

## Searching for More When You Need Less

There's no doubt about it - transitions can be scary. A new job means new coworkers and an unfamiliar commute. Transitioning from single life to married life brings questions like how to share a bathroom, who will do the dishes, when will I have private time. The transition from lower school to middle school finds our students with all sorts of new anxieties about daily life, workload, and friendships, even when they're already comfortable with the building and the teachers.

In *Sefer Shemot*, the Book of Exodus, the Israelites are in constant transition: from slavery to freedom, from civilization to the desert, from known to the unknown. In *Parshat Beshalach*, the Torah portion this week, we find the Israelites on their journey out of Egypt and ready to move on to the next phase in their life. They have put an enormous amount of faith in God, a force they have yet to truly encounter as a community.

The fear of the unknown is powerful within the Israelites, and as the journey continues, their fragility and tentativeness come to a head. As the Israelites are camped out, Pharaoh's army starts to approach. Because the people are afraid that they will be captured again, they complain to Moses in chapter 14 verses 11-12 that they would have been better off staying in Egypt. Even though we sing at Pesach every year, *Dayeinu*, freedom would have been enough; the Israelites have no sense of security yet.

When Moses responds with faith, believing that God will protect them, the Israelites seem satiated for the time being. They acknowledge they have been saved, but are still fragile. But security isn't the only human need. As they journey on, they are thirsty and can only remember the sweet waters in Egypt, the plentiful liquid nourishment. They complain again and finally receive water, but as I'm sure you can guess, quenching their thirst isn't the end of the story. The people feel the pangs of hunger, and they cry out that they require food and to know where their next meal will come from.

As the people learn to embrace freedom, they also learn that part of freedom is the responsibility to speak up if your needs aren't being met. Abraham Maslow, a 20<sup>th</sup> century psychologist, suggests that individuals can only become self actualized if they have all their other levels of basic needs met. This begins with physiological needs. A basic sense that there will be food, water, shelter, and sleep. The second level that must be fulfilled is that of safety - safety of body, resources, family, health, and property. The hierarchy goes on to discuss belonging, esteem, and then finally self actualization. These first two levels of the hierarchy must be met in order to move forward. It makes sense that the Israelites complained at first. Their basic needs and safety were not being met, and they didn't know if they would survive.

But the grass is always greener. Once these needs were met, the Israelites did not stop complaining and got stuck in the mindset of wanting more. Water and *mana* were no longer enough. They wanted meat, and they wanted more water, better water. We can certainly relate. Your laptop is barely a few months old, but that new model is so tempting. And what's wrong with buying just one more outfit while it's in style?

It comes as no surprise to any parent that has lived through a large transition like a move or a small one like switching to Daylight Saving Time that transitions show us the need for routine, schedule and security. When the Israelites first left Egypt, they wanted to go back out of fear of the unknown, and it took renewing that sense of self and sense of place for them to put their trust in Moses and in God.

The Israelites went through several phases of transition, and the story of the Exodus presents us with a choice for how we deal with our own transitions. We can work to find ourselves by trusting in ourselves and in God, or we can continually find something that we feel is lacking, something that holds us back, or something that could always be better. The question is how will you spend your journey?

ללמוד **To Learn:** ללמד **To Teach:** One of the first things we learn about the Israelites' journey is that God is going to take them on the long road out of Egypt rather than the most direct way. Why does God make this decision?

לשמור **To Keep:** לעשות **To Do:** Chapter 16, verse 23 teaches us that the Israelites needed to put food aside on Friday to eat during Shabbat. The idea of setting aside food for Shabbat, or *tzedakah* before Shabbat reminds us that we have a responsibility to take care of ourselves and others at all times. As a family, try to remember each Shabbat to set aside some time, money or necessities to be donated to help others.