

**NIPS** 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.

**RASHI** 29 So Moses came down from Mount Sinai. When he brought down the second set of tablets, on the Day of Atonement. Was radiant. The verb *karan* is related to the word *keren*, "horn." For the light radiated from his face in hornlike rays. And where did Moses get these "horns" of majesty? Our Sages say he got them when he was hidden in the cave in the rock, when the Holy One put His hand over Moses' face: "I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by" (33:22).

30 They shrank from coming near him. Come see how great is the power of transgression. Before they had put forth their hands to transgress, what does it say? "The Presence of the LORD appeared in the sight of the Israelites as a consuming fire" (24:17). Yet they had no fear and did not tremble. But once they had made the Golden Calf, they recoiled trembling even from Moses' radiance.

31 All the chieftains in the assembly. The expression is similar to "all the chieftains of the assembly." They were not actually in the assembly, but returned (with Aaron) separately from the rest of the people. Moses spoke to them. He spoke to them the message with which he had been sent by God. This whole passage is to be understood not in the past, but in the repetitive tense: "Moses would speak to them" and so forth.

**NAHMANIDES** writing as on the first. From the fact that Moses says "the same writing," we know that the second set too was "inscribed with the finger of God" (31:18). So "I will inscribe" (v. 1) must mean "with My finger." And you know the meaning of "finger" from that of "the hand." [A]

31 Moses spoke to them. Rashi's comment is not correct. What the text is saying, as the translations have it, is that the people fled from him in fear when they saw the radiance of his face (perhaps they thought that the Presence or the angels were with him), but Aaron and the chieftains came back and Moses reassured them, giving them the good news about the forgiveness of their iniquity and the tablets that he had brought down. Once all the rest of the people saw that he was talking with the chieftains, they all "came near" (v. 32), and "he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai" (OJPS). That is, the second set of the Ten Commandments that He

[A] See his comment to 14:31.

were undimmed and his vigor unabated" (Deut. 34:7)? At this point in the story, he is only 80, and his face was certainly not "dry."

30 They shrank from coming near him. OJPS is more literal here, but NIPS has the correct sense: they actually retreated from him.

[K] So it is hard to imagine how the first five could have been on one side and the last five opposite them on the other.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 29 So Moses came down. On Tuesday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tishrei. What is missing here is the ark that Moses made (see Deut. 10:3) to keep the tablets in until the Tabernacle was set up on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nisan and they could be put in the Ark made by Bezalel (Hizkuni). The skin of his face was radiant. From the glow of God's hand covering the cave he was in. The radiance also served to prove that this set of tablets was divinely given; it was not necessary for the first set, which was given publicly (Hizkuni). As if he were pure intelligence, with no material body. The "face" implies the material form, which separates and screens the human form from the higher truths (Gersonides). In the course of nature, one would expect his skin to have darkened, from hunger and from the weather. But God made sure that his skin was as bright as that of anyone else, and even more so (Abarbanel).

31 Moses called to them. When they recognized his voice, they realized that it was he, not an angel (Hizkuni).

**OJPS** 29 And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of the testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses knew not that the skin of his face sent forth beams while He talked with him. 30 And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face sent forth beams; and they were afraid to come nigh him. 31 And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him; and Moses spoke to them.

וַיְהִי בְרֵדת מֹשֶׁה מִהַר סִינַי וְשָׁנִי לָהֶם  
הָעֵרֹת בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה בְּרֵדתוֹ מִן הַהָר וּמֹשֶׁה  
לֹא יָדָע כִּי לָקַח עֹרָן פָּנָיו בְּבִרְרוֹ אֹתוֹ:  
וַיֵּרָא אֶהָרָן וְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה  
וַיִּהְיֶה קָרָן עָרֹד פָּנָיו וַיִּירָאוּ מִנֹּשֶׁת אֵלָיו:  
וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּשְׁבוּ אֵלָיו אֶהָרָן  
וְכָל־הַנְּשָׂאִים בְּעֵדָה וַיִּדְבֹּר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם:

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** • What was God's purpose in performing the miracle by which the skin of Moses' face was made radiant (v. 29)? • What exactly was the nature of this "radiance"? • Why did this happen to Moses only now, and not at the original giving of the Torah, or when Moses was given the first set of tablets? • Why does v. 29 repeat "So Moses came down" and "As Moses came down"? • Why does the text not describe how Moses' face became radiant, rather than introducing it merely by mentioning that Moses was not aware of it? • Why does the text say that Moses' face was radiant "while He talked with him" (OJPS), when it was radiant all the time? • How could Moses not be aware of the radiance? • What made "Aaron and all the chieftains" so afraid of the radiance?

**RASHBAM** 29 The skin of his face was radiant. This indicates majesty, as in "It is a brilliant light which gives off rays on every side—and therein His glory is enveloped" (Hab. 3:4). Anyone who, because the verb *karan* sounds like *keren*, the word for "horn," takes it to mean that Moses had horns is nothing but a fool, for there are many roots in Biblical Hebrew that have two separate sets of meanings. Menahem Ibn Saruq the lexicographer explains the word as I do.

**IBN EZRA** writing. The Second and Fourth Commandments are comparatively long, while the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth are quite short. [K] I think the full text must have taken both sides to write, and it was God's words, the Exodus 20 version, that was written there. (In my commentary to Deuteronomy 5 I will explain all the differences in that version.) But possibly the text was written twice, once on each side—both of them the Exodus 20 version. "Inscribed on the one side and on the other" (32:15) would thus mean that both sides were exactly equal.

29 The skin of his face was radiant. "Radiant" derives from the root meaning "horn." Similarly, in "It is a brilliant light which gives off rays on every side" (Hab. 3:4), the "rays" are literally "horns," but the poetic parallelism of the two halves of the verse shows that "rays" are meant. Hiwi (that transgressor, may his bones crumble!) thinks Moses' face was as dry as "horn," because he had not eaten, and that is why the people shrank from him. But why wouldn't Moses have kept the veil permanently over his face if that was so? Didn't Hiwi read that "Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes

were undimmed and his vigor unabated" (Deut. 34:7)? At this point in the story, he is only 80, and his face was certainly not "dry."

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[K] So it is hard to imagine how the first five could have been on one side and the last five opposite them on the other.

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31 Moses called to them. When they recognized his voice, they realized that it was he, not an angel (Hizkuni).

**NIPS** 32Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he instructed them concerning all that the LORD had imparted to him on Mount Sinai. 33And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

34Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would leave

**RASHI** 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near. After he had taught the elders, he would repeat the passage or the law and teach it to the Israelites. Our Sages taught: What was the schedule of instruction? Moses would learn from the mouth of the Almighty. Aaron would come into the tent, and Moses would teach him his lesson. Aaron would move aside and sit at Moses' left. His sons would come in, and Moses would teach them their lesson; then they would move aside, Eleazar sitting at Moses' right, and Ithamar at Aaron's left. The elders would come in. Moses would teach them their lesson, and they would move to sit on the sides. Then all the rest of the people would come in, and Moses would teach them their lesson. In this way, the whole people would hear it once, the elders twice, Aaron's sons three times, and Aaron four times. (See B. Er. 54b, which goes on to say that Moses would leave, after which Aaron would teach and then leave, and so forth until each group had heard the lesson four times.)

33 He put a veil over his face. Onkelos gives us the meaning of the word translated "veil," for it is an Aramaic word. B. Ket. 60a uses an Aramaic verb from this root to mean "look," and here too the "veil" is a garment that covers the face and the eyes. Moses put the veil over his face on account of the horns of majesty that radiated from it, so that they would not feast their eyes on them. He removed the veil when he was speaking with Israel, and also while God was communicating with him.

34 He would leave the veil off until he came out. He would come out leaving his face unveiled until after he had told the Israelites what he had been commanded and they could see the horns of majesty radiating from his face.

**NAHMANIDES** had given him, and everything from vv. 11-26. Moses told them that God had commanded him to make a new covenant with them on these terms, but the text describes this only briefly, in general terms.

33 He put a veil over his face. For he had noticed the radiance when he came back—or perhaps someone mentioned it to him.

34 Whenever Moses went in. After having described the events of that particular day, the text now (as the translations say) switches to the repetitive verbs, to let us know that this is how he behaved throughout this period.

had finished speaking everything that God had told him to command Israel. But in my opinion this is not correct. Moses' face radiated light when God spoke with him. We know from the fact that "all the Israelites came near" (v. 32) that, even if those who saw him were afraid at first, their fear left them. Now the radiance of Moses' face was continually restored from the glow of the Glory of the Presence when God spoke with him. This is why he left off the veil when he went into the Tent of Meeting—to get the light. He would come out and tell Israel what he had been commanded, and the radiance was a reliable witness that God had indeed spoken with him. The light from his face would stay all the while he was speaking with them, but then he would put the veil back over his face so that the eyes of the ignorant should not see that the light would then depart, and his face would return to its ordinary state. If you read the passage carefully, you will see this. Some think that "His eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated" (Deut. 34:7) attests to the fact that the radiance remained constant, but it really has nothing to do with it. You should realize that no prophet ever exhibited a greater wonder than this. For every marvel that God created to confirm a prophecy actually occurred to someone other than the prophet, and only once. But this occurred to Moses himself, and times without number. [L] Blessed is He who chose Moses and placed His holy spirit within him.

[L] In the long commentary Ibn Ezra agrees with Saadia's comment that the light never left Moses' face until the day of his death.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 33 He put a veil over his face. That is, he tried to restore the barrier between him and the higher world long enough so that he could speak with Israel. This is the pinnacle of miraculousness. For anyone else, it would be difficult to withdraw into this world of the spirit; for Moses, it was difficult not to. We have at times found something like this in ourselves, that it was difficult to restrain our thoughts from higher things even when eating, drinking, or chatting with friends. It is this that enabled us to understand this passage—despite the fact that the difference between these two kinds of contemplation is so great. If it were a literal veil, there would be no need to remove it when he received prophecy (Gersonides).

**OJPS** 32And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai. 33And when Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face.

34But when Moses went in before the LORD that He might speak with him, he

32 ואחר־יכן נגשו כל־בני ישראל ויצומו  
את־כל־אשר דבר יהוה אתו בהר סיני:  
33 ויכל משה מדבר אתם ויפן על־פניו  
מסוה:

34 ובבא משה לפני יהוה לדבר אתו וסיר  
את־המסוה עד־צאתו ויצא ודבר אל־בני

**ARABANEL'S QUESTIONS** • Why did Moses call Aaron and the chieftains first, and the Israelites only "afterward" (v. 32), if all were equally afraid of him? • If God wanted Moses' face to be radiant, how could Moses try to conceal it (v. 33) by putting a veil over his face? • Since Moses did not wear the veil when he was speaking with God or with the Israelites, what was the point of putting it on when he was by himself?

**RASHBAM** 32 All that the LORD had imparted to him on Mount Sinai. Before the Golden Calf incident. The reference is to chs. 25-31, as well as to the commandments in this chapter, vv. 12-26.

33 A veil. The *vav* in this word *marveh* is indeed part of the root, just like the *vav* in *autoh*, "his robe" (Gen. 49:11)—but these are two separate roots and two different garments. In the latter word, the *t* is also a root letter. That is how Dunash b. Labrat explains them, and his explanation makes sense. [G]

34-35 He would leave the veil off and speak to the Israelites, with his face

[G] Like Menahem ben Sarag, contemporary lexicographers relate both nouns to the same root, *mtv*.

**IBN EZRA** 32 He instructed them concerning all that the LORD had imparted to him. The terms of the covenant, vv. 11-26. For Moses may have never given them the instructions in 23:12-19, because he found them occupied with the Golden Calf.

33 A veil. We understand what the word means from the way it is used in this context. The "robe" of "His robe in blood of grapes" (Gen. 49:11) is etymologically related. Many people are of the opinion that Moses put the veil over his face because of his role in judging the people. He was afraid that those who appeared before him would be so scared by the glow of his face that they would forget what they had intended to say. He would take it off when he went into the Holy of Holies, for there was no need for it there. When he came out, he would leave his face uncovered until he

**NIPS** the veil off until he came out; and when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 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.

**RASHI** 35 The Israelites would see how radiant the skin of Moses' face was. When he left them, Moses would ... put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with Him. When he went in to speak with Him, he would take the veil off again.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** 35 Moses would then put the veil back over his face. So that they should not get used to the radiance and begin to think it ordinary (Hizkuni).

**OJPS** took the veil off, until he came out; and he came out, and spoke unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face sent forth beams; and Moses put the veil back upon his face, until he went in to speak with Him.

ישראל את אשר יצוה: "וראו בני ישראל את פני משה כי קרן עור פני משה והשיב משה את המסכה על פניו עד באו לדבר אתו: ס

**ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS** • Why must Moses' name be mentioned three separate times in v. 35 (see OJPS), which could easily have been written without it?

**RASHBAM** uncovered, what he had been commanded. Then he would cover his face again until he went in to speak with the Shekhinah, when he would uncover it again.

34:29 ויהי כדרך משה פתח סיני ושני לחת העדוה בני משה בדרתו סין  
הקר ומשה לא ידע כי קרן עור פניו עד ברו אתו:

Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two Tablets of Testimony in his hand. As Moses descended from the mountain he did not realize that the skin of his face had become radiant when [God] had spoken to him.

Moses descended from Mount Sinai bringing the second Tablets on Yom Kippur, as we shall explain.<sup>26</sup>

Moses did not know that his face had become radiant when God spoke to him. This happened when Moses was in the cave and God passed before him (34:6). From this, Moses' face shined very brightly with a radiant gleam.<sup>27</sup>

Some say that Moses received this radiance on his face when he took the second Tablets from God's Hands. The distance between God's "Hands" and Moses' hands was only two handbreadths. We explained earlier that the Tablets were six handbreadths by six handbreadths. God held two handbreadths in His "Hand" and Moses held two handbreadths in his hand. Therefore the distance between God's "Hands" and those of Moses was only two handbreadths. It was from this closeness that Moses received the great light on his face.<sup>28</sup>

Others say that Moses received this light from the sparks that emanated from God when He taught him the Torah.<sup>29</sup>

Some say that Moses had this illumination ever since he was born. This light came from the light that God made during the six days of creation. This was an extremely brilliant light (as is explained in the Portion of *Beresheit*).

Moses' face gave off the light of many lamps. If Moses was inside a room he would illuminate an entire house very well.

With this light it was possible to see from one end of the world to the other. One could see even the smallest things through that light. This was a pure, refined light and it could be used to see what was happening from one end of the world to the other.

However, God saw that people would be wicked and evil. He saw the people of the generation of the flood and the generation of separation [when the Tower of Babel was made]. God therefore set aside this light for the righteous in the World to Come.

God revealed this light to Adam, all the world to the other. He also revealed it to King David said, "How great is Your Glory for those who fear You" (Psalms 31:20) was 60,075 times as bright as the sun. This was the great reward that is put aside for the righteous.

Moses had this great light when he lived with Pharaoh he lost it. God did not give it to him on Mount Sinai and received the Torah. When the Tablets this light returned to him. This was the face upon which it was impossible for anyone to look.

God granted this to Moses to teach the people from Him, and that He has the power to create the world and to go against the laws of nature. When he eats and drinks much his face glows. When he fasts his face becomes dull. However, Moses' face became radiant from his many fasts. It is true that he fasted three times, but his face became more radiant each time. People could not look at it and they were afraid.

From this we also learn the greatness of Moses. He bound himself so close to God that he received the light. This became completely spiritual. This was a great achievement that no being had ever achieved.

Moses had such great attachment to God that he did not even realize that his face was radiant. He therefore says, "Moses did not even know that his face was radiant when God had spoken to him." Moses' face was radiant because "God had spoken to him." He was so self so deeply in the teachings that he was

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 lived with Pharaoh he lost it. God did not return it to him until he stood  
 on Mount Sinai and received the Torah. When Moses looked at the Tab-  
 lets this light returned to him. This was the brilliant radiance of Moses'  
 face upon which it was impossible for a human being to gaze.<sup>22</sup>

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 bound himself so close to God that he reached the level of the angels and  
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 radiance because "God had spoken to him." Moses had immersed him-  
 self so deeply in the teachings that he was not aware of his own self.<sup>23</sup>