



26 Adar 5777 / March 24, 2017

Dear Shir Tikvah:

One of our students asked this insightful question: "Rabbi, how does our Jewish tradition help us figure out our true path?" I suggested she wait - which didn't go over very well. "Waiting" is not a trait that we value in our culture, so much so that it seemed like a puzzling answer. The conversation moved on, but it left me thinking.

I was trying to teach her about waiting as an active, holy space for discernment. Not as a passive, giving-up kind of quality, and certainly not paralysis from indecision or overwhelm (which many of us face these days). Rather, the idea of waiting as an act of faith - faith that our discernment process is happening, while we're wrestling with the question, perhaps continuing to reframe our question until we get to the essential one.

A Jungian therapist would call this "conscious suffering" - seeing what's at stake, not yet knowing how to move forward, being willing to hold the tensions and intentions. The Vedantic tradition has other words for this process.

In this week's Torah portion, in the very last paragraph of the book of Exodus (chapter 40, verses 33-37), we read: "When Moses had finished the work, the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of the LORD filled the Tabernacle. When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, on their various journeys; but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift."

Whether we read the stories of our people's time in the wilderness as history, metaphor, or parable, waiting is part of the story. There is a cloud sometimes, and we're not supposed to move forward until it lifts. And God's Presence is in that cloud!

One of my favorite lines of prayer (from Psalm 69) appears at the end of Mah Tovu and in the High Holy Days Torah service:

וְאֲנִי תְפִלַּתִּי לְךָ | יְהוָה עֵת רָצוֹן אֱלֹהִים בְּרַב־חַסְדֶּךָ עֲנֵנִי בְּאֵמֶת יִשְׁעֶיךָ

V'ani, tefilati lecha, Adonai eyt ratzon Elohim b'rov chasdecha, aneini b'emet yishecha.

As for me, my prayer to You, O LORD, is that when the time is right, O God, in Your abundant compassion, answer me with the Truth of Your highest good.

There is an implication in this prayer that there is an Eyt Ratzon, a time of God's will, when a truth, grounded in compassion, will not only become clear but perhaps manifest in the outer world, like the cloud lifting from the Tabernacle.

The essence here is that it is an active faith, and an act of faith, that allows us to wait for the cloud to lift. Not a waste of time, but hard, holy work.

Shabbat Shalom,

Debra

P.S. I'd love to know your responses to this at rabbirappaport@shirtikvah.net. I'll be back next Friday from the biennial Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association Convention.