

## "LIFTING THE VEIL"

**(EXODUS 34:29-35 NIV)** *When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. <sup>30</sup>When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup>But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. <sup>32</sup>Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. <sup>33</sup>When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. <sup>34</sup>But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup>they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord.*

\* \* \*

**(LUKE 9:28-36 NIV)** *Jesus took Peter, John and James and went up on a mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. <sup>30</sup>Two men, Moses and Elijah, <sup>31</sup>appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the*

*two men standing with him. <sup>33</sup>As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) <sup>34</sup>While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, they saw Jesus alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one what they had seen.*

\* \* \*

**(2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-18)** *Therefore, since we have such a hope (in Christ), we are very bold. <sup>13</sup>We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. <sup>14</sup>But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup>Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. <sup>16</sup>But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup>And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

The paper said, "Beneath her sheer, white veil, the bride's face was 'radiant'."

"Radiant..." "The word communicates joy, happiness, excitement. But, in the Hebrew scripture Moses comes before the people with his face radiant, and the people are afraid. WHY THE FEAR?"

An interesting side story: in the 4th century the Bible was translated to Latin. The Hebrew word for "radiant" comes from the same root word as "horn". The intent is to communicate the idea of rays of light coming from his head. But the Latin translator took the word literally, and the "VULGATE" says, "His face was 'horned.'"

Maybe you've seen the sculpture by Michelangelo—Moses with horns! No wonder the people were frightened!

An earlier translation into Greek, says Moses' face was "glorified," which is probably closer to the original intention, as is validated by both the gospel and the epistle lessons for today. I think the RSV is close: his face was radiant.

But, back to my question: WHY THE FEAR?

There's another Hebrew word that's related to what's going on here. The word is older than the Bible; but it's not found in the Bible. We find it frequently in the writings of ancient rabbis to describe Gods' *presence* on earth, *God's participation* in history. And the idea is reflected in the NT when John says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his 'glory'..." (John 1:14).

The word is "*Shekinah*;" and it means, literally, "that which dwells." Now, there were three metaphors the Hebrews used to communicate their understanding of how God makes his presence known: (1) the ANGEL of the Lord, (2) the face of God, and (3) the glory of God.

*Shekinah* is used by later rabbis to describe several expressions in Hebrew Scripture: *brightness, fire and rainbow*, sometimes a *cloud* (as in the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites by day during the Exodus, and the cloud that settled over Jesus and the disciples in today's gospel reading) and *smoke* (remember Isaiah's vision [6:1-8]). All these references relate to the *Glory of God*; so, while "*Shekinah*" doesn't mean "*Glory*", the metaphor the rabbis most closely associated with the word was the *glory of God*.

In the NT, **δοξα** (the root of our English word, "doxology") is rendered in a variety of ways: Solomon's glory, the political glory of the world's kingdoms (e.g., in the temptation). In today's Gospel lesson, **δοξα** describes the divine presence as luminous, and it describes the appearance of Jesus in his transfiguration.

So, now, let's begin to pull some loose strings together:

Moses' face was said to be '**glorified**'—it was full of the presence of God—the later commentaries by the rabbis used the word, "**Shekinah**". But why was that frightening?

The whole experience was frightening. The night before Moses went up the first time the people gathered and there was thunder and fire and smoke, and the people said to Moses, "You're on your own, 'Bubba! You go Talk to God! Just leave us out of this!"

So Moses went up the mountain and the people grew impatient, and put pressure on Aaron to produce a God they could see and who wasn't so frightening. Finally, he gave in and made a golden calf, and when Moses came back down the mountain there was no *Shekinah*: this time we see *THE WRATH OF GOD! TERRIFYING!*

So Moses went back up a second time; and while he was up there, according to the rabbis, the *Shekinah* passed before Moses. And when Moses came down from the mountain, his face has changed. Well, the people still weren't over their last experience; and they were terrified!

And so Moses put a veil over his face to shield and protect the Israelites from the full presence of God. It's kind of like putting on sun screen before you go out on a summer day. That understanding was later transferred to the Temple—where the presence of God was said to dwell—and there was a veil between the people and the Holy of Holies. And it was when that veil was pulled back that Isaiah "...*saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two*

*they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

*<sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (ISAIAH 6:1-5 NRSV)*

And on a different mountain, on a different day, Jesus' appearance was changed, and Luke uses words similar to those that described Moses when he came down from Mt. Sinai the second time. And the disciples saw it and were not afraid. In fact, they wanted to just stay there forever.

In Moses' day, no man could see God and live. On the Mount of Transfiguration there was a transition. Christ is the means by which mankind may look at God and live. In Christ, the veil is lifted. In Christ the veil of the Temple is ripped from top to bottom!

In the Epistle, Paul says there still are things we do that veil the presence of God. He says it happens when we cling to past glories. (2 CORINTHIANS 3:15) *Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. (NIV)* It happens when we hold on to religious practices—spiritual habits that are comfortable, that are non-threatening—when we trust those habits and practices, instead of the one to whom they point.

If the veil were dropped from your face, would others could see the *Glory* of God in your life? What would be the response...

...of your friends? ...your family? They see you every day—warts and all. What about your business associates—people you work with every day.

A community leader well-known for his dedication to his church—was asked one day in a public meeting to lead prayer. The local minister who'd been invited to pray, didn't show up, and since everyone knew of this man's strong commitment to his church, they assumed... And so, they asked him to pray.

There was a look of panic on his face; a stunned, awkward moment; and then, he cleared his throat, and in a faltering voice, began: "Now I lay me down to sleep..."

Some of those who are most frightened—or embarrassed—are God's own people. It's just more comfortable to stay behind the veil—if only everybody would just stay behind the veil.

But faith is about lifting the veil; taking a risk; laying it on the line; living "as if" we really believe what we say we believe.

And so Paul concludes: *"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory..."*

*"This little light of mine, I'm gonna' let it shine!  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna' let it shine!  
This little light of mine, I'm gonna' let it shine!  
Let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine!"*