

My Face You Cannot See

by [Petr Chylek](#) (October 2023)



Moses Receiving the Tablets of the Law, Raphael, 1518

Moses said, “Show me Your glory.” (Exodus 33:18) God replied, “You cannot see My face, for no human can see my face and live. Behold, there is a place near Me; you may stand on the rock. When my glory passes by, I shall place you in a cleft of the rock and I shall shield you with my hand until I have passed. Then I shall remove My hand and you will see my back, but My face cannot be seen.” (Exodus 33:20-23)

There have been several Rabbinic interpretations of this

dialog between Moses and God. None of them is close to my understanding.

Thus, here is one addition to many interpretations of this dialog: Moses is asking God to explain to him the true meaning of Torah, the first five books of Old Testament. This is the meaning of "Show me Your glory."

God says: No. "Behold, there is a place near Me." Moses is on the Earth. God is in Heaven. The place near Me is a world in between the Earth and Heaven. This is what was created on the Second Day of Creation to divide water above from water below (New English Review February 2023). In Hebrew it is called RAKIAH, usually translated in English by different translators as firmament, sky, or space. Sometime it is not translated at all. That happens when translator admits that he is lost, having no idea what it may mean. In Kabbalah the world between the Heaven and the Earth is called the World of Formation, YETZIRAH in Hebrew.

God continues: "... you will see My back, but My face cannot be seen."

Note a passive voice: "My face cannot be seen." Meaning that not only you will not learn from Me the True Meaning of Torah, but nobody will be able to learn it. Why? Because The True Meaning of Torah does not exist. But, "... you will see my back" meaning that you will be able to figure out with your own intellect and using your intuition what individual story of Torah means to you!

Torah is not an ordinary book written by a human brain. It was either written by Divine, as many orthodox Jews and Christians believe, or it was written by a divinely inspired human beings. Torah has many different interpretations, depending on a spiritual level and intention of the reader. Depending on your level at the time of reading there is one interpretation just for you. That is why God was not able to answer Moses'

question about the true meaning of Torah saying: "... My face cannot be seen," meaning that there is not one true interpretation. Your interpretation and your understanding changes as you progress along the experience of the life. We all are climbing Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:12). With each new step there comes a new understanding.

Some people do not like ever changing conditions. They like to be certain about how to live, what to do and what not to do, what is their duty and the purpose of life, etc. According to Jewish tradition there were two Torahs given to Moses. That part that he was supposed to write down became the written Torah with many meanings. A more detailed explanation of humanity's duty was not supposed to be written down, but transmitted orally from generation to generation. This oral Torah, was later written down and became what is known as Talmud, the second most important Jewish scripture. Talmud has not been recognized by Christians and has not become a part of Christian Old Testament.

The first part of the oral Torah that was written down has been called Mishnah. It is the central part of Talmud to this day. As we mentioned above, the original Mishnah was an interpretation of written Torah for people at that place and at that time, which was a few thousand years ago.

It is now important to consider the meaning of the name Mishnah. Mishnah is a noun made from the Hebrew verb SHANAH. In Hebrew, by adding a letter "m" before the verb, you change the verb into a noun. Many words in Hebrew have several different meanings. The two basic meanings of the Hebrew root SH-N-H are to repeat or to change.

Original understanding was that the oral Torah should not be written down so that it can be changed for future generations as humankind progresses. The proper meaning of SHANAH and MISHNAH should have been: the change. Instead by tradition it was accepted that SHANAH in MISNAH means: to repeat. Thus,

instead of developing the MISHNAH as humankind progressed it was accepted that the written form of oral Torah should just be repeated over and over for all generations. This means to freeze the teaching at the level of tradition where it was two or three thousand years ago. This is exactly what Jesus meant when he accused Pharisees of replacing teaching by tradition: "Why do you transgress the commandments of God by your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3) and "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9)

That the meaning of Mishnah is change is also supported by 16th century rabbi living in Safed in Israel, namely, Rabbi Issac Luria (1534-1572), who said that at that time Jewish law was according to Hillel, but at the Messianic time, when mankind would reach a more perfect state, the law would be as stated by Shamai. Hillel and Shamai were two Jewish leaders, contemporary of Jesus. Hillel was more liberal and Shamai was a conservative. Hillel gained the upper hand and Hillel's dynasty controlled the development of Talmud and Rabbinic Judaism from the beginning of CE for about five hundred years.

There were several attempts to free Jewish religion of this self-enforced stagnation, starting with Sadducees about 200 BC, so called Karaites in early middle-ages, and with the birth of Reform Judaism in the 19th century. Each of these movements had one of its early goals to delete oral Torah (Talmud) from the list of Jewish scriptures. None of them were successful. Sadducees disappeared from history with the destruction of the Second Temple in year 70 CE. Although Karaites were a powerful section of Jewish society around the year 1000 CE, today they are just a few tens of thousands of them living in Israel. The Reform Judaism made originally a sharp departure from the orthodox way as witnessed by the eight principals accepted by the 1885 Pittsburgh Conference. After a few decades of its existence the Reform moved back towards the orthodox path and reintroduced Talmud to the lore

of Jewish treasures.

[Table of Contents](#)

Petr Chylek is a theoretical physicist. He was a professor of physics and atmospheric science at several US and Canadian universities. He is an author of over 150 publications in scientific journals. For his scientific contributions he was elected a Fellow of the American Geophysical Union and a Fellow of the Optical Society of America. He thanks to his daughter, Lily A. Chylek, for her comments and suggestions concerning the early version of this article.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)