

Parashat Ki Tisa, 5779, 2019:

*The Uniqueness of Moshe*

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The *Tanach* contains a number of instances when Hashem or his *malach* (angel) calls to individuals and repeats their name within the same verse. For example, immediately prior to the Almighty's command to Avraham to cease offering Yitzhak upon the altar (*Akeidat Yitzhak*), we find: "And an angel of G-d called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham! Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" (*Sefer Bereishit* 22:11, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon *Tosefta Berachot* I and *Sifra Vayikra* I, explains that this and, by extension, other cases wherein a name is reiterated, reflect Hashem's love for the person that is so called.

In contrast, our *parasha* contains a *pasuk* (verse) that is outside the general rubric of name repetition: "And it came to pass when Moses descended from Mount Sinai, and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand when he descended from the mountain, and Moses did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while He had spoken with him." (*Sefer Shemot* 34:29) This is by no means your classic case wherein Hashem summons people by repeating their names, since our verse is narrative and not dialogical in nature. In addition, this is the only verse in the five books of the Torah of which I am aware wherein a name is found three times. Taken in tandem, this suggests that Moshe's name is not repeated because of Hashem's love for him, but, rather, for some other significant reason.

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, the great Spanish exegete, Rabbi Don Yitzhak Abarbanel (1437-1508), addresses the issue of the three-fold repetition of Moshe's name within our *pasuk*, and suggests two complementary reasons for this unusual formulation. Both of these focus upon the spiritual-physical change that Moshe underwent, as depicted in the conclusion of our verse, "and Moses did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while He had spoken with him." The Abarbanel notes that under normal conditions, one would have thought that Moshe's transformation would have rendered him unrecognizable by the Jewish people. This, however, was not what emerged:

One ought not to think that as a result of the emanation of the brilliant Divine light the Jewish people were no longer able to recognize Moshe's face. [Although] this lack of recognition takes place regarding an individual when their friend's face changes because of a variety of reasons, this was most assuredly not the case regarding Moshe. Instead, the Jewish people perceived Moshe's face as they always had done, and recognized that this was, indeed his face — even with the brilliant Divine light coming forth from him. (This and the following translation my own)

In my estimation, it was crucial for our ancestors to continue to identify Moshe's face, as this would eliminate the dire possibility of their once again proclaiming, "Come on! Make us gods that will go before us, because this man Moses, who brought us up from the land of Egypt we don't know what has become of him" — as they had a mere two chapters earlier at the outset of the incident of the *Eigel Hazahav* (Golden Calf, *Sefer Shemot* 32:1). As such, in the mind of our forebears, Moshe remained the Moshe they had always known, and his, and their, continuity remained intact.

As we have seen, the Abarbanel's first reason for the three times we find Moshe's name in our *pasuk* reflects our ancestors ongoing ability to recognize that "Moshe was Moshe." His second reason, once again focuses upon the brilliant Divine light that emanated from Moshe's

countenance, and teaches us about the singular nature of his prophetic experiences, and his unique manner of receiving Hashem's Word:

And the second matter that is made known to us regarding Moshe, and the [mystical] activity of the Divine light emanating from his face, is that he neither sequestered nor removed himself from his four senses — unlike the actions of all the other prophets at the time of their prophetic experiences. We know this to be the case, since he, himself, after receiving the Word from Hashem, returned his own veil to his face. This demonstrates that he never ceased to be aware of his senses, and that [during his prophetic communications] he was totally awake in the same exact fashion as he had been prior to receiving his prophecy.

Given the Abarbanel's trenchant analysis, we are now in an ideal position to briefly explore the exceptional elements of Moshe's prophetic engagements. We are fortunate that the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) addressed precisely this topic in his classic work, *Perush HaMishnah*:

- Unlike all other prophets, Moshe spoke to Hashem in a direct manner, i.e. without any intermediary.
- In contrast to all other prophets, Moshe communicated with the Almighty during the day and when he was completely conscious.
- All other prophets felt anguish, trembled, shuddered and became weak due to their meeting with Hashem. Moshe, however, remained fully in control of his physical and psychological powers throughout his prophetic engagements with Hashem.
- All prophets, with the exception of Moshe, received their visions whenever the Almighty appeared to them – and without their control. Moshe, however, spoke to Hashem whenever he so chose. (Synopsis based upon, *Perush HaMishnah, Sanhedrin, Introduction to Perek Chalek*, Rav Kapach edition)

The Rambam describes the spiritual intimacy that obtained between Moshe and Hashem. The portrait that emerges is that of a unique individual who enjoyed unparalleled access to the Almighty due to his exceptional spiritual gifts.

Moshe and his prophetic encounters were unique in the annals of Jewish history. As the Torah teaches us, “And there was no other prophet who arose in Israel like Moses, whom the L-rd knew face to face” (*Sefer Devarim* 34:10, underlining my own) While none of us are capable of achieving his exalted level, each of us can do our utmost to reach out to Hashem, and establish a

meaningful connection with Him. With the Holy One's *chesed* and *rachamim* (kindness and mercy) may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

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\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: [\*\*http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd\*\*](http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd)

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.