

The Veil That Makes Light Bearable

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Shabbat Ki Tisa – Parah, March 7, 2026

In memory of

אברהם בן דוד רפאל

Avraham ben Dovid Rafael (Abraham Leidner)

צמח בן יוסף

Tzemach ben Yosef (Seymour Hefter)

May their memories be for a blessing

At the end of Parashat Ki Tisa, after the sin of the Golden Calf and the giving of the second Luchot, Moshe descends from Mount Sinai. The Torah tells us something extraordinary:

כי קרן עור פניו

“Ki karan or panav” — the skin of his face shone

Moshe himself did not realize this had happened, but the people saw the radiance and were afraid to approach him. Moshe called them near, taught them the commandments that God had given, and then the Torah tells us that he placed a covering over his face:

ויתן על פניו מסוה

The word “masveh” is unusual and appears only here in the Torah. Most translations render it as a veil or covering. Linguistically, it derives from a Hebrew root meaning to conceal.

The medieval commentator Ibn Ezra explains simply:

והמסוה — כיסוי על הפנים

“The masveh is a covering placed over the face.”

In other words, the purpose of the masveh was to shield the people from the intensity of the light.

But the Torah describes a fascinating rhythm. Moshe does not wear the veil all the time. When he stands before God, he removes it. When he teaches Torah, he removes it. Only afterward, when he returns to ordinary life among the people, does he replace the veil.

So, the masveh becomes part of a rhythm – unveiling for encounter and teaching, veiling for life among Am Yisrael.

The Ramban explains that the radiance on Moshe's face was not metaphorical. It was an actual reflection of the divine glory Moshe encountered on Sinai. The people were afraid to approach him

מפני האור הגדול אשר בפניו

“because of the great light shining from his face.”

A beautiful Midrash deepens this image. The Midrash teaches that Moshe's radiance came from the leftover ink when God wrote the Torah.

As we see in Shemot Rabbah 47:6:

מן הדיו שנותר בקולמוס
העבירו על ראשו של משה
ומשם נעשה קרן אור פניו

“From the ink that remained in the quill, Moshe passed it over his head, and from that came the radiance of his face.”

The light itself was Torah.

The Talmud deepens this idea in Bava Batra 75a:

פני משה כפני חמה
פני יהושע כפני לבנה

“The face of Moshe was like the sun, and the face of Yehoshua like the moon.”

Moshe's leadership shone like the sun — direct and overwhelming. Later generations would reflect that light more gently, like the moon reflecting sunlight. Revelation cannot remain at full intensity forever. It must be mediated.

The Sfas Emes offers a remarkable insight about the veil. He writes (Ki Tisa 5631):

כי ענין המסוה הוא
שלא יוכלו לקבל האור הגדול
רק על ידי לבוש והסתר

“The purpose of the veil is that the great light cannot be received except through a garment and concealment.”

In other words, the veil does not block revelation. It makes revelation possible. Sometimes light must be softened so that it can be received. The Gerrer Rebbe teaches that the great

light could only be received through concealment. The masveh did not block revelation – it allowed Am Yisrael to receive it. Sometimes light must be clothed so that it can remain in Olam Hazei.

In Kabbalah, there is a concept of tzimtzum — divine contraction.

צמצום אורו
כדי שיוכלו העולמות להתקיים

The Infinite light contracts so that the world can exist.

Moshe mirrors that divine movement. After encountering overwhelming holiness, he must soften the radiance to live among the people. Unbounded light overwhelms. Measured light sustains.

The Zohar describes Moshe's radiance as a reflection of the supernal light:

נהורא עילאה

But such light cannot remain fully revealed in the world. It must be clothed and sometimes veiled so that it can dwell among human beings.

Perhaps that idea feels especially meaningful at **Seudah Shlishit**, as Shabbat begins to fade. All day long, we have lived in a kind of radiance — through tefillah, Torah, rest, and community. But as the light of Shabbat withdraws, it does not disappear. Like Moshe's radiance, it becomes veiled so that we can carry it into the coming week.

How does one carry the light forward?

This D'var Torah is shared in memory of Abraham Leidner and Seymour Hefter.

Each embodied the radiance of Torah and Jewish commitment. Their lives shone with emunah, devotion to Torah, and love for the Jewish people. Each raised families that carried forward the mesorah of our people. Each influenced not only their families but the communities around them. Each lived through the darkness of the Shoah and also witnessed the miracle of the rebirth of the State of Israel. Both now rest in the Holy Land itself — the land whose rebirth they saw. Their light did not disappear.

And so tonight, as the light of Shabbat fades, we remember that the light of Moshe did not disappear. It was veiled so that it could continue. The light of Torah did not disappear. It passed from generation to generation. And the light of these two individuals continues in their families, their values, and their Emunah.

The Gemara's image returns once more:

פני משה כפני חמה
פני יהושע כפני לבנה

The sun becomes the moon.

And the moon continues to illuminate the night.

May the memories of Avraham ben Dovid Rafael and Tzemach ben Yosef continue to shine through all of us.

יהי זכרם ברוך