

Rabbi's Column

This is a transition week or two, both in terms of Torah portions, and in terms of the religious calendar. This past Shabbat, we read Bechukotai, the last portion in Leviticus. This next week, therefore, we begin the book of Bamidbar (called Numbers, but means "in the wilderness"). This coming Saturday night we begin the Festival of Shavuot, which minimally commemorates the beginning of our transition from a small family to a nation of people who are somehow related to each other, fully recognizing that it is not only the first born, or the designated leaders who have a connection with God, but it is every single one of us who has a connection with God. Transitions are complicated.

From afar, a transition might look smooth and seamless. It is always important to remember that hard work and precedent are a major part of any seemingly smooth transition. Most transitions, including the one reflected in BaMidbar, do not even look smooth. Was Moses not working hard enough, then? Not really. Moses, however, had his eye on the end stage of the journey, so he missed several dangerous bits on the way. It's kind of like crossing a bridge. The potential directions for safe travel are increased drastically on both ends of the bridge. When the focus is directed towards the freedom of movement on the other side of the bridge, then the current protective barrier on the bridge is often seen less as protective and more as restrictive.

"When are we going to be able to have that picnic by the road, instead of a snack on it?" Etc., etc., etc.

Moses would have been better off, I think, if he had said something like, "You will know we have arrived at the right spot when the ground on the side of the road is on the same level as the road. Until then, thank God for the barrier that keeps you from plummeting to the ground a the side of the road."

Just a reminder that as long as we are alive, we are always in transition. The not-so-easy task is to figure out what parts of our lives form the safety barricades that protect us en route to the next destination, and what parts of our lives have ground next to the road, just waiting for us to relax, enjoy our progress, and have a great picnic.

Speaking of which - remember July 4th.