

# Do Jews Have Horns?

## *Karan Or Panav*

*This shiur was inspired by Rabbi Yehoshua Lewis, founder of Olami affiliate Mesorah NJ, by his series of classes on Jewish myths. Rabbi Jeremy Kagan provided important direction in its development. Rabbi Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg kindly reviewed and edited the shiur.*

### Overview

The catalyst for this class is a popular misconception – asked by many university students to their campus rabbis – do Jews have horns? After we discuss the misunderstanding behind the myth, we explore the true perspective on how it originated – with the radiance of Moshe Rabbeinu upon descending from Mount Sinai with the Second Set of Tablets. This shiur explores the phenomenal, unparalleled spiritual growth and development achieved by Moshe Rabbeinu and the ramifications for own capabilities.

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**Preface. *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star***

Rabbi Mordechai Becher related that his friend and mentor, Rabbi Dovid Refson, the Dean of Neve Yerushalayim once attended a conference on Science and Religion. The first speaker was an astrophysicist who began, “I don’t know much about religion, but my feeling is that it is basically reciprocal ethics.” He then proceeded to present his understanding of the interplay of religion, Judaism and science. Rabbi Refson, the next speaker, gets up and begins, “I don’t know much about astronomy, but I think it can be summarized by, *‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.’*” After the presentation, the astrophysicist was noticeably upset. Rabbi Refson responded that the astrophysicist had done the same thing, thereby minimizing the significance and depth of Judaism.

In this shiur, to avoid simplification when clarifying the myth of Jews bearing horns, we will uncover profound ideas about the essence of Judaism, the nature of G-d and the human capacity for astonishing spiritual growth. The question will no longer be, “Do Jews Have Horns?” but rather, “Could They?”

## Section I. How Did this Myth Begin?

Among the top myths held by those unfamiliar with Judaism is that Jews have horns. In fact, it's not uncommon to hear stories of people previously unacquainted with Jews who scrutinized them to catch a glimpse of their horns. How could such a wild myth have ever arisen?

The myth that Jews have horns is most famously reflected in an early 16<sup>th</sup> century Michelangelo marble sculpture of Moses bearing horns.



Why did Michelangelo think that Moshe Rabbeinu had horns? To answer this question a brief historical background is necessary ([as described by Rashi](#)). Over 3,330 years ago, G-d instructed Moshe, on behalf of the Jewish people, to climb Mount Sinai on the 7th day of the Hebrew month of Sivan to receive the Torah along with the *Luchos Rishonos* (First Tablets) containing the Ten Commandments. G-d taught Moshe the Torah on Mount Sinai for forty days. G-d told Moshe to descend on the 17th of Tammuz because the Jews were worshipping the Golden Calf. He descended and broke the Tablets, and then burned the calf the following day – the 18th of Tammuz.

Moshe then climbed Mount Sinai again on the 18<sup>th</sup> (or 19<sup>th</sup>) of Tammuz for a second forty-day period to pray for forgiveness from G-d for the serious transgression of the Golden Calf. Moshe descended on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of Av. G-d then instructed Moshe to climb Mount Sinai for a third forty-day period on Rosh Chodesh Elul to reaccept the Torah and receive the *Luchos Shnios*, the Second Tablets, containing the Ten Commandments. Moshe descended with the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur after achieving atonement for the Jewish people, with a facial appearance described by the Torah (Shemos 34:29) as קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו – *karan or panav*.

The mistaken understanding of the exact meaning of *karan or panav* led to the myth that Jews have horns. How? The myth originated from the **inaccurate translation** of the Hebrew phrase *karan or panav*. It could be construed as “the skin of his face became horned.” The entire verse would then read as follows:

*“When Moshe descended from Har Sinai, with the two Tablets of Testimony in the hand of Moshe as he came down from the mountain, Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become horned— when G-d had spoken to him.”*

In contrast, the **correct translation** is “the skin of his face had become radiant”: “...*Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant when G-d had spoken to him.*”

The **mistranslation** then took on a life of its own. Not only did Moshe transform from become “radiant” to becoming “horned,” but the myth spread from Moshe to the entire Jewish people. They all had horns. But how does the Jewish tradition know with certainty that the Hebrew *karan or* refers to a radiance rather than horns?

The 11<sup>th</sup> century commentator Rashi describes how to arrive at the proper definition. Even though the Hebrew word *karan* in isolation does connote a physical horn, the phrase *karan or panav* relates to the facial projection of light:

**1. Rashi, Shemos 34:29 – *Karan Or Panav* connotes the projection of light.**

<p>קרן is an expression related to the word “horns.” For the light would shine and project like a horn.</p>	<p>כי קרן – לשון קרנים, שהאור מבהיק ובולט כמין קרן.</p>
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The mistranslation of *karan or panav* as physical horns motivated the grandson of Rashi – Rashbam – to later clarify any ambiguity of the correct translation:

**2. Rashbam, Shemos 34:29 – *Karan or panav* does not mean actual horns like those of an ox.**

<p>[HIS FACE] WAS RADIANT: [The word קרן is] related to the idea of הוד – grandeur. It is like the word קרנים in the phrase (Chavakuk. 3:4), “Which gives off rays (קרנים) on every side.” Anyone who sees קרן, in this verse, as denoting “horn,” as in the phrase (Deut. 33:17), “He has horns like the horns of the wild ox (קרני ראם קרניו),” is a fool. For many words in the Torah have [at least] two [separate, distinct] meanings. So, too, did [medieval grammarian] Menahem explain it.</p>	<p>כי קרן – לשון הוד, וכמוהו: קרנים מיזו לו [חבוקק ג, ד].</p> <p>והמדמהו לקרני ראם קרניו [דברים לג, יז] אינו אלא שוטה, כי שתי מחלקות הם ברוב תיבות שבתורה. וגם מנחם (מחברת: קרן) כן פירש.</p>
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The Torah’s description of Moshe descending with the Second Tablets with a radiant visage is the direct result of Moshe reaching a lofty spiritual level that enabled him to communicate with G-d, the level of prophecy. But this raises a difficulty. If this is so, Moshe also prophesied the first time he received the Torah on Mount Sinai along with the First Set of Tablets. Why did he not then descend with his face radiant?

Furthermore, the Talmud states that from the time of Avraham until the Second Temple there were *hundreds of thousands* of prophets (see below Page 5 Source 3), yet only Moshe Rabbeinu is described as having a radiant face. Why? In order to answer these questions, we first need to gain insight into the nature of prophecy in general and then the unique level of Moshe Rabbeinu’s prophecy in particular.

## Section II. The Nature of Prophecy

(This Section is adapted from the Olami Morasha class on [Prophecy I.](#))

### Part A. What is Prophecy?

Rambam (Maimonides) counts prophecy as one of the Thirteen Fundamentals of Jewish Faith; this is an indispensable foundation of Judaism.

#### 1. Rambam, Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1 – Prophecy is an attachment of the human intellect to G-d’s “mind.”

<p>The Sixth Foundation [of Jewish belief] is prophecy. That is, that a person must know that there are individuals who have very lofty qualities and great perfection; whose souls are prepared to the point that their minds receive perfect intellect. After this, their human intellect can then become attached to the Active Intellect [i.e. the “mind,” so to speak, of G-d] and endow them with an exalted state. These are the prophets and this is prophecy.</p>	<p>והיסוד הששי הנבואה. והוא, לדעת שזה המין האנושי יש שימצאו בו אישים בעלי כשרונות מפותחים מאד ושלמות גדולה, ותתכונן נפשם עד שמקבלת צורת השכל, ויתחבר אותו השכל האנושי בשכל הפועל, ויאצל עליהם ממנו אצילות שפע, ואלה הם הנביאים, וזוהי הנבואה וזהו ענינה.</p>
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#### 2. Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, Fundamentals and Faith, pp. 69-70 – Judaism rests on the foundation of the reality of prophecy.

<p>Rambam’s choice of the term “prophecy” rather than “inspiration” is significant: Prophecy is defined as the reality of man receiving a direct and clear message from G-d ... Those contemporary thinkers who believe that the Torah was not given through direct communication with the Almighty, that the words of Torah are not His exact words but merely Divinely inspired words of men, do humanity a great disservice. Since a person is easily inspired by a message he wants to hear, a law built upon inspiration obviously will not command the respect and authority necessary to bind man; it will become malleable in his hands. Such a Torah would cease to be the source of life from Above, and would instead become a mere product and target for human manipulation.</p>
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Prophecy is crucial to the structure of Judaism: there can be no such thing as a commandment from G-d if He has no way of communicating His Will directly to us.

### Part B. The Nature and Levels of Prophecy

We will now describe the phenomenon of prophecy: what it is, how it felt, and why it was used. We will also distinguish between the prophecy of Moshe (Moses), i.e. the Torah, and the vision of other prophets in Jewish history.

**1. Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), *Derech Hashem* (The Way of G-d) 3:3:4 – Prophecy is a state of being bound to G-d.**

<p>Prophecy is a degree of inspiration where an individual reaches a level where he literally binds himself to G-d in such a way that he can actually feel this attachment. He then clearly realizes that the One to Whom he is bound is G-d. This is sensed with complete clarity, with an awareness that leaves no room for doubt whatsoever. The individual is as sure of it as he would be if it were a physical object observed with his physical senses.</p> <p>The essence of prophecy is the attainment of such an attachment and bond with G-d... However, this state is accompanied by the perception of certain truths and enlightenment regarding Divine mysteries. The perception gained through prophecy is clear and attained in the manner we have mentioned. It is higher than knowledge gain through “the holy spirit.”</p>	<p><u>ואמנם למעלה מכל זה יש מעלה אחרת, והיא הנבואה. וענינה, שיגיע האדם ויתקשר בבורא ית"ש ויתדבק בו דביקות ממש, באופן שירגיש ההתדבקות וישיג מה שהוא מתדבק בו, דהיינו כבודו ית', על הדרך שנבאר לפנים, ויהיה הדבר ברור אצלו ומורגש ממנו בלי ספק כלל, כדרך שלא יסתפק בדבר גשמי שירגישהו בחושיו.</u></p> <p>והנה עיקר הנבואה הוא השיג הדביקות והקשר הזה, עודו בחיים ... ואולם יתלזה לזה ידיעות והשכלות, כי אמנם ישיג על ידי זה ענינים אמיתים ונכבדים מאד מסתרי סודותיו ית', וישיגם בבירור בדרך ההשכלה הנשפעת שזכרנו, וביותר כח מבעל רוח הקדש.</p>
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**2. Ramchal, *Da'as Tevunos* (The Understanding Heart) 177 – Prophecy is knowledge of G-d attained through a (partial) revelation of His Glory.**

<p>Prophecy is the knowledge and perception of some of G-d's Glory which he grants to the prophet ... The one who attains prophecy understands it on his level ... for the prophets do not have the ability to see G-d's Glory as it really is, but when the Glory is revealed to them it creates images of prophecy in their heart.</p>	<p>הנבואה היא ידיעה והשגה שהקב"ה נותן לנביא מכבודו יתברך ... וישיגהו תופס במדה שתפס...</p> <p>כי לא ניתן רשות לנביאים לראות הכבוד העליון כמו שהוא, אבל הכבוד המתגלה עליהם יחדש בלבבם דמיונות נבואיים.</p>
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**3. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 14a – There were many prophets, but only those with a message for future generations were included in Tanach.**

<p>There were many [prophets], as it was taught: Numerous prophets arose among the Jewish Nation – double the amount [of people] as left Egypt [i.e., 1.2 million] ... Those prophecies that were relevant for future generations were recorded [in</p>	<p>טובא הוו כדתניא הרבה נביאים עמדו להם לישראל כפלים כיוצאי מצרים ... נבואה שהוצרכה לדורות נכתבה ושלא הוצרכה לא נכתבה.</p>
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Scripture]; otherwise they were not recorded.	
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Up to here, we have been talking about prophecy in general. It is important to distinguish between the level of prophecy of Moshe in comparison to others. While the prophecy of others was either to elevate the prophet himself or to convey a message to other people, the prophecy of Moshe was different: his was direct from G-d, qualitatively purer, received in a conscious state, and could occur whenever he desired. Ultimately, it had the status of “Torah.”

**4. Rambam, Commentary on the Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1 – The Seventh of the Thirteen Fundamentals of Faith maintains that Moshe’s prophecy was qualitatively different from all other prophets – it was perfectly pure.**

<p>The Seventh Foundation [of Jewish belief] is the prophecy of Moshe Rabeinu, may he rest in peace. This is the requirement to believe that he is the father of all the prophets, both those that preceded him and those who arose after him; all of them were below his level. He was the chosen by G-d from among all of mankind, who attained the greatest knowledge of G-d, more than any other person ever attained or ever will.</p> <p>[We must also believe] that Moshe rose to the ultimate height, attaining the level of the angels. The barrier [between himself and G-d] that he did not tear through; nothing physical held him back. He was devoid of any flaw, big or small. [When he was in a state of communion with G-d] all of his material faculties were inactive, leaving him with pure intellect. It is for this reason that it is said regarding him that he could speak to G-d, Blessed be He, without the mediation of angels.</p>	<p>והיסוד השביעי נבואת משה רבינו. והוא, שנאמין שהוא אביהן של כל הנביאים שקדמו לפניו והבאים אחריו, הכל הם למטה ממנו במעלה, והוא בחיר ה' מכל המין האנושי, אשר השיג ממנו יתעלה יותר ממה שהשיג וישיג כל אדם שנמצא ושימצא.</p> <p>ושהוא עליו השלום הגיע לתכלית הרוממות מעל האנושיות עד שהשיג המעלה המלאכית ונעשה במעלת המלאכים, לא נשאר לפניו שום מסך שלא קרעו ולא עצר בעדו שום מעצור גופני, ולא נשאר בו שום דבר מן החסרון לא מעט ולא הרבה, והושבתו בו הכוחות הדמיוניים והחושים בכל השגותיו, ונתבטל כוחו המתעורר, ונשאר שכל בלבד, ועל ענין זה אמרו עליו שהוא מדבר עם ה' בלי אמצעות המלאכים.</p>
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Moshe Rabbeinu’s prophecy was different from that of other prophets in the following four ways (see IBID further):

1. G-d spoke to him directly.
2. Moshe remained in a conscious state throughout the prophecy.
3. Moshe was physically unaffected by the prophecy.
4. Moshe could receive prophecy at will.

### Section III. Why Moshe Deserved that His Face be Radiant

We now understand that Moshe Rabbeinu's exalted spiritual level enabled him to achieve unparalleled prophecy. Were there any unique factors that enabled Moshe Rabbeinu to be worthy of the radiance of his face? Moreover, if Moshe radiated light only after the second giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, why not also after the first giving of the Torah when G-d also taught Moshe the Torah and presented him with the First Tablets?

#### Part A. The Appearance and Nature of the Radiance of Moshe's Face

The Torah itself only writes that Moshe's face glowed after he received the Torah the second time. Unlike the giving of the Torah at Sinai which directed to the entire nation of Israel who stood there, the second giving of the Torah was to Moshe alone.

#### 1. Shemot (Exodus) 34:28-35 – Moshe receives the Torah from G-d over forty days and then descends with his face radiating, holding the Second Tablets.

<p>28. He was there with G-d for forty days and forty nights; he ate no bread and drank no water, and He inscribed upon the tablets the words of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments.</p> <p>29. When Moshe descended from Har Sinai – with the two Tablets of Testimony in the hand of Moshe as he came down from the mountain – Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant when G-d had spoken to him.</p> <p>30. Aaron and all the Children of Israel saw Moshe, and behold! – the skin of his face had become radiant; and they were afraid to approach him.</p> <p>31. Moshe called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the assembly returned to him, and Moshe would speak to them.</p> <p>32. After that, all the Children of Israel would approach; he would command them everything that G-d had spoken to him on Har Sinai.</p>	<p><b>כח</b> וַיְהִי־שָׁם עִם־יְהוָה אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתָה וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְּחָת אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים:</p> <p><b>כט</b> וַיְהִי בְרִדְתָּ מֹשֶׁה מִהָר סיני וּשְׁנֵי לַחַת הַעֲדוּת בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה בְּרִדְתּוֹ מִן־הָהָר וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא־יָדַע כִּי קָרוֹ עוֹר פָּנָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ אֹתוֹ:</p> <p><b>ל</b> וַיֵּרָא אֶהָרֹן וְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְהִנֵּה קָרוֹ עוֹר פָּנָיו וַיִּירָאוּ מִגִּשְׁתֹּ אֵלָיו:</p> <p><b>לא</b> וַיִּקְרָא אֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה וַיָּשׁוּבוּ אֵלָיו אֶהָרֹן וְכָל־הַנְּשָׂאִים בְּעֵדָה וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם:</p> <p><b>לב</b> וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן נִגְשׂוּ כָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּצְוֶם אֹתָם כָּל־אִשׁוֹר דָּבַר יְהוָה אֹתוֹ בְּהַר סיני:</p>
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At what point did Moshe earn the radiance of his face? Rashi explains that this occurred towards the end of the third forty-day period on Mount Sinai, after Moshe asked G-d to reveal His *Kavod* (Glory), to the manifestation of the Divine attributes we call the *Shechinah*.

**2. Shemos 33:18-23 – Moshe requests G-d to reveal his Divine essence on top of Sinai during his third, forty-day period.**

<p>18. Moshe said, “Show me now your Glory!”          19. And G-d answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the Name Hashem before you; I shall show favor to those whom I choose to show favor to, and I shall show compassion to those I choose to show compassion to.          20. G-d said, “You cannot see My Face, for no human can see My Face and live.”          21. And G-d said, “There is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock;          22. “When My Glory passes by, I will place you in a cleft of the rock; I will shield you with My Hand until I have passed by.          23. “Then I will remove My Hand away and you will see My Back; but My Face may not be seen.”</p>	<p>(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר הַרְאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ:          (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כְּל־טוֹבִל עַל־פְּנֶיךָ וְקָרָאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְחַצְתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲחֹן וְרַחַמְתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם:            (כ) וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת אֶת־פָּנַי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחָי:            (כא) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל־הַצֹּר:            (כב) וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדִי וְשַׁמְתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצֹּר וְשַׁפְתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד־עֲבָרִי:          (כג) וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת־כַּפְּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אֲחֵרַי וּפָנַי לֹא יִרְאוּ:          (ד)</p>
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**3. Rashi, Shemos 34:29 – Moshe experiences a higher level of Divine revelation, commencing the “rays of glory.”**

<p>And from where was Moses privileged to have the rays of glory? Our Rabbis said that they originated from the cave (or cleft) in the rock atop Mount Sinai, for the Holy One, blessed be He, then put His hand upon his face, as it is said, (Exodus 33:22) “And I will shelter thee with My hand” (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 37).</p>	<p>ומהיכן זכה משה לקרני ההוד? רבותינו אמרו (תנחומא כי תשא ל"ז) : מן המערה שנתן הקב"ה ידו על פניו, שנאמר: ושכתי כפי ( שמות ל"ג:כ"ב).</p>
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Why did Moshe deserve to achieve this great level that no other human had ever reached? Moshe was worth of the Divine glow of his face because he petitioned G-d to forgive the Jewish people for worshipping the Golden Calf. Moshe offered that G-d take his own life and spare the Jewish people. He argued that leaving Egypt with all the gold booty was a great temptation that led to their constructing the Golden Calf (see Shemos and Rashi 32:30-32).

**4. Netziv, Shemos 33:18 – Moshe was privileged to reach such a high level in order to request atonement for the nation for worshipping the Golden Calf.**

<p>Therefore Moshe requested of G-d, “Show me now your glory!” This was not to derive personal gain from the splendor of G-d’s glory – for Moshe’s great humility precluded such behavior. Rather it was</p>	<p>על כן ביקש משה מהקב"ה "הראני נא את כבודך", ולא שהיה משה רוצה ליהנות מזיו כבוד ה', שלא זהו דרכו של משה רבינו בענוותו הנפלאה, אלא שהיה מוכרח לזה כדי להגיע לשאלתו ובקשתו לטובת ישראל.</p>
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necessary for Moshe to arrive at this point to ask and request [forgiveness] on behalf of the benefit of the Jewish people (for the transgression of worshipping the Golden Calf).	
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The Ramban explains further that the giving of the Torah the second time was to Moshe alone (who would then teach the laws to the Jewish people) because of his prayers and his merit in defending the Jewish people.

**5. Ramban, Shemos 34:3 – The difference between the first and second reception of the Torah at Mount Sinai.**

<p>No one will ascend Mt Sinai with Moshe [for the Second Tablets] from among the Elders as was the case for the First Tablets. Furthermore, no one will be seen on any part of the mountain, including the base where the Jewish people had previously stood to receive the Torah.</p> <p>Also, the flocks and cows should not be left to graze in front of the mountain. Initially, for the First Tablets, animals and people were forbidden only to touch the mountain. This prohibition remained in effect. For G-d's Glory (Presence) was continually resting upon the mountain until the Second Tablets were given. But at the Second Tablets, G-d was more stringent [by not allowing the Elders to accompany Moshe].</p> <p>The reason for all this was that the first giving of the Torah was for the entire Jewish people, and the second was for Moshe alone based on his merit and prayers. And the Divine Presence that would be revealed on the mountain for the Second Tablets would be greater than at the First.</p>	<p>שלא יעלו עמך כלל זקני ישראל כאשר עשו בלוחות הראשונות, וגם איש אל ירא בכל ההר, גם בתחתית ההר, מקום מעמד ישראל בראשונה.</p> <p>גם הצאן והבקר אל ירעו מול ההר ההוא, מנגד, כי בראשונות לא הוזהרו רק שלא תגע בו יד אם בהמה אם איש, והנה עדיין עומדים באזהרה ההיא, כי הכבוד היה תמיד בהר עד שנתנו הלוחות האחרונות. אבל עתה החמיר בשעת מתן הלוחות האלו יותר מהמעמד הראשון.</p> <p>והטעם בכל זה, כי בראשונות היה המעמד בעבור כל ישראל, וזה למשה בלבד בזכותו ובתפלתו, וגדול יהיה הכבוד הנגלה על ההר האחרון מן הראשון.</p>
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**6. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Broidie, *Sam Derech, Vayikra, Parshas Behar*, p. 311. – Moshe earned a higher spiritual level due to his merit and prayers.**

The Ramban above makes it clear that the giving of the Second Tablets had	ומבואר בדבריו שבמתן הלוחות השניים היו חומרות שלא היו במעמד מתן הלוחות הראשונים.
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<p>stringencies not present at the giving of the First Tablets. At the giving of the Second Tablets there was a Revelation of G-d at a higher level since the Tablets were given to Moshe Rabbeinu alone due “to his merit and prayers,” and he then gave them to the Jewish people. (In contrast to the First Tablets which were viewed as being given to the Jewish people [directly through Moshe]).</p> <p>And since Moshe Rabbeinu himself was on a higher level than the Jewish people...G-d’s Revelation was greater at the giving of the Second Tablets than at the First Tablets.</p>	<p>משום שבמתן הלוחות השניים היה גילוי ה' בדרגה גבוהה יותר, כי היה למשה רבנו בלבד "בזכותו ובתפלתו" והוא שמסרם לבני ישראל (שלא כמתן הלוחות הראשונים שהיה לכלל בני ישראל) –</p> <p>ומכיון שדרגת משה רבנו היתה עילאה מדרגת בני ישראל... היתה התגלות ה' בעת מתן הלוחות השניים גבוהה יותר מדרגת ההתגלות במתן הלוחות הראשונים.</p>
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Moshe’s glowing face expressed the special level that he had achieved.

**7. Rabbi Simcha Zissel Broidie, *Sam Derech*, Vayikra, Parshas Behar, p. 311-312, Footnote 3. – The *Karan Or Panav* manifested the great spiritual level of Moshe.**

<p>We need to understand why Moshe Rabbeinu merited the <i>Karnei Hod</i> – radiance of glory – only at the second giving of the Torah, for , hadn’t G-d spoken to him directly already at the first giving of the Tablets? According to our explanation this is understood. At the giving of the Second Tablets there was a more intense Revelation of G-d. Thus Moshe became worthy of the radiance of glory.</p>	<p>יש להבין מדוע זכה משה רבנו לקרני הוד רק במתן זה, והרי כבר בלוחות ראשונים דבר עמו ה' פנים אל פנים. ולפי המבואר שבמתן הלוחות השניים היה גילוי ה' בדרגה גבוהה יותר, מובן שלכן זכה לקרני הוד רק במתן זה.</p>
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**Part B. Highlighting that the Second Tablets were Divine**

There was also an additional, practical reason why Moshe Rabbeinu needed to descend with Divine facial radiance. Since Moshe was alone on Har Sinai when he received the Second Tablets, the radiance was necessary to demonstrate that the Second Tablets were also given by G-d. Otherwise, skeptics might have challenged that it was Moshe himself who wrote the Second Tablets.

**1. Chizkuni, Shemos 34:29 – Since the Second Tablets were given privately to Moshe, “Karan Or Panav” indicated that these, too, were Divine.**

<p>Why was Moshe privileged to get the radiance with the Second Tablets, but not when he carried down the First Set of Tablets? The First Set of Tablets had been given publicly amidst thunder, shofar blasts and fire. But regarding the latter Tablets, G-d specifically warned Moshe that that no one was to accompany him, as it is written [Shemos 34:3], “Another person shall not be seen on the mountain...”</p> <p>The giving of the First Set of Tablets was accompanied by extraordinary phenomena – visible thunder, audible lightening, thick clouds and fire. In contrast, the Second Tablets were given secretly. If it hadn’t been for Moshe’s radiance, there would have been an opportunity for critics to claim that the Second Set of Tablets were not given by G-d. (especially since G-d had commanded Moshe to hew out and bring the Second Tablets atop Mount Sinai for G-d Himself to engrave, in contrast to the First Tablets which were both given and engraved by G-d).</p>	<p>ומה שזכה בלוחות אחרונות ולא בראשונות היינו על ידי שהראשונות נתנו לעין כל ברעמים וקולות ואש, ובאלו כתיב גם איש אל ירא בכל ההר וגו',</p> <p>ומאחר שהראשונות נתנו בקולות וברקים וענן ולפידים והללו נתנו בחשאי. אלולי קרני ההוד היה פתחון פה לאומות לומר לא נתנו לוחות אחרות ולא היו מאמינים שנתנה לו הקב"ה.</p>
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**2. Malbim 34:29 – The radiance showed that the second giving of the Torah was Divine and immutable.**

<p>This light engendered awe and terror in man, just as prophets experienced terror at the time of prophecy... This radiance was necessary now but not earlier; for in contrast to the first time Moshe received the Torah on Mount Sinai, when the Torah (<i>Luchos</i>) was written by G-d Himself, now with the second giving of the Torah, Moshe was involved with the writing. Therefore a greater light was shown upon Moshe and he became elevated...</p> <p>And this was also a sign and wonder for the Jewish people designed to show that this (second giving of the) Torah was Divine and immutable as long as no one would replace</p>	<p>כי אור זה היה מטיל אימה ופחד על לבושי חומר, כאשר יפחדו הנביאים בעת הנבואה... והוצרך זה עתה ולא קודם, שאז היתה כל התורה כתובה מן השי"ת בעצמו, לא כן עתה שנכתבה ע"י משה, הופיע עליו אור יתר גדול ונתעלה...</p> <p>וגם שזה היה אות ומופת לבני ישראל שתורתו תורת אלקים, ושלא תשונה התורה כל עוד שלא יעמוד איש כמוהו ויופיע באור אלקי וקרני הוד, עד יראו כל בשר כי אלקים שוכן עליו, חוץ ממה</p>
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<p>Moshe who radiated a G-dly light. This way everyone would know that G-d's [Presence] rests upon him, in addition to what they already heard (the first time) at Mount Sinai from G-d when He designated Moshe as the messenger to give the Jewish people the Torah.</p>	<p>שכבר שמעו בסיני מפי ה' שמנה אותו לשליח לתת להם תורה.</p>
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#### Section IV. The Connection to Torah *She'ba'al Peh* – The Oral Torah

So far we have concluded that there were two essential factors caused Moshe Rabbeinu's face to shine with a Divine glow. 1) It was his reward for stepping forward to pray for Klal Yisroel for eighty days following their transgression of worshipping the Golden Calf, and 2) G-d provided an unmistakable sign that the Second Tablets were also Divine since the Jewish people were not present when Moshe received them from Him on Mt. Sinai.

##### Part A. The Correlation of the Tablets to the Written and Oral Torahs

This would seem to be the straightforward, end-of-the-story explanation. However, there was another major factor in the difference between the giving of the two sets of Tablets that resulted in Moshe's radiant face – the First Tablets were both made and written by G-d, whereas the Second Tablets were hewn by Moshe, carried atop Mt. Sinai, and then inscribed by G-d.

##### 1. Shemot (Exodus) 34:1-4 – G-d commands Moshe to hew the Second Set of Tablets for the Ten Commandments and then ascend Mount Sinai.

<p>1. And the Lord said to Moses: "Hew for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones. And I will inscribe upon the Tablets the words that were on the First Tablets, which you broke. 2. Be prepared for the morning, and in the morning you shall ascend Mount Sinai and stand before Me there on the top of the mountain. 3. No one shall ascend with you, neither shall anyone be seen anywhere on the mountain, nor shall the sheep and the cattle graze opposite that mountain. 4. So he [Moses] hewed two stone Tablets like the First ones, and Moses arose early in the morning and ascended Mount Sinai as the Lord had commanded him, and he took two stone Tablets in his hand.</p>	<p>א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה פָּסֹלֶךְ שְׁנֵי־לַחֹת אֲבָנִים כַּפְּרָאשִׁנַּיִם וְכַתְּבֵתְלֵ עַל־הַלַּחֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ עַל־הַלַּחֹת הַקְּרָאשִׁנַּיִם אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַרְתָּ:</p> <p>ב וַהֲיֵה נָכוֹן לַבֹּקֶר וְעָלִיתָ בַּבֹּקֶר אֶל־הָרַ סִינַי וְנִצַּבְתָּ לִּי נֹשֵׁם עַל־רֹאשׁ הָהָר:</p> <p>ג וְאִישׁ לֹא־יַעֲלֶה עִמָּךְ וְגַם־אִישׁ אֶל־יָרֵא בְּכָל־הָהָר גַּם־הַצֹּאן וְהַבָּקָר אֶל־יָרְעוּ אֶל־מִוֶּלֶת הָהָר הַהוּא:</p> <p>ד וַיִּפְסֹל שְׁנֵי־לַחֹת אֲבָנִים כַּפְּרָאשִׁנַּיִם וַיִּשְׁפֹּם מֹשֶׁה בַּבֹּקֶר וַיַּעַל אֶל־הָרַ סִינַי כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתוֹ וַיִּקַּח בְּיָדוֹ שְׁנֵי לַחֹת אֲבָנִים:</p>
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What is the significance of the fact that the First Tablets were both hewn and written on by G-d and the Second Tablets were hewn by Moshe and then written on by G-d? There are two levels to approach this question. The basic understanding is the First Tablets signify the Written Torah – the history of the creation of the world until the Jewish People entered the Land of Israel, as well as the 613 *mitzvos* (commandments) – recorded by Moshe Rabbeinu in the Torah. The Second Tablets represent the Oral Law – the process of G-d teaching Moshe a comprehensive oral explanation of the Torah’s written text.

**2. Rabbi Gedalyahu Schorr, *Ohr Gedalyahu, Parshas Ki Sisa*, p. 149 – The First Tablets represented the Written Torah and the Second Tablets represented the Oral Torah.**

<p>It is written [Shemos 33:23], “Then I will remove My hand away and you will see My back; but My face may not be seen.” This prophecy accompanied the giving of the Second Tablets. It points to the essence of worship of the Divine and (see further source #4) and the way the Second Tablets were given. The Sages taught, “And you will see My back” refers to the Oral Torah, whereas, “My face may not be seen” refers to the Written Torah (First Tablets).</p>	<p>כתיב (שמות ל"ג כ"ג) "והסרת את כפי וראית את אחרי ופני לא יראו", מראה הנבואה הזאת נתנה ביחד עם נתינת הלוחות השניות, ומראה הנבואה מורה על המהות של סדר העבודה ואופן הנתינה של לוחות שניות, ואמרו חז"ל וראית את אחורי זהו תושבע"פ, ופני לא יראו זהו תושב"כ.</p>
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With this insight of the *Ohr Gedalyahu*, we can appreciate more clearly the significance of Rashi’s remark that the beginning of Moshe’s glow commenced with G-d teaching Moshe the Oral Law. (See again above – Section III. Part A, Sources 2 & 3).

G-d taught the Oral Torah to Moshe on Mount Sinai, repeated it to him in the *Obel Moed*, and again at the Plains of Moav. Moshe passed on this tradition verbally to the people, who in turn taught it to the subsequent generation, and so it was passed on by word of mouth from teacher to student for over one thousand years. Eventually, it was preserved in writing in the form of the Mishnah, Talmud and the Midrashim. We thus speak of two Torahs: the Written Torah (*Torah She’BiK’tav*) and the Oral Torah (*Torah SheBe’al Peh*).

**3. Vayikra (Leviticus) 26:46 with Commentary of Rashi – There are two Torahs, both given to Moshe by G-d.**

<p>These are the statutes, the ordinances, and the Torahs that the Lord gave between Himself and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai, through Moshe.</p> <p><b>Rashi</b> – and the Torahs [Why the plural form, “Torahs”? This denotes two Torahs]: One Written Torah and one Oral Torah. It</p>	<p>אלה החקים והמשפטים והתורת אשר נתן יקוק בינו ובין בני ישראל בהר סיני ביד משה:  והתורת: אחת בכתב ואחת בעל פה, מגיד שכולם נתנו למשה בסיני:</p>
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teaches us that all was given to Moshe on [Mount] Sinai. [ <i>Torat Kohanim</i> 26:54]	
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The two Tablets take on a further dimension of representing the Written and Oral Law in the context of the sin of the Golden Calf. This event led to the breaking of the First Tablets, Moshe’s prayer, and the repentance of the Jewish people. All of this enabled G-d to give the Second Tablets. When the Torah was initially given on Mount Sinai, the Jewish people had collectively reached the extraordinary level of Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden (before their transgression that led to their banishment). At that level, the Jewish people could have enjoyed an eternal life of prophetic awareness, immune to death. But then they found themselves on a different level of existence.

**4. Rabbi Gedalyahu Schorr, Ohr Gedalyahu, Parshas Ki Sisa, p. 147 – A “First Tablets perspective” afforded a naturally clear comprehension of Torah; a “Second Tablets perspective” requires great effort for Torah clarity to purify one’s body to house the soul.**

<p>The main difference between the First and Second Tablets is the latter were hewn by Moshe Rabbeinu (and inscribed by G-d) and the former were both (“hewn” and inscribed) by G-d, as a consequence of the decline in the level of the Jewish people due to the <i>Cheit Ha'Eigel</i> – transgression of the Golden Calf.</p> <p>For the <i>Cheit Ha'Eigel</i>, brought death to the Jewish people. Their bodies, which had become angelic at Mount Sinai, became mortal. The Second Tablets were hewn from the earth, as it is written [Shemos 34:1], “Hew for yourself...” Consequently, the practical objective of human perfection after receiving the Second Tablets is to purify the body to become a fitting abode for the light of the soul.</p> <p>The Sages say that one could know all the details and letters of the entire Torah from the First Tablets. That is, knowledge of the Torah came as the result of a deep comprehension accessible at that time. The people were at a level of great clarity from which they comprehended the spiritual root of each Divine command. By extension, from this source, they</p>	<p>עיקר החילוק בין לוחות הראשונות להשניות, כי בשניות כתיב פסל לך שגוף הלוחות יעשה משרע"ה, משא"כ גוף הלוחות הראשונות היו מהקב"ה, כי בחטא העגל ירדו בני"י ממדריגתם.</p> <p>שע"י חטא העגל נגרם להם מיתה, שהגוף ירד ממדריגתו – מהדרגה של מלאך, ולכן שלטה בו מיתה, ולכן כפי מדריגתם אז ניתן להם הלוחות, שבלוחות שניות ה' הגוף מן הארץ – פסל לך, וסדר העבודה של האדם אחר קבלת הלוחות השניות הוא – לזכך הגוף שיהי ראוי לקבל אור הנשמה.</p> <p>לוחות הראשונות – אשר איתא בחז"ל שהיו יודעים את כל דקדוקי' ואותיותי' של תורה, ביאור הדברים הוא, שהידיעה באה מפני עומק השגתם בעת ההיא, ומחמת רוב הבהירות היו משיגים שורש הדיבור, וממילא מהשורש ידעו את כל הענפים אשר יוצאים ממנו, כי מי שעומד בפנים אצל השורש יכול לראות מהפנים לחוץ, ומצד זה ידעו ממילא את כל הדקדוקים אשר יוצאים מכל דבור ודבור.</p>
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<p>understood all the wisdom that branched out of it. For someone who stands on the inside, next to the source, is able to see from the inside out. And from this perspective, they intrinsically understood all the details that comprised each Divine command.</p>	
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By worshipping the Golden Calf there was a dual change in man that resulted in both negative and positive consequences. On the one hand, the Jewish people suffered a huge decrease in their spiritual level and clarity – beforehand they lived like angels in the constant light of Divine revelation as a conduit for expressing Divine will. That clarity was lost. How would the Jewish people now relate to G-d and the Torah? Answering this question will lead us to understand that there was a positive side to the Sin, as well.

**Part B. Emulating G-d with Free Will: *Na’aseh V’Nishmah vs. Kimu V’Kiblu***

To arrive at the answer, we need to account for one additional pivotal factor that brought about Moshe Rabbeinu’s radiance, and in turn, a fundamental change in the nature of man after receiving the First and Second Tablets respectively. The Talmud (Shabbat 88a) teaches that when the Torah and First Tablets were given to the entire Jewish people at Mount Sinai, it was seemingly forced upon them. How was this derived? The Torah writes [Shemos 19:17], “They stood *under* the mountain” rather than near, or at the base of the mountain, as if the mountain threatened to crush them if they did not accept what they were offered on it.

**1. Rashi, Shemos, 19:17 based on Talmud Bavli 88a and Midrash Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 19:17:2 – Mount Sinai is held over the Jewish people.**

<p>“At the lower part of the mountain” (Shemos 19:17). Literally, this means “at the foot of the mountain.” But the Midrash says that it implies that the mountain was plucked up from its place and was arched over them as a barrel turned upside down, so that they were standing beneath (under) the mountain itself (Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 19:17:2; Shabbat 88a).</p>	<p>בתחתית ההר – לפי פשוטו: ברגלי ההר. ומדרשו: שנתלש ההר ממקומו ונכפה עליהם כגיגית.</p>
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What is implied by this metaphor? The overwhelming recognition of the existence of G-d at Mount Sinai made the decision to accept the Torah “forced.” The Jewish people’s angelic existence was a response to the immediacy of G-d’s Presence and receiving the “Written Torah.” On the other hand, after worshipping the Golden Calf, G-d withdrew His Divine Presence, and enabled the Jewish people to act with free will to strive to make life decisions, thereby actualizing their potential (even though there were still prophecy and miracles until the First Temple’s destruction). From that time on, the Jewish people relied on their intellect, creativity and hence, their free will to reach their potential. Going from “First

Tablet” Jews to “Second Tablet” Jews, they went from serving as a *conduit* for G-d’s Presence in the world, to serving as a *representative* of G-d. (Rabbi Jeremy Kagan, communicated.)

**2. Jeremy Kagan, *The Jewish Self*, p. 88, 91. – Receiving the First Tablets suspended free will; the Second Tablets enabled human achievement through free will.**

The significance of this shift to the Oral Torah is seen in the way in which it was accepted. When the prophetic Written Torah was given at Sinai, it was in a context of total revelation which forced our acceptance, nullifying free will and independent self. The Oral Torah on the other hand, was accepted within the context of the Creator’s newly hidden face. It did not take place under the force of overwhelming revelation—it was an act of choice and self-creation. This directly paralleled both the new nature of the Torah itself, which we were creating rather than receiving through prophecy, and the new relationship which had developed with the Creator in the time of the Assembly, which only existed through our active choice to recognize Him in the world rather than through the influence of external revelation.

...Through the Oral Torah we learned to uncover the image of G-d within us, and through it to reach toward the Creator.

Moshe Rabbeinu and the subsequent prophets enabled the clear communication of the Oral Law. Nevertheless, the process of studying, deriving and applying the Oral law itself was still a challenge. It was Moshe Rabbeinu’s rigorous involvement in studying and applying the Oral Torah which led to the radiance of his face. This is symbolized by Moshe himself hewing out the Second Tablets.

**3. Netziv, *Shemos*, 34:1 – Moshe hewing the Second Tablets symbolizes the effort involved in Torah study.**

<p>G-d commanded that the Second Tablets be hewn by Moshe, not because they didn’t deserve having G-d do so, but rather to demonstrate that halachah which emerges from these Tablets is the result of a combination of man’s effort with Heavenly assistance. In this, halachah is modeled after the (Second) Tablets themselves which were the product of both Moshe’s act of hewing and G-d’s writing.</p>	<p>... צוה הקב"ה שיהיו הלוחות השניים בפיסול ידי משה, לא משום שלא זכו למעשה אלהים, אלא להורות דהלכה המתחדשת בכח לוחות הללו היא השתתפות עמל האדם בסייעתא דשמיא, כמו עצם הלוחות שהיו מעשה משה וכתבת הקב"ה.</p>
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When Moshe Rabbeinu received the Second Tablets, it was via a process that involved both a greater revelation of G-d to Moshe alone, coupled with the more challenging study of the Oral Law, the combination of which produced his Divine glow. When Moshe descended from Mount Sinai, he taught the Written and Oral Torahs at a level of prophecy. After Moshe died, that process continued – albeit at a lower level of prophecy – until the Second Temple when prophecy essentially ceased with the destruction of the First Temple. From the Second Temple period onward, under the leadership of the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, the Men of the Great Assembly, the Oral Torah became the primary means of studying Torah and deriving halachah, Jewish law.



(The Oral Torah was eventually written down as a response to the pressures of exile, which created a danger that the Torah would be forgotten. Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner in *Pachad Yitzchak, Chanukah*, ch. 1, pp. 27-29, points out that in spite of this, the oral character was preserved to a degree by writing it in a fashion which could not be properly understood without a teacher, and by leaving portions unwritten. Rabbi Jeremy Kagan, *The Jewish Self*, p.86, note 8.)

**4. Jeremy Kagan, The Jewish Self, p. 62. – Following the First Temple’s destruction was a dramatic transition marked by the loss of both prophecy and miracles.**

This was a time of change on an imaginable scale. The closing of the Written Torah represented the official end of prophecy in history. The loss of prophecy from the realm of human experience was a complete revolution in what it was to be human. Man no longer communicated with the Transcendent, and the world of experience became completely locked within the realm of nature. For coincident with the end of prophecy was the end of what the sages refer to as *neis nigleh*, revealed miracles – open violations of the laws of nature.

After the Temple’s destruction, the Jews were exiled to Persia where the ruling leadership decreed that the Jews should be, G-d forbid, annihilated. Through a series of Divinely orchestrated but seemingly natural events, the Jews were saved culminating in the enactment of the festival of Purim, recorded in the *Megillah*. The Jewish people renewed their commitment to Judaism by affirming this new mode of relationship with G-d by formally confirming and accepting upon themselves the Oral Law (As the *Megillah* says, קָמְנוּ וְקַבְּלוּ – *kimu v'kiblu*; “they arose [on their own initiative], and accepted [the Oral Torah]). *The Anshe Kenneset HaGedolah*, the Men of the Great Assembly, recognized G-d’s hidden role, the new mode of relationship to Him without prophecy. The Oral Law now superseded prophecy and became the *modus operandi* to sustain the Jews’ relationship with G-d and integrate Jewish law into their daily lives.

The Netziv explains that despite this spiritual change, the Sages still possessed the ability to achieve a certain level of radiance of their own.

**5. Netziv Shemos 34:29 – Study of the Oral Law engendered a facial radiance.**

<p>We explained earlier (Shemos 31:18) that the expression, “When G-d had spoken with him (Moshe),” refers specifically to the Oral Torah. It is as if the two, G-d and Moshe, were speaking together. This is the radiance that was attained with the Second Tablets. The study of the Oral Torah engenders radiance in a person. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim, Chapter 3, Halacha 2 tells us: Rabbi Yona said that his</p>	<p>בדברו אתו – כבר ביארנו לעיל (לא, יח) דזה הלשון אינו אלא על תורה שבע"פ, אשר כביכול שניהם דברו יחדיו, וזהו קירון הפנים שהשיג בלוחות השניות, וכדאיתא בירושלמי שקלים פ"ג (הלכה ב') דרבי יונה אמר, דלכן פניו מאירים משום דאולפן שכיחא ליה, וכן ר' אבהו שהאירו פניו אמר תוספתא עתיקתא מצא ו"חכמת אדם תאיר פניו" קהלת ח, א, (והכי איתא בנדרים (מט, ב)...)</p>
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<p>face radiates because he would study regularly... Similarly, the students saw the face of Rabbi Avahu was lit up. Rav Yochanan asked him, “What was the new Torah insight you heard?” Rabbi Avahu said, “I found an old Tosefta with new insights that made me.” Rav Yochanan said about Rebbe Avahu, [Koheles 8:1] “A man’s wisdom lights up his face.” This idea is also found in the Talmud, Nedarim 49b...</p> <p>All the more so, when Moshe Rabbeinu was receiving the Torah the second time and was writing down the Torah he received the first time, he was able to understand (through the Oral Torah) how the principles and laws were rooted in the Written Torah. Moshe worked on this continually during this period and as a consequence his face glowed with an everlasting illumination.</p>	<p>וכ"ש כשמשה רבינו עמד בשעת כתיבה על כל הקבלות שלמד בראשונה, ועמד עליהם בשניה לדעת מקורם בתורה שבכתב, ובזה השיג בתמידות של מ' יום אלו — הארת פנים, עד שקרן עור פניו לעולם.</p>
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Despite our great distance from Moshe Rabbeinu’s high level of prophecy and clarity of Torah understanding, the Ohr Gedalyahu informs us below that we in fact still have the capability to strive for the lofty First Tablet level!

**6. Rabbi Gedalyahu Schorr, *Ohr Gedalyahu, Parshas Ki Sisa*, p. 149 – Even through the Oral Torah it is possible to attain the clarity of the Written Torah.**

<p>Through the learning process established by the Second Tablets, rigorous study of the Oral Torah can lead one to the high levels of the First Tablets – the Written Torah. That is, by going through the “back” one can reach the “front.” This shows that the lofty level of the First Tablets are still accessible, but the path to reach that level, through the Oral Torah, is long and challenging. Nevertheless, we are still capable of reaching the concealed wisdom.</p> <p>This is the prescribed process of Jewish growth utilizing the Second Tablets to break through barriers of concealment by</p>	<p>כי סדר של לוחות השניות הי', שע"י היגיעה בתושבע"פ יכולים לבוא לידי השגה בתושב"כ, ההשגה של לוחות הראשונות, והסדר הי' כי ע"י האחור הוא מגיע להפנים, כי דרגה זו של לוחות הראשונות לא ניטלה מבנ"י לגמרי, אלא שנעשתה הדרך יותר ארוכה ויותר קשה, והאופן להגיע להבחינה שבה עמדו ישראל בעת לוחות הראשונות הוא ע"י היגיעה בתושבע"פ. וע"י יגיעה זו יכולים לשבור ההסתר וההעלם עד שבאים להבחינה של פני של הלוחות הראשונות.</p> <p>וזהו סדר העבודה של לוחות השניות, שצריכים לבקוע ההעלם ע"י היגיעה בתושבע"פ ועל ידה הוא בא לאותו הדרגה של לוחות הראשונות.</p>
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laboring at the Oral Torah, and thereby reaching the lofty heights of the First Tablets.	
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**7. Rabbi Gedalyahu Schorr, *Ohr Gedalyahu, Parshas Ki Sisa*, pp. 149-150 – The broken pieces of the First Tablets lay in the Aron (Ark) with the Second Tablets intact, symbolizing our ability to fuse those shards via the Oral Torah!**

The Talmud [Baba Basra 14b] states that the broken pieces of the First Tablets are also in the Ark resting below the intact Second Tablets. This teaches us that we have not entirely lost the great heights of the First Tablets. For if we had lost access to that high level, why would the broken First Tablets lay in the Ark? It must be because we still possess the ability to fuse the broken pieces of the First Tablets together through the diligent study of the Oral Torah, and to reach the level of comprehension of the First Tablets.	ואמרו חז"ל (ב"ב י"ד) כי גם שברי לוחות מונחין בארון, ודבר זה מורה לנו כי לא אבדנו לגמרי הדרגה של לוחות הראשונות, כי אילו אבדנו אותה לגמרי לאיזה צורך היו מונחין בארון, אלא שגם אחר שבירת הלוחות יש בכח האדם לצרפם יחד, כי ע"י היגיעה בתושבע"פ הוא בא לידי ההשגה של לוחות הראשונות.
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**Section V. The Yom Kippur Link**

The final question we ask about the nature of the Second Tablets is what significance is there in Moshe's Rabbeinu bringing them down from Mount Sinai specifically on Yom Kippur? What makes this question even more fascinating is that in fact Yom Kippur *became* Yom Kippur on that very day – it did not exist beforehand as the “Day of Atonement!”

During the 80-day period after the breaking of the First Tablets, the Jewish people engaged in *teshuvah*, repentance, to atone for the transgression of the Golden Calf. Their repentance was accepted by G-d, as manifested by giving the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur itself, reaffirming the covenant with G-d at the giving of the First Tablets at Mount Sinai. (See *Pachad Yitzchak, Maamar Aleph-Yud*, pp. 44-45.) The sincere remorse by the Jewish nation and their commitment to change, followed by G-d accepting their repentance, became integrated into the very fabric of Jewish time as the festival of Yom Kippur, just as the Exodus from Egypt established the festival of Pesach – Passover.

**1. Rashi, Devarim (Deuteronomy) 9:18 – Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai for the third time on Rosh Chodesh Elul and descended on Yom Kippur, when G-d forgave the Jewish people.**

“I petitioned before G-d as [I did] the first time, for forty days” – As it says, “And now I will go up to G-d. Maybe I will gain atonement” (Shemot/Exodus 32:30). This	ואתנפל לפני ה' כראשונה ארבעים יום - שנאמר ועתה אעלה אל ה' אולי אכפרה באותה עלייה נתעכבתי ארבעים יום נמצאו כלים בכ"ט באב
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<p>[second ascent on Mt. Sinai] began on the eighteenth of Tammuz and [Moshe] remained there for forty days, which ended on the twenty-ninth day of Av. On that day, G-d forgave the Jewish people and said to Moshe, “Hew for yourself two Tablets ...” [Moshe ascended Mt. Sinai a third time on Rosh Chodesh Elul] and remained an additional forty days which ended with his return on Yom Kippur.</p> <p>On that day G-d forgave the Jewish people and said to Moshe, “I have forgiven you as you requested,” and therefore Yom Kippur was established as a day of pardon and forgiveness.</p>	<p>שהוא עלה בי"ח בתמוז בו ביום נתרצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל ואמר למשה פסל לך שני לוחות עשה עוד מ' יום נמצאו כלים ביום הכפורים.</p> <p>בו ביום נתרצה הקב"ה לישראל בשמחה ואמר לו למשה סלחתי כדברך לכך הוקבע למחילה ולסליחה.</p>
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Significantly, the engine for *teshuvah* is the free will to make moral choices, which we learned above was represented by the giving of the Second Tablets.

## 2. Jeremy Kagan, *The Jewish Self*, pp. 107-8, 141 – Exercising free will emulates G-d and is the path to self-actualization.

<p>The end of prophecy, which forced the development of the Oral Torah, allowed for the attainment of true free will and so total selfhood. This is, within the confines of our situation as create beings, our emulation of the Creator’s characteristic of necessity....Our capacity for deep choice is our deepest essence....Our capacity to achieve and exercise free choice is our means of self-actualization and sense of self.</p> <p>Through free choice we create self, becoming a receiver if G-d’s goodness and fulfilling the purpose of creation. There are two aspects to this self-creation: 1) through our chosen actions we merit our existence, rather than being dependent upon the Creator’s charity, and 2) we decide how to develop our self rather than our nature being determined from without. In other words, that we exist and who we are both come from us. (see Ramchal, <i>Derech HaShem</i>, Chapter 6, pp. 80-87.)</p>
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## 3. Based on Jeremy Kagan, *The Jewish Self*, pp. 104, 114 – *Teshuvah* is the key to actualizing our free will by correcting our deficiencies and perfecting character.

<p>There are two models of individuals who embrace the power of their free will to strive for character perfection. The overwhelming majority of people make decisions, fail, dust themselves off, then climb back into the ring, make more decisions, fail, climb back into the ring, etc. but each time progressing and making themselves stronger and stronger. The rare second model are the totally righteous who build themselves painstakingly, choice by choice. How is it that the majority of the Jewish people can benefit from free will if they encounter so much failure? What is the key to genuine personal development and growth? They answer is <i>teshuvah</i> – introspection and personal change to correct one’s shortcomings.</p>
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**4. Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, *Rosh HaShanah Yom Kippur Survival Kit*, Leviathan Press, p.102 – Dealing with mistakes.**

One of the most common words in your prayer book is “sin.” It’s not a very pleasant sounding word. Certainly no one wants to look at himself or herself as a sinner. In Hebrew, the generic term for sin is *chet*. This term literally means “to make a mistake.” Sins, no thanks. But mistakes – sure – we all make mistakes.

The issue on Yom Kippur (and throughout the year) is this: How do we correct the mistakes of our past and avoid repeating them in the future? If we can understand this, then we possess the key to unlocking an enormous reservoir of latent potential for greatness that would otherwise lie dormant.

This is teshuvah. The common translation of teshuvah is “repentance.” Again, a rather foreign sounding idea. The proper translation of the word teshuvah is “to return.” Teshuvah is an animated technique for locating the rationalizations that lie at the root of our mistakes: recognizing them, dealing with them, and eliminating them.

**5. Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 7:3 – One must also do *teshuvah* for negative character traits and life attitudes. This can be harder than improving one’s outward actions.**

<p>It is a mistake to think that <i>teshuvah</i> is required only for actions done with one’s body, such as immoral relations, theft, or robbery.</p> <p>Rather, one is required to introspect and do <i>teshuvah</i> even for negative character traits and incorrect attitudes. Examples include: anger; hatred; jealousy; mockery; excessively chasing after money, honor, and food; and all similar negative traits.</p> <p>These character faults are harder to deal with than wrong actions, because it is very difficult to eradicate a character fault that is enmeshed [in one’s personality].</p>	<p>אל תאמר שאין תשובה אלא מעבירות שיש בהן מעשה כגון זנות וגזל וגניבה,</p> <p>אלא כשם שצריך אדם לשוב מאלו, כך הוא צריך לחפש בדעות רעות שיש לו ולשוב מן הכעס, ומן האיבה, ומן הקנאה, ומן ההתול, ומרדיפת הממון והכבוד, ומרדיפת המאכלות וכיוצא בהן מן הכל צריך לחזור בתשובה.</p> <p>ואלו העונות קשים מאותן שיש בהן מעשה, שבזמן שאדם נשקע באלו קשה הוא לפרוש מהם.</p>
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How can we harness the tools of free will and *teshuvah* to accomplish our mission in this world? By projecting our own radiance – bringing greater light into the world, as we learn below.

**Section VI. Projecting our Own Radiance**

What are the direct implications of Moshe Rabbeinu reaching the level of “*karan or panav*” for us? For this we will investigate a fascinating Talmudic explanation of what happened when Moshe requested that G-d reveal His essence to him.

**1. Shemos 33:18-23 – Moshe requests that G-d reveal His Divine essence on top of Sinai during his third, forty-day period.**

<p>18. Moshe said, “Show me now your Glory!”...                  22. “When My Glory passes by, I will place you in a cleft of the rock; I will shield you with My Hand until I have passed by.                  23. “Then I will remove My Hand away and you will see My Back; but My Face may not be seen.”</p>	<p>(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלֵי מֹשֶׁה...                  (כב) וְהָיָה בְעֵבֶר כְּבֹלֵי וְשִׁמְתִּידָּ בְּנִקְרַת הַצֵּיּוֹר וְשִׁפְתֵי כַּפֵּי עֲלִידָּ עַד-עֲבָרֵי:                  (ג) וְהִסְתִּיתִי אֶת-כַּפֵּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת-אֲחֵרֵי וּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרְאוּ:                  (ס)</p>
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What did aspect of His “Back” did G-d show Moshe?

**2. Rashi, Shemos 33:23 – G-d shows Moshe the knot of His *tefillin*.**

<p>G-d showed Moshe the knot of His <i>tefillin</i>.                  (Talmud Bavli, Berachot 7a.)</p>	<p>וראית את אחורי – הראהו קשר של תפילין.</p>
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Tefillin consists of two black leather boxes, called *batim* in Hebrew, which contain parchments inscribed with Torah verses about the Exodus, the Oneness of G-d, and, the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. To perform this mitzvah a man straps one *bayit* onto the upper left arm opposite the heart (a lefty places it on his right arm) and the second onto the forehead between the eyes using black leather straps known as *retzu'ot* in Hebrew. At the back of the *tefillin shel rosh* (tefillin worn on the head) two straps supporting this *bayit* are tied in a knot, the ends draping in front of the wearer towards his waist.

The Talmud states that G-d “wears” *tefillin* and showed Moshe the *kesher shel tefillin shel rosh* – the knot of *tefillin* worn behind the head. What does this signify?

**3. Shottenstein Talmud Commentary, Berachot 7a based on Rashba – G-d revealed to Moshe the inter-relationship of all parts of creation.**

<p>Just as the strap of the <i>tefillin shel rosh</i> encircles the head, so too the entire universe revolves around G-d. By showing Moses the knot of the <i>tefillin</i>, G-d revealed to him how every part of creation ties in with every other part. But only the knot and strap were shown to Moses, not the <i>tefillin</i> themselves. The <i>tefillin</i> represent the actual perception of G-d Himself. That perception was held from Moses. Only G-d’s providence, represented by the straps and knot, was revealed.</p>
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Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovitz teaches us that there is another dimension of understanding the knot of the *tefillin* that Moshe was shown. G-d was showing Moshe that his mind was fully in control of his actions.

**3. Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovitz, The Jerusalem Kollel, Torah Downloads, [Parshas Yisro](#) – Moshe saw a reflection of himself.**

<p>The sefarim explain that G-d showed Moshe Rabbeinu himself. He showed Moshe Rabbeinu that aspect of G-d that he had attained. What is that? The <i>kesher shel tefillin shel rosh</i>. And the sefarim go on to explain what this kesher is. Where exactly is this knot? The point where the brain and the spine meet. It’s the point where understanding and action</p>
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meet. Moshe Rabbeinu reached the level of perfection where there was no gap between understanding and behavior. That was the aspect of perfection that Moshe Rabbeinu personified. All of his work and growth turned him into the kesher shel tefillin of G-d.

Obviously when dealing with G-d there is not something called “intellect” and something else called “behavior.” G-d is One. Moshe had attained unity where understanding meant action. Whatever he knew, he was. Whatever he knew, he did. He had reached the point that understanding, attitude and action were one.

The attribute of achieving no disconnect between mind and action is within our reach, as manifested by Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, who was a leader of world Jewry until he passed away in the mid-1980's:

*...As Rabbi Kamenetsky's son-in-law Rabbi Hirsch Diskind said of him, "Much of what people saw as his good middos (personal character) was really his super intellect." That "super intellect," in fact, encompassed two separate qualities – both of which he epitomized. The first is the ability to anticipate all the ramifications of every action, whether one's own or those of another – the quality of 'roeh es hanolad' (foreseeing the consequences), which is the hallmark of a Talmud chacham (Torah scholar). The second is the development of oneself to such an extent that one's seichel, understanding, rules over all one's personal emotions and desires. The ultimate definition of the Torah personality is one whose complete submission to the dictates of the Torah – the Divine Intelligence – has enabled him to enthrone his most G-d-like quality, his seichel, as master of his behavior to the point that his behavior is a reflection of his seichel. (Reb Yaakov, by Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblum, Mesorah Publications, 2004, p. 26.)*

The Torah in fact teaches us that when G-d initially chose Moshe to be the leader of the Jewish people at the Burning Bush, he had already achieved the level where his mind controlled his actions. This is implied by the verse (Shemos 3:5), “Take your sandals off of your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground.” The *Kli Yakar* below explains that the eventual radiance of Moshe's face was a manifestation of the perfection of his personal growth, having progressed to that level from the time of the Burning Bush.

#### 4. *Kli Yakar*, Shemos 3:5 – Moshe nullified the influence of materialism.

The Talmud (Bava Basra 75a) teaches that the face of Moshe was like the sun, radiating light to all directions. He was purified to the point that he was worthy of a radiance emanating from his material face. For Moshe was purified by standing on Har Sinai for 40 days without eating or drinking and was nourished by the glow of the Divine Presence.

Therefore (earlier at the Burning Bush), G-d told Moshe to remove his shoes – plural - teaching us that he had negated the influence of the material in two areas. One is the purification of his intellect from any

...פני משה כחמה (ב"ב עה.) המאירה מכל צד כך משה נזדכך גם בחלק החומריות שבו כל כך עד שזכה לקירון עור פני החומר, כי נזדכך ע"י שעמד בהר מ' יום בלא אכילה ושתייה והיה ניזון מן זיו שכינתו יתברך,

לכך נאמר למשה של נעליך שנים במשמע רמז לשלילות החומריות מן כל שני חלקיו, הן זיכוכ כח השכלי מן התערבות החומריות שבו, הן זיכוכ כח החומרי עצמו, ולכך אמר כנותן טעם כי המקום אשר אתה עומד עליו אדמת קודש,

<p>materialistic intrusion, and the second is the purification (of his body) from any materialism itself. Therefore, G-d said that reason Moshe had to remove his shoes was “the place you are standing upon is holy ground.”</p> <p>The usage of the Hebrew word <i>makom</i> – “place” connotes a level (of achievement). G-d was in effect saying that the level Moshe reached indicated that even his material aspects were holy, as the Torah writes, “holy ground.”</p>	<p>ושם מקום מורה על המדריגה, ואמר כי המדריגה אשר אתה עומד בה היא שאפילו חלק האדמה שבך קודש הוא, זה"ש אדמת קודש הוא.</p>
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**5. Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovitz, The Jerusalem Kollel, Torah Downloads, [Parshas Yisro](#) – Learning Torah connects us to G-d and provides the context for self-definition.**

What’s the moral of Moshe’s vision of the tefillin knot for us? That for everyone, there is a unique way that you see G-d. And when you see G-d, what is that a measure of? Of where you’re at. When we learn Torah we are actually “seeing G-d” (i.e., G-d’s values and how that aligns with who we are.)...When we learn Torah we are connecting to G-d.

The Torah tells us that there never arose a prophet like Moshe Rabbeinu. To think that we can project radiance like Moshe is out of the question. Nevertheless, we each have the ability to bring tremendous light to the world by working to actualize our potential and fulfill our mission in this world. How do we do that?

The Talmud actually debates what path to actualizing one’s potential is the most direct: the study of Torah or fulfilling the mitzvot – concrete actions.

**6. Jeremy Kagan, The Jewish Self, pp. 132-133 – Which is more important – the learning of Torah or performing the mitzvot?**

“The Oral Tradition debates whether the pure learning of Torah or the practice of mitzvos is more important—is the deeply felt and understood connection to the Creator, or the expression of that connection through concrete actions, our primary goal?

Is Torah study greater, or are deeds greater? R. Tarfon answered, ‘Deeds are greater.’ R. Akiva answered, ‘Torah study is greater.’ Then all answered, ‘Torah study is greater, because Torah study brings one to deeds.’ [Kiddushin 40b.]

The Talmud’s conclusion is confusing. Is Torah study the goal, or is the action the goal? If Torah’s greatness derives from its leading to action, it would appear that action is the ultimate purpose. Yet, the passage identifies Torah as the greatest accomplishment, because it leads to action!

The ambiguity is resolved when we remember that man is composed of both a body and a soul, an internal self and an external one. We exist only through the fusion of the two. The Torah is primarily interested in our internal experience. Yet only when the internal



experience of Torah knowledge breaks forth into our actions is it expressive of our self, something that is us as opposed to that which merely is known by us. Though Torah may be primary, action is the necessary sign of the ultimate goal of integration. The Oral Torah is the instrument by which we achieve this integration, because the Oral Torah translates the generalities of the Written Torah into the detailed actions of everyday life.

The overriding goal of Jewish life is to study Torah to guide us towards exemplary behavior. To appreciate what a challenge achieving such behavior is, let's put this into context: What is the greatest distance one can travel in this world? From NY to Hong Kong, North Pole to the South Pole, etc., correct? No. To travel from the brain to the heart... To actualize the concepts we intellectually recognize to be true, but nevertheless find a great challenge to integrate into one's heart and behavior. Thus, we can appreciate how important it is to learn Torah in order to become a complete individual. (Based on Rabbi Eytan Feiner.)

**7. Rambam, *Hilchot Talmud Torah* (Laws of Torah Study) 3:3 – Torah study is the most important mitzvah because it teaches one how to act.**

<p>There is no <i>mitzvah</i> that is equal to that of Torah study. Rather, Torah study is equal to all of the <i>mitzvot</i> together. The reason for this is that study leads to practice.</p>	<p>אין לך מצוה בכל המצוות כולן שהיא שקולה כנגד תלמוד תורה אלא תלמוד תורה כנגד כל המצוות כולן, שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה.</p>
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**8. Vilna Gaon, *Even Shleimah 2* – What is life for if not for character refinement?**

<p>The prime purpose of man's life is to constantly strive to break his bad traits. Otherwise, what is life for?</p>	<p>עיקר חיות האדם הוא להתחזק תמיד בשבירת המדות, ואם לאו – למה לו חיים?</p>
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**9. Rabbi Nosson Weisz, *Yeshiva Aish HaTorah* – Why do we learn Torah?**

Torah study addresses the essential questions that a person should think about: What is the purpose of life, why am I in this world, why did G-d put us here, what am I supposed to accomplish, why should it matter if I live? All that knowledge is only in the Torah. The Torah is what brings light to the world.