

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Ki Tisa**  
**February 27, 2016**

**פרשת כי תשא**  
**י"ח באדר א' תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 30:11-34:35

In this *parasha*, Hashem continues describing the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) to Moshe; the people worship the *Aygel Hazahav* (Golden Calf), Moshe pleads on their behalf, and Hashem forgives them.

After the sin of the *Aygel Hazahav*, Moshe ascends the mountain again to commune with Hashem, and the following conversation takes place [33:17-23]:

יז וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, גַּם אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֲעֲשֶׂה: כִּי-מִצָּאתָ חֹן בְּעֵינַי, וְאִדְעָךָ בְּשֵׁם. יח וַיֹּאמֶר: הֲרֵאֵנִי נָא, אֶת-כְּבוֹדְךָ. יט וַיֹּאמֶר, אֲנִי אֶעְבִּיר כָּל-טוֹבִי עַל-פָּנֶיךָ, וְקִרְאתִי בְּשֵׁם ה', לְפָנֶיךָ; וְחִנַּנְתִּי אֶת-אִשְׁרֵי אָחוֹן, וְרַחַמְתִּי אֶת-אִשְׁרֵי אֲרָחִים. כ וַיֹּאמֶר, לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת-פָּנַי: כִּי לֹא-יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם, וְחָי. כא וַיֹּאמֶר ה', הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי; וְנִצַּבְתָּ, עַל-הַצּוּר. כב וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדִי, וְשָׁמַתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוּר; וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי כַּפֵּי עֲלֶיךָ, עַד-עֲבָרִי. כג וְהִסַּרְתִּי, אֶת-כַּפֵּי, וְרֵאִיתָ, אֶת-אַחֲרָי; וּפְנֵי, לֹא יִרְאוּ.

**17** Hashem said to Moshe: 'I will do this thing also that you have spoken, for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.' **18** And he said: 'Show me, please, Your glory.' **19** And He said: 'I will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of Hashem before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.' **20** And He said: 'You cannot see My face, for a human cannot see Me and live.' **21** And Hashem said: 'Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand upon the rock. **22** And it shall come to pass, when My glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My

hand until I have passed by. **23** And I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.'

The Babylonian Talmud in Tractate *Berachot* 7a explains what God actually showed Moshe on His back: “‘And I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back.’ R. Hama b. Bizana said in the name of R. Simon the Pious: ‘This teaches us that the Holy One showed Moshe the knot of the *tefillin* [at the back of the head].’”

What might be the homiletic message of this *midrash*? I would like to suggest that it emphasizes the rabbis’ belief in the Divine origin of not only the Written Law, but the Oral Law.

Maimonides [12<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt/Spain] in his Introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*, his code of Jewish Law, Chapter 4, discusses the concept of *Halacha L’Moshe MiSinai*, “Law of Moshe from Sinai,” which is a series of thirty laws that have never been challenged, but which do not appear either explicitly or implicitly in the Written Torah. Among these are 8 laws related to *tefillin*:

- The skin which constitutes the parchment for the *tefillin*.
- The formation of the letters “*shin*” on the head *tefillin*.
- The formation of the knot of the head and arm *tefillin*.
- The requirement of black straps for the *tefillin*.
- The requirement that the *tefillin* be cubes in shape.
- The requirement of the slit in the bases of the *tefillin* cubes [through which the leather straps pass].
- The requirement that the parchments be tied in a roll with thread made of the hair of *tahor* [ritually pure] animals before placement in the *tefillin*.
- The requirement that the compartments of the *tefillin* be sewed together with threads made from parts of *tahor* animals.

Even, or perhaps especially today, *tefillin*, in their structure and their use, seem esoteric and look odd as people in daily morning prayers wear these black boxes with straps on their foreheads and arms. Nonetheless, without break, for the last 3400 years, Jews having been donning them on a regular basis for their prayer to Hashem.

The reasons enumerated are many, but that is a topic for a different *Dvar Torah*.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What do you think is the reason for wearing *tefillin*?
- What do you believe about the Divine origin of the Written and Oral Torah? What is your rationale for this belief?
- How would you have felt if you were Moshe meeting Hashem on Har Sinai?