

“Face to Face”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

God says to Moses: “You cannot see my face, for man may not see Me and live.” (Ex. 33:20) There is danger in God’s exaltedness; to presume to look upon the Divine is to court destruction.

Yet at the end of the Bible, we are told that Moses saw God *panim el panim* — face to face. How can such an encounter be both possible and impossible?

Perhaps the message is that we grow gradually more intimate with God’s face as we get older. When we glimpse as much as it is given to us as individuals to glimpse, we are through with our earthly mission. Moses died when he had at last seen God face to face. That is in some sense our task in life — to see God truly according to our capacity. When we have fulfilled that task, we are through.

To see God truly means to see the possibilities of this world, to work for its betterment, to grow our own souls. Could our life be a quest to see the face of God? At times we see it in the magnificence of the world; at other times in truly seeing another human face. Surely that is a noble definition of the human quest, achieved by *Moshe Rabbenu*, Moses our teacher.