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### Radiance

In 1914 the European journal of psychoanalysis published an anonymous article. The editors justified printing the article because the author was “personally known to them” and had experience in psychoanalysis. It was subsequently revealed that the author was none other than Sigmund Freud himself who chose to publish this paper anonymously because its subject was not one of his patients and their dreams, neuroses, or conflicts, but was rather Michelangelo’s famous sculpture of Moses.

I suspect that most of you can picture Michelangelo’s Moses in your minds; if not, just picture Charlton Heston with the wavy grey hair. Moses is sitting on a rocky crag on Mt. Sinai with the tablets of law held in his arms, an angry gaze on his face as he surveys his people worshipping the golden calf. His feet are poised and tense; in another moment he will leap to his feet and shatter the tablets at the base of the mountain.

Freud, however, looked closely at the way that Moses holds the tablets in the sculpture. He does not look like a man grasping an object that he is about to shatter. According to a physiological reconstruction of Moses’ arms, Freud concluded that the statute depicts a man who had been loosely holding onto the heavy tablets, who had then been distracted by a disturbing sight that had drawn his attention away. As he looked away, he loosened his grip on the tablets and they began to slip from under his arm. Michelangelo’s statue of Moses is a sculpture of Moses catching the tablets and keeping them secure under his arms after they had begun to slip.

According to Freud’s investigation, Michelangelo sculpted a depiction of Moses that is absent from the Torah. Michelangelo’s Moses conquered his temper and never shattered the tablets. In Jewish tradition, the shattering of the tablets was one of Moshe’s greatest actions which God fully endorsed. But Michelangelo chose to depict a Moses who was in full control of his anger and rescued the tablets rather than allow them to slip from his hands.

But there is another element of Michelangelo’s Moses that can shed some light on which biblical episode, if any, Michelangelo was attempting to portray in stone. Michelangelo’s Moses has horns. Depictions of Moses with horns was common in Medieval Christian art and iconography reflecting the Vulgate’s translation of Exodus 34 into Latin, where the Torah says that Moshe’s face “shined” with rays of light.

וַיְהִי בְרִדְת מֹשֶׁה מֵהָר סִינַי וְשָׁנִי לַחַת הָעֵדוּת בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה בְּרִדְתּוֹ מִן־הָהָר וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא־יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו  
בְּדַבְּרוֹ אִתּוֹ:

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.

“*Karan Obr Panav*” means “the skin of his face was radiant” but which Jerome translated as Moses had horns (from the Hebrew, “keren” instead of “karan”).

The radiance that shown from Moshe’s face was first seen, not when Moshe came down with the first set of tablets and shattered them upon seeing the golden calf, but when Moshe came down with the second set of tablets. Michelangelo’s Moses, with his horns and his intact tablets, could be a depiction of the moment in the Torah when Moshe, with his face radiant from his encounter with God, returned from Mt. Sinai and held the second tablets.

Moshe brought us the Torah for the second time, he brought us the tablets that we would keep, on Yom Kippur. Today is the anniversary of our successfully receiving the Torah.

Today is the anniversary of Moshe returning to our midst with a face that shown with the radiance of God. Where did that radiance come from and can we tap into that radiance too?

The Midrash (Yalkot Shimoni, 406-408) lists three sources for Moshe's radiance.

### רבותינו אומרים מן המערה

Our rabbis taught that Moshe's radiance came from his encounter with God in the cave. The Torah describes that Moshe was secluded in a cleft up on Har Sinai when God passed before him revealing the 13 attributes of mercy that are so central to this day and to this season.

This paradigm for encountering God, and for radiance is still available to us. We don't have to take up mountain climbing to find radiance, but we do need to cultivate moments of solitude, introspection, and interiority. We are tethered to phones and reachable and accountable to others for every waking hour of almost every day. We share our passing thoughts and opinions online for hundreds of friends and strangers to scrutinize and evaluate. I sometimes have the feeling that a thought or idea or emotion isn't real until I've told someone else about it, but some ideas and emotions need to ripen inside us before they are ready to be shared. And some ideas should not be shared. As the Kotzker Rebbe said, "not everything that is thought should be said, not everything said should be written, and not everything written should be published."

Because my phone serves as my alarm clock on most mornings, I sometimes read email before my feet touch the floor. My mind is dragged away to think about a dozen different topics, some quite trivial, some quite weighty, before I have had a chance to readjust to being awake and say any of the morning *tefilot*. Can we carve some times that are not for sharing with the world? Can we designate more times into which we will not let the world intrude.

Over our family vacation this summer I was able to see the Milky Way for the first time in years. I had not been away from city lights on a night with no moon and a clear sky for years. Having experiences of solitude, or of being alone with family, or just with a small group of friends, is a vital human need and can allow for greatness.

The midrash continues with a different theory for the source of Moshe's radiance and this paradigm too is available to us:

רבי ברכיה אומר מן הלוחות. ארכן של לוחות ששה טפחים ורחבן שלשה והיה משה מחזיק בשני טפחים והקב"ה בשני טפחים ושני טפחים ריוח באמצע משם נטל משה קרני ההוד

The tablets themselves were six handbreadths tall. The top two were in God's hands and the bottom two were in Moshe's hands. There were two open handbreadths in the middle and Moshe's radiance came from that middle ground.

Moshe's radiance came from struggle. He had to struggle in order to claim the Torah on our behalf. That space in between the part of the tablets that he held and the part of the tablets in God's hands was the area of struggle. Radiance comes from struggle because we are defined by our struggles and the causes for which we exert ourselves.

The Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe visited Palestine on his way to America in the 1920s. While he was there he met with Rav Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*, who had himself just recently completed a fundraising and teaching tour of the United States. Rav Kook told the Lubavitcher Rebbe about wealthy philanthropists he should meet. He told him about important rabbis and Jewish communal leaders he would need to meet. And, knowing that the Lubavitcher Rebbe had enduring conflicts with the Soviet government, [and the Russians still have the Lubavitcher Rebbe's private library], Rav Kook encouraged him to meet

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. “Brandeis,” Rav Kook said, “is a completely secular Jew, but ער ברענט מיט צדק he burns with a passion for justice.”

That was Moshe’s radiance. Justice Brandeis devoted his life to justice and his soul radiated with that passion. Our souls too can glow with passion from the things to which we are most committed.

My grandmother, a powerful religious influence of my childhood, yearned for redemption with a powerful faith. In her final years, living in a Chassidic nursing home in Brooklyn, she would often burst into song as she imagined singing and dancing with *Mashiach* in the streets of Yerushalayim. She glowed with the radiance of one who believes in something and is committed to something.

I’ve said many times before about every aspect of Jewish life: “The more you put in the more you get out.” Shabbat is great. It isn’t hard to enjoy Shabbat. But a careful, conscientious Shabbat, the emerges from diligent study of the laws and customs of Shabbat is incomparably more rewarding than the casual Shabbat that is not informed by study or meticulous care to detail. Only the latter Shabbat can give radiance.

Character development is the same way. There is saintly behavior that is beyond my capacity. There is basic decency that I acquired at a young age from my parents. But in between is the struggle. There is Torah already in my hands and there is Torah that is firmly in Heaven. The struggle to be better is over the two handbreadth in between. I want to be better. I want to serve others better. I want more of the Torah to be in my hands. I want to understand it. I want to be able to share it with you.

The struggle for good things and for transcendence endows us with radiance.

The midrash presents a third and final explanation of the source for Moshe’s radiance.

רבי יהודה בר נחמן אמר כשמשה כתב את התורה נשתייר בקולמוס קימעא והעבירו על ראשו ומשם נעשו לו קרני ההוד.

When Moshe finished writing out the Torah there was some extra ink left in his quill. He passed that ink onto his head and it became the beams of radiant light.

Why was there any leftover ink when Moshe had finished writing out the Torah? There was leftover ink because there is always something for us to do. Nothing is ever final and complete without any possibility of our showing up to make a difference.

Are you disappointed if you come to a weekday afternoon Mincha minyan and find 25 people here already davening? Were you hoping to make more of a difference? Your presence does makes a difference. Now there are 26 people davening together. Is there a rally downtown with 10,000 marchers? Make it 10,001. Are there 15,000 people at anAIPAC conference, make it 15,001.

Will the rally be transformed by one extra person? Probably not. Will the conference become a success because you were there? Probably not. But you will be transformed if you become the sort of person who needs to show up in-person at those places where it is worthwhile to be.

The leftover ink, the bit that seems to have no purpose because everything has already been said, that ink is the source of radiance. That radiance is the radiance of presence. That radiance is the radiance of knowing that showing up and being present can matter even when there is nothing additional to say.

Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, who was perhaps the most influential Orthodox rabbi and halakhic scholar in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s was quite alarmed by a new form of technology which he thought was a threat to Judaism. He was very concerned about...the spread of the telephone. He was worried that people would phone their rabbis with questions rather than arrange to meet them in person. How could a rabbi

respond to a questioner who was not standing before him. “A rabbi doesn’t answer a *she’elah*,” he said, but rather “responds to a *sho’el* or *sho’elet*.” A rabbi doesn’t answer questions, a rabbi responds to questioners. Judaism is transmitted when we share Torah knowledge and respond to one another’s questions in the presence of one another.

Overtime it came to feel less strange for us to use telephone and Rav Henkin’s fears may at first seem misplaced. But, decades later, we speak of the risk of “phoning it in” and only half-engaging in tasks that deserve our full attention, and of being detached spectators from causes that deserve our own personal contribution and presence.

Yizkor is about to begin.

As always, I encourage everyone to remain in the room for *yizkor tefilot*. Even those who are blessed with living parents can recite *tefilot* on behalf of those who died in the Holocaust, many of whom left behind no surviving relatives to memorialize them. We will also recite *yizkor tefilot* on behalf of the deceased rabbis of our congregation who laid the foundation for the community that we are able to enjoy today. And we recite *yizkor tefilot* for fallen Israeli soldiers whose lives and deaths have relevance for each one of us. The first Israeli terror victim of 5779 was buried just days ago. Ari Fuld was someone well known to quite a few members of our community. If there are six degrees of separation that unite all humanity, there are no more than 2 or 3 degrees of separation that unite every Israeli and because the Fuld family were American *olim*, each of us is no more than two degrees of separation with Ari.

May he be the last victim this year and the last of any year. But until there is peace, we all owe it to those who wear a uniform in our defense to cherish the memories of those who fall in defense of others.

As we make our *yizkor tzedakah* pledges in memory of relatives who are no longer alive, let us contemplate the radiance of their lives.

Recall the unconditional love of a grandparent, the guidance of a parent, the steadfast partnership of a spouse, the lifelong friendship of a sibling, the infinite potential of a child.

The pledge to *tzedakah* in their memory is a concrete way that their example and their memories inspire us to do good in the world. We can also use their example and their memories to inspire us to become more admirable and honorable people. On Yom Kippur, the day when Moshe returned with a face shining with Divine radiance, we too can strive for radiance. And the memories of our beloved deceased will help us achieve that.