

CHEVRAH TORAH...LT, 5780

Discovering the Other—Understanding Ourselves

Being a student of Elie Wiesel means being yourself and cultivating your humanity, your sensitivity to others...It means knowing you do not have to choose between your particular identity and your concern for all people...that the particular and the universal can be mutually reinforcing." [Witness Ariel Burger, pgs. 253-254]

Ki Tisa

Exodus 34:27-35

Key KOSHI:

HOW does Divine revelation make Moses the "other"??...

WHAT does this teach us about our relationship to God in Covenant today?

P'SHAT...The Story that Unearths THE Question: WHAT Are We to Become

34:27] And the Lord said to Moses: Write down these commandments, for in accordance with these commandments I make a covenant with you and with Israel.

28] And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water; and he wrote down on the tablets the terms of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

29] So Moses came down from Mount Sinai. And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him. 30] Aaron and all the Israelites saw that the skin of Moses' face was radiant; and they shrank from coming near him. 31] But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the chieftains in the assembly returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. 32] Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he instructed them concerning all that the Lord had imparted to him on Mount Sinai. 33] And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

34] Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would leave the veil off until he came out; and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35] the Israelites would see how radiant the skin of Moses' face was. Moses would then put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him.

27 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּתֹב־לְךָ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים
הָאֵלֶּה כִּי עַל־פִּי אֶתְּנֶנְךָ
בְּרִית וְאֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל: 28 וַיְהִי־שָׁם עִם־יְהוָה
אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל
וַיִּמֵּים לֹא שָׁתָה וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְּחָת אֶת־דְּבָרֵי
הַבְּרִית עֲשֶׂר־תְּהִי הַדְּבָרִים: 29 וַיְהִי בְרִדַּת מֹשֶׁה
מִהָר סִינַי וּשְׁנַי לַחַת הָעֵדֻת בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה בְּרִדְתּוֹ
מִן־הָהָר וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא־יָדַע כִּי קָרוֹן עוֹר פָּנָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ
אִתּוֹ: 30 וַיֵּרָא אֶהָרֹן וְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה
וְהִנֵּה קָרוֹן עוֹר פָּנָיו וַיִּירָאוּ מִגִּשְׁתֹּת אֱלֹהֵי:
31 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵם מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אֵלָיו וְכָל־
הַנְּשָׂאִים בְּעֵדָה וַיִּדְבֹּר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם: 32 וְאַחֲרֵי־
כֵן נִגְשׂוּ כָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּצְוֶם אֶת־כָּל־אִשָּׁר
דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אִתּוֹ בְּהָר סִינַי: [מִפְטוֹר] 33 וַיִּכַּל
מֹשֶׁה מִדְּבַר אֲתָם וַיִּתֵּן עַל־פָּנָיו מַסּוּהָ:
34 וּבָבֹא מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ יִסִּיר אֶת־
הַמַּסּוּהָ עַד־צֵאתוֹ וַיִּצָּא וְדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יִצְוָה: 35 וַרְאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־פָּנָיו
מֹשֶׁה כִּי קָרוֹן עוֹר פָּנָיו מֹשֶׁה וְהִשִּׁיב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־
הַמַּסּוּהָ עַל־פָּנָיו עַד־בֹּאוֹ לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ...An Interchange of Truths: The More Jewish—The More Human

V. 29

So Moses came down from Mt. Sinai. And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Pact, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with Him

SARNA...A unique phenomenon conveyed by a unique Hebrew verb, *KaRaN*. The traditional meaning is favored by Habakuk 3:4, in which *Karnayim*, “rays of light,” appear in parallelism to “a brilliant splendor.” Moses’ radiance is a reflection of the Divine Radiance...

RASHI...*had become radiant*...How was it that Moses merited these rays of splendor? Our Rabbis taught [TANCHUMA] The radiance resulted from the Divine hand with which God had sheltered Moses [33:22] when He showed him glimpses of His Glory.

TANCHUMA...R’ Judah ben Nachman said in the name of Resh Lakish: Wherein did Moses merit the beams of God’s Glory? When God taught Moses Torah to transcribe for Israel, there was some ink still left in the pen. When he wiped back his hair, the ink got on his head.

OR HaCHAYIM...Moses was unaware, because coming down from the mountain he was holding the two tablets, and presumed the light beamed forth not from him but from them- the light of the Torah.

ALSHECH...Torah uses this way of describing Moses’ descent to underline that the holiness Moses acquired on the Mountain during his stay in God’s proximity did not evaporate once he returned to earthly surroundings. The evidence was, first of all, his ability to carry the heavy tablets in one hand. Since he had become so thoroughly spiritualized, he did not even notice that his face gave off the rays. One might even assume that in the higher regions Moses came from, these light emissions would not even have been visible...but rather the regular radiance of being in the Presence of God.

V. 30

Aaron and all the Israelites saw that the skin of Moses’ face was radiant; and they shrank from coming near him.

SARNA...The peculiar threefold use of *karan*...is probably a pointed allusion to the golden calf, for *keren* is the usual word for a horn. This gives rise to the mistaken notion that Moses grew horns, thus the rendering of *cornuta*—horns in the Vulgate...A horned Moses later become a familiar figure in art, of course, as in Michaelangelo’s Moses..

SIFREI...*and they shrank from coming near him*...Come and see how great is the power of sin. Until they extended their hand in sin [by worshipping the Golden Calf], what does [the Torah] say? *The appearance of the glory Of God was like a consuming fire on the mountain top before the eyes of the Children of Israel [24:17]* but they neither feared nor trembled. But from the time when they made the Gold Calf, they shivered and trembled even before the rays Moses’ glory.

NECHAMA... Sin had deprived them of the ability to see with spiritual insight capable of appreciating the holy. Had they honored the Divine call to be holy, they each would have felt the rays of majesty in their own heart...

V. 33

And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

BE’ER MOSHE...Moses wore the mask to spare the people the embarrassment of seeing how they had so deprived themselves of closeness to God that they could not even look at his prophet.

ABRAVANEL...Moses felt that it was not right for him to use this glow in ordinary everyday matters...But when he was imparting the message of Torah to Israel, he did not veil his face so they would feel the full spiritual impact.

IBN KASPI...When Moses descended the mountain, the spiritual impact of his communion with the Supreme clung to him, giving him a dimension, which singled him out from any other being. Overawing all who came near. God forbid that “*karan*” should refer to anything tangible, to actual physical rays. It is a grave mistake to render it by any other equivalent than “force.”

DRASH...A Dialogue of Celebrating Difference: Listening for the Light

V. 34-5 *Whenever Moses would come before the Presence to speak with Him, he'd remove the veil...and whenever he'd come out to speak to Israel that which had been commanded, they would see Moses' face—skin radiant, but then Moses would put the veil back on his face.*

RALBAG...

Moses attained an extraordinary degree of spirituality on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights without food or drink...These heights of godliness and spirituality were reflected in the beams sent forth by his countenance, and this preeminence of mind over matter remained with him even when he came down from the mountain. His self-communings, and the halo of spirituality in which he moved prevented him from noticing the Israelites when they came to consult him. When the latter saw this, they were afraid to approach him, so wrapped up in his own thoughts.... At this, Moses called them and spoke to them. It was then he put on the veil- to signify that he tried to shake off his excess spirituality in order to bring himself down to an earthy level and converse with them. But when he communed with God, he removed the veil. He required no extra efforts to commune with God, so he removed the veil. All his efforts were needed, however, in the opposite direction, in diminishing his spirituality in order to converse with ordinary human beings.

NECHAMA...

Moses adjusted the message to the level of his audience so that they should not be overwhelmed by its awesomeness. But there is one unfortunate drawback to this explanation: It runs counter to the wording of the text. For there, quite the opposite is stated.

Moses put the veil back on when he finished speaking with them. In other words, while he was speaking with Israel, he wore no veil....We therefore prefer ABRAVANEL's explanation in which he divides Moses' time into three: when the Lord spoke to him, when he transmitted the Divine message to Israel, and when he was engaged in worldly affairs. It was only at the third that he removed the veil... Accordingly, just as he received God's message without a veil, so he transmitted it. He did not hide behind it or make Judaism into an esoteric cult for the initiated only but imparted it to all Israel without discrimination—just as he received it at the Hand of God. His was a generous giving of his knowledge and the fruits of his inspiration in the spirit of "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!"

SOD: The Open Questioning that Leads to Love

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN...

In the month of Sivan was the Divine Revelation at Sinai. 40 days later, in the month of Tammuz, the smashing of the tablets occurred, and 80 days after, the second set of tablets were given on Yom Kippur, a response to Israel's repentance...The People Israel come of age by taking responsibility for their actions and for their world. But with this new Revelation, God's Presence is now hidden...no longer manifest in the shaking mountain of Sinai...So the mask that covers Moses' face when he descends from the mountain for the second time reflects the mask that will hide the Holy One from view, no longer directly manifesting in guiding the people...Neither Israel nor humanity are ready, as of yet, for such direct, Divine intervention.

With the second tablets, the new paradigm for God in the world will not be direct revelation, as at Sinai, but rather the masquerade of Purim, when God's Name is not even directly referred to in the Scroll...Esther, quite literally, means "hiddenness." The Israelites must now carry with them the burden and sacred responsibility of interpreting God's Revelation and thus revealing God on their long march towards Redemption.