a grey hoodie with the hood up and black pants.

Caption - Top: Over the years, my understanding of agadic texts has shifted and matured.

PANEL 6
Description: The character (narrator) sits at a large desk with a text in front of her.

Caption - Top: The urgency to classify details as "real" or "imagined" has since faded, and the exercise of **finding meaning** has taken its place.

Caption - Floating Column on Top Left:

Rambam on Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1

...when you see one of their words that intelligence pushes off, you stop and reflect about it and know that it is a riddle and a parable…

Caption - Floating Column on Top Right:

[Hebrew text of Rambam on Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1]

PANEL 7

Description: Two sets of text are framed by the captions, each with highlighted sections.

Caption - Top: Recently I reencountered the stories from my youth.

Image Text - Middle Top:

Bereishit Rabbah 78

[Highlighted section begins] Rabbi Yannai said to him...it teaches that [Esav] came not to kiss [Yaakov] but to bite him, but our ancestor Yaakov's neck became like marble and that wicked man's teeth were blunted [highlighted section ends]. And what does it come to teach by saying, 'and they cried'? Rather this one cried about his neck, and this one cried about his teeth.

[Hebrew text of Bereishit Rabbah 78 with corresponding highlighted text]

Caption - Middle: I took a closer look at the sources, and I was again struck by the similarities between the two accounts.

Image Text - Middle Bottom:

Devarim Rabbah 2:29

And how did he [Moshe] flee from before Pharaoh, as it is written (Shemot 2:15), "...Moshe fled from before Pharaoh..."? [Highlighted section begins] Rabbi Yannai said: the executioner came to put the sword on his neck, and the sword became blunted from upon his neck, which had been turned to marble... [highlighted section ends].

[Hebrew text of Devarim Rabbah 2:29 with corresponding highlighted text]

PANEL 8

Description: Hebrew text and translation float on a grey background above a pair of crying closed eyes.

Caption - Top: A particular line from the Yaakov episode caught my attention:

Image Text - Middle Top:

[Hebrew text from Bereishit Rabbah 78]

And what does it come to teach by saying, 'and they cried'?

Rather this one cried about his neck, and this one cried about his teeth.

Caption - Floating Box in Middle: Why would Yaakov cry about his neck?

PAGE 3

4 square panels arranged in a 2 x 2 grid.

PANELS 9 - 12

PANEL 9

Description: A grimacing open mouth with teeth looms from the shadows.

Caption - Top: An explanation offered by the sages suggests that Yaakov feared being bitten again.

Footnote - Bottom:

Midrash Tanchuma, Vayishlach 4

...Esav cried because Yaakov's neck had become as hard as marble, and Yaakov cried out because he was afraid that Esav might try to bite him again.

[Hebrew text of Midrash Tanchuma, Vayishlach 4]

PANEL 10
Description: A ram and a wolf battle; the ram butts the wolf whose mouth and teeth angle dangerously toward the ram's horn.

Caption - Top: An especially vivid retelling of this anxiety is illustrated with a parable of a ram whose horn is bitten by a wolf.

Footnote - Bottom:

Midrash Tanchuma, Vayishlach 4

This may be compared to a situation in which a wolf attacks a ram. The ram gores the wolf with his horns, while the wolf sinks his teeth into the ram's horn until they both cry out. The wolf cries out because he is unable to do any harm to the ram, and the ram cries out because he is fearful that the wolf might attack him once again and kill him. Esav and Yaakov cried out for the same reason...

[Hebrew text of Midrash Tanchuma, Vayishlach 4]

PANEL 11
Description: The narrator character sits at the desk with Jewish texts and materials for making comics; a pen is in her hand on a page with four panels.

Caption - Top: Still, I remember my childhood question.

Caption - Floating Bubble on Top Left: Did it hurt?

PANEL 12
Description: Ink text on a white background.

Caption - Floating Center: And I wonder what the nature of that pain could have been.

PAGE 4
4 square panels arranged in a 2 x 2 grid.
PANELS 13 - 16

PANEL 13
Description: A slender pale neck is represented as a tower.

Caption - Top: The similarities between the Yaakov and Moshe accounts run deeper than concrete details and midrashic textual resemblances.

Caption - Floating Column on Top Left:

Shir HaShirim 7:5

Your neck is like a tower of ivory, Your eyes like pools in Heshbon By the gate of Beth-rabbim, Your nose like the Lebanon tower That faces toward Damascus.

Caption - Floating Column on Top Right:

[Hebrew text of Shir HaShirim 7:5]

Caption - Floating Box in Middle: Both are anchored to the same verse in Shir Hashirim.

Footnote - Bottom:

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 7:5:1

“Your neck is like a tower of ivory”: it is written (Bereishit 33:4), “Esav ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept..” … “Your neck is like a tower of ivory,”: it is written (Shemot 2:15), “When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh.”

[Hebrew text of Shir HaShirim Rabbah 7:5:1]

PANEL 14

Description: Two figures reach toward each other as mirror images amidst encroaching shadows.

Caption - Top: In addition to this shared biblical reference, there are notable contextual parallels in both instances as well.

Caption - Bottom: For both Yaakov and Moshe, God’s miracle of the marbe neck saves them from threats closest to them.

PANEL 15

Description: Two sets of Jewish texts are framed by captions at the top and middle/bottom of the page.

Caption - Top: The sages dispute the reunion moment between Yaakov and Esav. Maybe Esav’s kiss *was* a kiss -- an especially heartfelt one after the years of their separation.

Image Text (Small) - Middle Top (1):

[Hebrew text of Bereishit Rabbah 78]

Image Text (Large) - Middle Top (2):

[Hebrew text of Bereishit 33:4]

Image Text (Large) - Middle Top (3):

[Bereishit 33:4]

“...falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept.”

Image Text (Small) - Middle Top (4):

[Bereishit Rabbah 78]

Rabbi Simeon ben Elazar said...it teaches that [Esav] felt compassion in that moment and kissed [Yaakov] with all his heart.

Caption - Middle Bottom: The indecipherability between familial kiss and deadly bite is further muddied with the possibility that it was through this tender moment of closeness that Esav would ultimately harm Yaakov.

Footnote - Bottom:

Sefat Emet, Genesis, Vayishlach 14

… when Esav saw that he would not prevail through war, he sought to harm him through his closeness.

[Hebrew text of Sefat Emet, Genesis, Vayishlach 14]

PANEL 16

Description: Two sets of Jewish texts are framed by captions at the top and middle/bottom of the page.

Caption - Top: In Moshe's case, the danger came from the house in which he was raised. The sages paint Pharaoh's deep reluctance to punish Moshe, until news of Moshe's crime spurs Pharaoh to decree his execution.

Image Text (Small) - Middle Top (1):

[Hebrew text of Devarim Rabbah 2:29]

Image Text (Large) - Middle Top (2):

[Hebrew text of Shemot 2:15]

Image Text (Small) - Middle Top (3):

[Shemot 2:15]

When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moshe...

Image Text (Large) - Middle Top (4):

[Devarim Rabbah 2:29]

When Pharaoh heard this, he said, "About many things I've heard and kept quiet, but since it's reached bloodshed, apprehend him!..."

Caption - Middle Bottom: The familial betrayal Moshe faced may have had more than one source as well; perhaps in the act of striking an Egyptian taskmaster, Moshe allied himself with the Jewish people, only to have them turn against him too.

Footnote - Bottom:

Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 167

'...he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand (Shemot 2:12)' at the moment that he [Moshe] killed him, there were no Egyptians, but there were Israelites. And 'sand' refers to none other than Israel...if it were not for these evildoers [Datan and Aviram], the matter would never have been discovered…

[Hebrew text of Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 167]

PAGE 5
4 square panels arranged in a 2 x 2 grid.
PANELS 17 - 20

PANEL 17

Description: A lone marble pillar stands against a grey background.

Caption - Top: To be sure, the similar accounts of Yaakov and Moshe are characterized by great miracles and divine protection. Presumably, feelings of awe and gratitude accompanied these salvations.

PANEL 18

Description: The lone marble pillar stands against a more shadowed grey background.

Caption - Top: But I wonder again about those tears of Yaakov. If mixed in with the awe and gratitude there may have been traces of sadness and pain for the very devastating necessity of a salvation from one so close.

PANEL 19

Description: Three bubbles of text are positioned on a grey background.

Caption - Top: What does it mean to need such a miracle?

Caption - Floating Bubble on Top Left: Did it hurt?

Caption - Floating Bubble on Middle Right: Did their necks stay like that forever?

Caption - Floating Bubble on Bottom Left: What in the world is a marble neck anyway?

PANEL 20

Description: The narrator character sits quietly and contemplatively at the desk, reflecting; there is a stack pages/books (Jewish sources) and a stack of comics in front of her.

Special thanks to Shoshi Finkel for her guidance and assistance with this script.

List of Sources with Links to Sefaria Library
(in order of appearance)

- Rambam on Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1
- Bereishit Rabbah 78
- Devarim Rabbah 2:29
- Midrash Tanchuma, Vayishlach 4
- Shir HaShirim 7:5
- Shir HaShirim Rabbah 7:5:1
- Bereishit 33:4
- Sefat Emet, Genesis, Vayishlach 14
- Shemot 2:15
- Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 167