

# DUMB

This word presents an interesting study in its unique origins, and in its unique journey into the Teutonic languages. The etymology appears historically in Akkadian and Hebrew, and its transfer exclusively to Teutonic suggests that other factors may affect how it was used in both the original languages and in the ensuing languages.

Three major related words appear in Hebrew, with four main meanings:

- **דָּם** = dam = blood
- **דָּמָה** = dama = be like, resemble
- **דָּמָה** = dama = cease, cause to cease, cut off, destroy
- **דָּמִי** = dami = cessation, pause, quiet, rest
- **דָּמַם** = damam = be or grow dumb, silent, still
- stupefy, be astounded, stupefied
- **דָּמָמָה** = damamah = (silence) whisper

Related words in Akkadian are **dāmu** = blood, **da'mu** = dark, **da'āmu** = to become dark, **damtu**, **dutu** = shape. The **dam** word is also found in Arabic, Ugaritic, Syriac, and so on.

An interesting cognate in Hebrew is the word for red, **Adom**, which is so familiar to us as the father of mankind. Adam literally was named Red. Note how **dam = blood** is the color red.

This red color carried on down among the ancient Hebrew people, who were noted for their handsome features and outstanding physiques.

Lam 4:7 -- Their princes were brighter than snow and whiter than milk, their bodies more red than rubies, their appearance like sapphires.

1 Sam 16:12 -- So he sent and had him (David) brought in. He was red, with a fine appearance and handsome features.

1 Sam 17:42-43 -- He looked David over and saw that he was only a boy, red and handsome, and he despised him.

This word **admuw**, or **admowm**, is mostly translated as "ruddy," simply because the Jewish and Christian translators did not want to use the word "red." Use of the word red would identify genetic inheritance beyond their conceptual framework. For example we can see it in the manner in which *The Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* explains the traditional understanding of the word:

- Ugaritic **adam** is the rouging done by the nobility after bathing. The Bible describes the color of skin (like coral, Lam 4:7), war shields (parallel to scarlet, Nah 2:3), fermented wine (Prov 23:31), sin (Isa 1:18), and tabernacle curtains (Ex 25:5). Also note Old Akkadian **adamu** "dark red," as of a garment, Akkadian **adamatu** "dark red soil" and **adamu** "red blood," and Aramaic **adam**, as of blood.

Edom: This name was given to Esau, who desired red pottage more than his birthright

(Gen 25:30; 36:1). Note how this folk tradition, to avoid the literal meaning, finds another explanation of the word. Rebecca gave birth to twins; the first was colored "red," (Gen 25:25, NIV). If Edom was red so also was Jacob, as were their father, Isaac, and their grandfather, Abraham.

We can see the manner in which the translators used the words, from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*.

**דָּמָה** OT:119 adam (aw-dam'); to show blood (in the face), i.e. flush or turn rosy:

KJV - be (dyed, made) red (ruddy).

OT:120 'adam (aw-dawm'); from OT:119; ruddy i.e. a human being (an individual or the species, mankind, etc.):

OT:121 'Adam (aw-dawm'); the same as OT:120; Adam the name of the first man, also of a place in Palestine:

OT:122 'adom (aw-dome'); from OT:119; rosy:

KJV - red, ruddy.

OT:123 'Edom (ed-ome'); or (fully) 'Edowm (ed-ome'); from OT:122; red; Edom, the elder twin-brother of Jacob; hence the region (Idumaea) occupied by him.

OT:124 'odem (o'-dem); from OT:119; redness, i.e. the ruby, garnet, or some other red gem.

I have been unable to determine how the **dama** = resemble or the other words derived from **dam** = red. A relationship must exist, understood by the ancient people, that now escapes us. However, the **dama** = cease, **dami** = pause, rest, and quiet, and **damam** = dumb, silent and still are related by simple semantic relationship. The one word then came into the Teutonic languages for that singular use only.

English	Hebrew
<b>Dumb = silent, speechless, dull, stupid.</b>	<b>Dama = cease, perish. Dami = silence, Damma = one silenced, destroyed</b>
<p>Compare Old Norse <i>dumbr</i>, Gothic <i>dumbs</i>, Old Saxon <i>dumb</i>, German <i>dumm</i>. Anglo Saxon <i>dumb</i>; akin to Danish <i>dom</i> = stupid, dumb, Swedish <i>dumb</i> and Old Norse forms meant only mute, speechless. In Old English <i>dumb</i> = silent, unable to speak; in Old High German (<i>thumb</i>) it meant both this and stupid.</p> <p>These diverse applications suggest as the original sense such notion as "stupid," "not understanding," which might pass naturally either into "deaf" or "dumb."</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. lacking intelligence or good judgment; stupid; dull-witted.</li> <li>2. lacking the power of speech (often offensive when applied to humans): a dumb animal.</li> <li>3. temporarily unable to speak: dumb with astonishment.</li> <li>4. refraining from any or much speech; silent.</li> </ol>	<p><b>דָּמָה</b> = <b>cease, cause to cease, cut off, destroy</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>cease</i> Je 14:17 (eyes from weeping) La 3:49 (<i>id.</i>)</li> <li>2. <i>cause to cease, cut off, destroy</i>, Israel: Je 6:2; Ho 4:5.</li> <li>3. Je 47:5; Ez 32:2; Ho 10:7; <i>be cut off, destroyed, ruined</i>, of a city Is 15:1, Je 47:5; of people Ho 4:6, Zp 1:11</li> </ol> <p><b>דָּמָה</b> <b>cessation, pause, quiet, rest;</b></p> <p>— 1. <i>quiet</i>, Is 62:6 <i>keep not quiet</i> (let there be <i>no quiet to you</i>); in prayer to God ψ 83:2 <i>keep not quiet</i></p> <p><b>דָּמָה</b> = <b>be or grow dumb, silent, still</b></p> <p>ψ 35:15 Jb 30:27; Am 5:13</p>

5. made, done, etc., without speech.

6. lacking some usual property, characteristic, etc.

7. performed in pantomime; mimed.

from natural infirmity (Ex. 4:11); not knowing what to say (Prov. 31:8); unwillingness to speak (Ps. 39:9; Lev. 10:3).

3. *be silent*  $\psi$  4:5; Ez 24:17 Lv 10:3 Am 5:13; in grief La 2:10; 3:28.

4. *be still* Jb 31:34;  $\equiv$  perish Je 8:14; 48:2  $\psi$  31:18; *be silent to* i.e. be resigned to  $\psi$  37:7; 62:6.

## TWOT

The root under consideration is used almost exclusively in prophetic books or context. Thus, the verb is found outside this genre only in 2 Sam 21:5 and Ps 49:12,20 . The verb means to come to an end, but it is always a violent end that is indicated: Isa 15:1; Jer 47:5; Hos 4:5-6; 10:15.

In a different context, however, this verb is used by Jeremiah in his aspiration that his tears shed for his people not "cease" (Jer 14:17; cf. Lam 3:49). Isaiah also uses the verb (in the Niphal perfect) in his familiar, "Woe is me for I am 'undone'" (Isa 6:5).

**damâ** is used seventeen times in the OT and twelve of these are in the Niphal stem.

**Rest, silence, occurs four times:** Isa 62:6-7; Ps 83:1; Isa 38:10.

**damam** is cognate to the Ugaritic dmm "be silent." It occurs twenty-nine times in the Qal, and five times in the Niphal. It is found primarily in poetry.

**damam** is often found in a context of catastrophe and mourning. Aaron and Ezekiel had to keep quiet in spite of the death of loved ones (Lev 10:3; Ezek 24:17). The elders of Judah sit silently with dust on their heads (Lam 2:10). Sometimes the notion of stress is absent, however, as in Job 29:21.

Judgment upon nations brings the meaning close to "destroy. " The cities of Moab (Jer 48:2) and the island fortress of Tyre (Ezek 27:32) are silenced, and men of war are brought to the silence of death. Jeremiah applies this to the troops of Damascus (Jer 49:26) and Babylon (Jer 50:30; cf. Isa 23:2). The only Hiphil use of the verb refers to the Lord dooming Israel (Jer 8:14). The wicked (1 Sam 2:9; Ps 31:17 [H\* 181]) and the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex 15:16) are also silenced in death.

## List of References

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**OED:** *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1971. Now available on line from Online Subscription Department, Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016.

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I offer no references for words that come from various other languages, and that can be traced by browsing the World Wide Web.