

This Week In Torah Mishpatim

Hurry up and wait. That is how I understand Exodus 24:12—God said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them.” Why such a charge?

The 19th century Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk believed it was a command to be fully present. Earlier the people responded to God’s command with an absolute devotional faith— “*na’aseh v’nishmah*—we will do, and we will hear.” The rebbe was illuding to a stronger conscientious approach to Revelation—one that evokes rational and intellectual responsibility for what is being handed down to them. In “waiting,” there is anticipation and perhaps trepidation for what is to be given. As a result, an intensity alights the people’s perception of where they are and what is happening. Nerve endings are firing. Senses are alert. There is no boredom at this moment, just yearning... mixed with fear.

Contemporary Orthodox Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz believes what is being described in this portion is a concept called *m’nuchat hanefesh*—which is loosely translated as equanimity. It is a balancing act between extremes which co-exist in the soul at any given moment. He believes that cultivating equanimity is the crucial ingredient to living a meaningful, passionate, purposeful life in joy, peace and inner calm. He writes: “Traditional thinkers tell us to cultivate the *middot* of trust and faith-- *bitachon* and *Emunah*. We need not worry too much, they suggest, since ultimately God is in control. Everything happens for a reason. So much is beyond our control. We should not get too worked up in worry, fear, and anxiety.”

So... hurry up and wait!

In our *parasha*, we read that “Moses had ascended the mountain, the clouds covered the mountain.” [Exodus 24:15] The Kotzker Rebbe and Rabbi Shmuly Yankowitz share that it is easy for people to stand afar and tremble at the sight. But Moses entered the dark cloud knowing that the deepest spiritual treasures are found in humble places of unsettled presence. Embrace that uneasiness that comes with uncertainty. Majesty is experienced there!

