

REPENTER'S ACHIEVEMENT

THE GIFT OF TEFILIN

Parshas Ki Sisa

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

One of the most difficult aspects in Jewish history, conveyed in our Sidra, is the request by Moshe of Hashem "Show me Thy glory". Moshe spent forty days with Hashem on Sinai. That closeness to Hashem was more than any human ever achieved. "Peh el Peh," says Hashem, mouth to mouth do I speak to him (to Moshe) in a clear vision... (Bamidbor 12:8). "Hashem would speak to Moshe face to face, as a man would speak with his fellow" (our Sidra 33:11). Even on that propitious level of closeness it did not dawn on Moshe to request to "see" Hashem. Now after the tragic downfall of Israel, hundreds of rungs down the slope, because of the terrible sin of idol worship, dancing to the golden calf, Moshe has the courage to ask for it? Amazing, shocking!

Moshe, who was always the humblest of the humble, was even more shattered as he came down, and saw the abyss to which his brethren plunged. He smashed the Tablets. Was this the appropriate time to request super high levels of closeness to Hashem?

[Smashing the tablets was considered a colossal achievement. The very last passage in the Torah credits Moshe for his courage to do that. "For all the signs and wonders that Hashem sent him to perform in the land of Egypt... and for the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel". Rashi expounds this as a reference to smashing the Tablets.

Commentators explain that by smashing the Tablets, Moshe actually saved Israel. By bringing the Tablets to the Israelites it were to constitute a complete relationship, as a full marriage, so to speak. Turning afoul with the golden calf would have been

likened to a married woman cohabiting with a stranger, rendering her forbidden to the husband. By smashing the Tablets, the full "marriage" not having been taken place, thus treated as a single woman, the "marriage" was still permitted to take place. For this the Torah concludes with huge credit for Moshe (See Rashi last comment in Chumosh). Still the original Tablets were smashed, a tragedy of gigantic proportions. The original Tablets were written "באצבע אלקים", "inscribed by the finger of Hashem" (this week's Sidra 31:18).

The Talmud teaches us that in the Mishkan, as well as the Beth Hamikdosh, the broken Tablets were placed in the Ark together with the (complete) Tablets (Brochos 8b). One surmises its presence in the Ark, in addition for being held in supreme honor (see Iyun Yaakov Menochos 99a) it reminded Israel the need for continuous repentance. The question now becomes more wondrous: Was this the appropriate time for Moshe to ask for that gift of high level closeness?

An astonishing saying of the rabbis affords us a clue to understand the above. The rabbis say: "The place (level) where a Baal Teshuva (repenter) stands, even a complete Tzadik cannot reach" (Brochos 34b, Sanhedrin 99a).

The period when Moshe came down from Sinai on Yom Kippur, with the good news of "SOLACHTI", I have forgiven, that was the time when he came down with the second Tablets. In a sense, all our connection to Torah is a Yom Kippur connection, the contact through repentance. As Rav Hutner z.l. once observed in a pre Yom Kippur shiur, the only time we pray for Torah in the Shemona Esra is in the fourth Bracha "Hashivainu, Return us back O our Father, to thy Torah". The Bracha concludes Boruch... Who seeks repentance. This coincides with the above that ours is a Yom Kippur Torah.

On Moshe's emboldened request to see G-d, Rashi comments, Moshe realized that this was an "Ais Ratzon" a moment of opportunity, (to take advantage of). One conjectures, Rashi refers to Moshe's realization that a special relationship with Hashem developed in connection with repentance and atonement, a level superbly higher than ever before. That was the "ais ratzon" Moshe sought to take advantage of.

Reb Tzodok (Tzidkas Hatzadik) writes that the Neshomo of Moshe was so intertwined with the souls of all Yidden, to the point that each time Israel stumbled in sin, Moshe, too, blundered. In connection with the sin of golden calf, it caused Moshe to smash the Tablets with the Ten Commandments. While this was an achievement, as mentioned earlier, it was nevertheless considered a saddening mistreat of Hashem's tablets. Moshe's pleading to Hashem to forgive Israel for the Aigel, golden calf, involved himself as well, atonement for his blunder.

Consequently, at this **עת רצון**, Moshe's request to see Hashem was not for the sake of personal achievement of the spirit, but for the spiritual benefit of all Israel, just as the atonement applied to all Israel. And so was Hashem's response meant for all Israel.

Though Hashem's response to Moshe's request was not positive, "You will not be able to see My face, for no human can see My face and live" (33:20) - the request was not completely ignored. "You will see my back". Cites the Talmud (Brochos 7a) that Hashem showed Moshe the knot on His Tefilin, which contains the verse "and who is like Your people, one nation in the world" (II Samuel 7:23). That knot symbolizes that Hashem and Israel are tied; the sin of the golden calf forgiven and again tied as one.

It is interesting to note, that just as Hashem's Tefilin is indicative of Hashem's forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, so has our Tefilin a reference to that forgiveness. So it seems from the Shulchan Aruch chapter 32, Halacha 44 where we learn that

portions inserted inside into the Tefilin come encircled with a hair from a calf "in order to bring atonement for the sin of the golden calf" (Mishna Brura ibid 210).

Hashem's response to Moshe's request, showing him the knot on the Tefilin, is indicative of the capacity of the mitzva of Tefilin to "see" the Torah of Hashem. All the peoples of the earth will SEE that the name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you" (Devorim 28:10). "This is a reference to the Tefilin on the head" (Menochos 35b). Obviously, can the wearer of Tefilin himself SEE the name of Hashem upon him? The mitzva of Tefilin comes for the sake of "the Torah of Hashem to be in your mouth" (Shemos 13:9), to understand and SEE in mind. Hashem's response with the Tefilin, thus, is not unrelated to Moshe's request to see Hashem.

Accordingly, the Mitzva of Tefilin, when observed properly with a sense of Kedusha, is indeed a positive response to Moshe's request, and meant to all Israel as to Moshe. Indeed a gift par excellence.

The difference in age of religious maturity between a girl, at age 12, and a boy, at age 13, is probably due to difference in age of bodily development. Still, one ventures to suggest it is also due to the boy's reaching the sensitivity and appreciation of the gift of Tefilin, which is decisive on all Mitzvos.

On Purim, we shall read in MEGILAH, ליהודים... "for the Jews there was light, with joy and gladness and honor" (Esther 8:16). The Talmud comments: ...Simcha refers to Yom Tov, Soson refers to circumcision, Yekor refers to Tefilin (Megila 16b). One wonders, how does Tefilin fit into this category, Yom Tov, circumcision? According to the above, however, Tefilin is the apex of all gladness, as it is paralleled by the Tefilin of Hashem Himself, the source of all Simcha.

