

PARSHAS KI SISA: FACE TO FACE

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

Shortly after Moshe Rabbeinu succeeded in securing Hashem's forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, he asked Hashem, (Shemos 33:13) "Hodiani noh es drochecha - Please make your ways known to me." Rashi explains that since this was a time where Hashem's rachamim (mercy) was granted to the Jews, Moshe felt that it would be an especially opportune moment to beseech Hashem to share His wisdom with Moshe. The Gemorah (Brachos 7a) explains that Moshe wanted to understand the age-old question of why so many righteous people suffer while it often seems that the wicked are prospering. This understanding was the âderech' of Hashem that Moshe wanted to understand.

Although Hashem granted many other requests of Moshe, Hashem informed him that this particular one would be denied. "Lo suchal liros es ponai, (Shemos 33:20) - You shall not be able to see My face." He explained that no man could see His âface' and [continue to] live. Several pesukim later, Hashem informed Moshe that He will permit him to see the âback' of Hashem. Rashi explains that at that point, Hashem showed Moshe the knot of the tefillin.

Even a casual reading of these sentences seems to indicate that this was a seminal moment in the life of Moshe. However, it is exceedingly difficult to understand exactly what transpired between Hashem and Moshe. Several questions arise:

- * After granting Moshe forgiveness for the entire Jewish nation, why did Hashem refuse this particular request of Moshe?
- * What exactly was the request of Moshe, to "See the face of Hashem", and why was it so important for Moshe to do so?
- * The Torah relates that Moshe spoke to Hashem âface-to-face.' So Moshe did, in fact, see the âface' of Hashem?
- * And finally, how did Hashem comfort Moshe by informing him that he could see the âback' of Hashem and specifically by showing him the knot of the tefillin?

To gain a deeper understanding of these matters, it is important to understand what Moshe was really requesting of Hashem. Moshe wanted to understand the ways of the world. Moshe, as so many throughout history, wanted to understand the reward and punishment system of this world. Why is it that so many good people suffer while the wicked prosper? Moshe asked to see the face of Hashem. To see one's face is to examine every detail of their being. Moshe wanted a clear understanding of what transpires in this world. Hashem denied his request, not because He did not wish to grant it to Moshe, but rather it is simply impossible for a human to understand all the details

of Hashem's world.

I would like to offer an analogy that may shed some light on this matter. GPS, Global Position Satellite technology, allows drivers to navigate unfamiliar roads by offering precise maps and directions. One of the features of GPS is that it allows drivers to 'zoom' in and out of a map of any given area - to see the details of the streets or the 'big picture' of the entire city or state. When one zooms in on any particular street, however, it is impossible for him to see the directions that will take him from one city to another. Only the larger map will allow one to navigate properly.

Hashem was explaining to Moshe that humans have a limited life span, and cannot always understand Hashem's world. We cannot see the 'face' of Hashem - as we are unable to see the larger picture. Just as flying in an airplane affords people a different view of the earth, so too, Hashem, in His infinite wisdom and His global view, sees things in a way that we humans cannot. Hashem, however, did grant Moshe the ability to see things in retrospect - to see the 'back' of Hashem.

Occasionally, we are granted the understanding of events that transpired years, or even decades ago. At the time, we were 'zoomed in' on the present and did not comprehend why we were given certain challenges. When growing up, we may wonder: Why are some people (or ourselves) born into a challenging family situation? Why do people lose their parents? Why are some born with significant handicaps, or learning disabilities? .

Only decades later, we may observe that some of these very children grew into adulthood and rose above these challenges. They became stronger as a result of the moral strength that it took to overcome them, and grew into outstanding adults who inspire others.

I would like to suggest that the image that Hashem showed Moshe reflected the very nature of a keshet. When two individual straps join together to form a knot, the two straps become hidden from view at times. They both emerge, however, as a stronger and firmer unit. It is this deep understanding that Hashem offered to comfort Moshe - and all future generations of His children.

Best wishes for a Guttan Shabbos.

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