

## You Have Reached Your Destination, Now What?

Shabbat Shalom. It's been awhile since I've given a D'var up here. The last time I spoke on the Bimah was either when I was presenting the latest Bar or Bat Mitzvah kid with a B'kol Ekhad and neon green T-shirt, on behalf of Lexington USY, or maybe it was at Camp and Israel Shabbat when I talked about the incredible Shabbat experience and the "best summer ever" on USY on Wheels, Bus A Summer 2009.

This week's Parasha, D'varim, is the first parasha in the last book of the Torah. So, by its very nature, it is the beginning of the end. The Israelites are just outside of the promised land of Canaan after 40 years of wandering in the desert. It's also the end of the beginning because the Israelites who have been taken care of for 40 years in the desert by Moses, and ultimately through the direction of G-d, are about to be left to implement what they've learned in a brand new land.

At the start of the parasha, Moses begins to address the Israelites from "the other side of the Jordan." While Moses himself is not permitted to cross into the land of Canaan, the text is told from the perspective of an individual on the other side of the Jordan River from where Moses is speaking. In Moses' address, he first reviews the navigational directions from G-d for how they were told to get to Canaan from Mount Sinai, I guess it was hard to follow without a map or GPS, so the people had to do some "recalculating". But now that they have arrived at the Promised Land, G-d's message shifts and it seems G-d is no longer there to give them directions. G-d says, "Go take possession of the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to assign to them and to their heirs after them."

Commentary likens G-d's gift of the land to the Israelites to the gift of land from a master to a servant. Next G-d, appoints judges and leaders, removing the burden of judgment and transferring some power to the people, with the caveat that G-d is the ultimate judge, so any matter that is too difficult should be brought to G-d to hear.

D'varim is the start of a major shift in the story of the Jewish people. One name for the book of D'varim is Mishnei Torah, the repetition of the Torah. Perhaps, more so than after the crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites are about to truly taste freedom. The rules have been given, the people have heard them, and now they are just reviewing for their final exam, living out all that has been taught and promised for them in a new land. It is the younger generation, the generation that never experienced the burden of slavery in Egypt, who must now carry the burden of freedom and settle in Canaan for future generations. I imagine the younger generation looking forward to their new lives in Canaan with both wonder and fear. This generation has spent their entire life wandering through the desert with the dream of one day reaching the Promised Land. They knew they were literally the future of Judaism. But once they arrived what was next, what was their next destination, and who would guide them while they were there?

When I imagine the younger generation of Israelites, I feel a parallel between my own journey towards Jewish adulthood, after all, isn't my generation now the "future of Judaism?" I'm sure a lot of the Jewish experiences I was privileged with as a child and as an adolescent are similar to ones you or your children experienced, so feel free to nod along if my experiences sound familiar. Throughout high school my social calendar was filled with USY dances and Teen Minyanim, Leadership Retreats,

and Shabbatons. I could look forward to picking new courses at Prozdor every semester on topics ranging from Israel Advocacy to Jewish Biomedical Ethics to Israeli Dancing. Summer was the best, either on a USY Summer Program or while working at Camp Ramah, I was fully immersed in Jewish culture and being Jewish was cool and fun. After spending an incredible year learning in Israel on Nativ, which is the Conservative Movement's Gap-Year program in Israel, I spent four years at Binghamton University, which boasts one of the largest and most active Jewish campus populations. There, I enjoyed spending Shabbat with my friends at Hillel or Chabad each week (sometimes both), celebrating Israel Independence Day, and standing in unity with my peers at vigils all-too-many times after horrific terrorist attacks on our people. I was president of a nationally Jewish sorority-led fundraising efforts to raise thousands of dollars for Jewish philanthropies like American Jewish World Service and Sharsheret, and studied the Torah portion each week with my roommates and our beloved Chabad Rebbetizin, Rivky.

But now at 23, standing in front of a congregation that gave me all of these opportunities growing up, I don't know what's next. Despite feeling like a poster child for Jewish Involvement as a young adult, I no longer have a comfortable structure of school or camp anymore and I feel a loss of connection. Not in a heretical way, if you were worried about that, Ramah and USY have done their job. More of a loss of connection from communities that I once felt I belonged in.

When I thought about giving this D'var and talking about my Jewish journey, it was important to me to pick a topic and give a take away message that anyone could relate to no matter what age or connection they have to the shul. I may have

had a particularly intense transition recently, but my feelings of loss of comfort and structure I'm sure are a part of every Jewish Journey. Perhaps you just finished two years of study in a Meah course, or helping your child study for his or her Bar Mitzvah, or completed a year of Mourning, or even throwing out that last box of Matzah from Passover, like my family did this week. All experiences are common in that they give an individual structure and a purpose to follow the mitzvot, a sense of community, and a goal to look forward to be it a more temporal goal or an event.

But now that I'm no longer a lost adolescent, and the people are no longer wandering in the desert, and your child has finished his or her Bar Mitzvah lessons, what's next? As we know, the story was all but over for the wandering youth when they finally made it to Canaan. They had to establish a temple and a community, this time one more permanent. Just like the Israelites, all of the opportunities in my youth have given me direction and the tools to navigate my way through Judaism. Now it is up to me to let go of the reins and find my own way, settle and find a community in this "promised land" of post-college life. This is the burden of freedom, the loss of connection and the vagueness of the future. Perhaps the answer is finding a new program or goal to become involved in, perhaps there simply is not enough structure available for young Jews in the Boston area, but that is a discussion for another time or Kiddush. Either way, there seems to be a paradox, a desire for freedom to make choices without the guidance of an authority, a goal I strove for throughout my schooling and the Israelites strove for throughout their wanderings in the desert. While at the same time, the loss of direction and guidance is scary and unclear. As we start to wrap up the Torah with the book of D'varim, we

are just beginning our journey towards the High Holidays, a time for reflection on where we stand Jewishly. Which side of the Jordan are you on, are you lost on a guided journey like the Israelites wandering in the desert, or are you establishing your own path free of guidance? I would love to discuss more with you about your own Jewish Journeys at Kiddush and where you see yourself headed as we move into a new phase in the Torah and in the Jewish year. Thank you!