

**Was Moses a Political Assassin?  
Shmot – 2010  
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**1. Shmot 2:11-12**

<p>When Moses was grown he began to go out to his own people, and he saw their hard labour. One day he saw an Egyptian beating one of his fellow Hebrews. Moses looked all around and when he saw that no one was about he beat the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.</p>	<p>ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו: ויפן כה וכה וירא כי אין איש ויך את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול</p>
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What problems are there with Moshe's actions?

**2. BS Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary, pp. 44f (quoted in The Torah by Gunther Plaut)**

The text does not moralize on Moses' act of violence. Nowhere is there an explicit evaluation that either praises or condemns it. Rather, a situation is painted with great realism and sensitivity, and the leader is left to ponder on the anomalies of the deed. Moses acts in order to right an injustice, not for his own sake, but for another's, He is motivated to react with violence out of love for his people which may even jeopardize his own life.

**3. Vayikra 24:21**

<p>One who kills a human being shall be put to death.</p>	<p>וּמִכָּה אָדָם יוּמָת</p>
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**4. Rambam Rotzeach 1:6**

<p>Who pursues his fellow man with intent to kill....every Jew is obliged to rescue the victim even at the expense of the pursuers life.</p>	<p>הרודף אחר חברו להורגו...הרי כל ישראל מצווין להציל הנרדף מיד הרודף, ואפילו בנפשו של רודף.</p>
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**5. Shmot Raba 1:28**

<p>Once an Egyptian taskmaster saw an Israelite foreman's wife, who was beautiful-free of any blemish-and he cast his eye upon her. So the next day at cockcrow, he went to that foreman's home and got him out of the house and came to his wife who thought he was her husband and she became pregnant by him. It so happened that the husband turned back and saw the Egyptian as he was leaving the house. The husband reentered his house and asked his wife, "Did the Egyptian touch you?" She replied, "Yes, but I thought it was you!" When the taskmaster became aware that the husband had found him out, he put the husband</p>	<p>פעם אחת הלך הנוגש המצרי אצל שוטר ישראל ונתן עיניו באשתו שהיתה יפת תואר בלי מום. עמד לשעת קריאת הגבר והוציאו מביתו וחזר המצרי ובא על אשתו והיתה סבורה שהוא בעלה ונתעברה ממנו. חזר בעלה, מצא המצרי יוצא מביתו. שאל לה: נגע בך? אמרה לו: הן, וסבורה הייתי שאתה הוא. כיון שידע הנוגש שידע בו, חזר לעבודת הפרך והיה</p>
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back to heavy labor and beat him all day trying to kill him...Through the holy spirit, Moses saw what the Egyptian had done to the Hebrew in his home and what he intended to do to him in the field... And when he saw that there was no one who would be zealous for G-d and slay the Egyptian he smote the Egyptian.	מכה אותו ומבקש להורגו...והיה משה רואה והביט בו, ראה מה עשה לו בבית ברוח הקדש וראה מה שעתיד לעשות לו בשדה. וירא כי אין איש...שיקנא להקב"ה ויהרגהו.
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How do the above understand the word "makeh?" How is the word understood differently in the commentaries below?

### 6. Naphtali Hertz Weisel – quoted by Nechama Leibowitz

It looks very much like an unlawful act. Did merely striking a blow warrant killing? Surely the shedding of blood was forbidden to all mankind even prior to the giving of the Torah.

### 7. Fox Shmot 2:12

No man there – the expression taken in context would seem to indicate that Moshe was afraid of being seen.

### 8. Rasag Shmot 2:12

He hit the Egyptian and he died.	ויך את המצרי וימת.
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### 9. Ha'Emek Davar

Moses looked around for a way to bring the Egyptian who struck the Hebrew for nought to justice but saw there was nobody he could appeal to for justice for all were against the Jews.	חפש עצות לקבול על המצרי שהכהו חנם וירא כי אין איש להגיד לפניו את העול כי כולם עצרת בוגדים ושונאי ישראל.
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### 10. Midrash Petirat Moshe

When towards the end of his life Moses tried to put off his death so he could enter Eretz Yisrael...

G-d said to him "Did I tell you to slay the Egyptian?" Moses answered: "You slew all the first-born in Egypt." Then G-d silenced him by saying: "Can you liken yourself to Me? I cause death, but I also revive the dead."	אמר לו הקב"ה: בלום אמרתי לך שתהרוג את המצרי. אמר לו משה: ואתה הרגת כל בכורי מצרים ואני אמות בשביל מצרי אחד?! אמר לו הקב"ה: ואתה דומה אלי, ממת ומחיה? כלום אתה יכול להחיות כמוני!
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How can Moshe's act be justified?  
Which passage is most critical of Moshe?

## **Class**

Cf. Budda

## **Shmot 2:11-12**

Should have kept law of land

## **Shmot Raba 1:28**

Duty to take law into own hands and save victim  
Mizri not keeping Noachide law

## **Rasag Shmot 2:12**

Not clear if killed him deliberately or beat him so severely that he died, latter suggested by makeh, vayach, same word  
Only meant to hurt him

## **Ha'Emek Davar**

No legal system whatsoever  
Temporary setting aside of the law because of circumstance

## **Midrash Petirat Moshe**

Has to be due process

## **Conclusion**

Depends on how define makeh, fact that used same means acted correctly