

Rosh Hashanah Morning 5780

Lewis and Clark - Unknown Territory

I'm sure many of us are familiar with the phrase, "wherever you go, there you are."

If we go into a new room, it is still us. Let's say we want to change something, we want to engage in the process of repentance or *teshuvah*, we often follow the route suggested by Maimonides. We acknowledge what we did was wrong, we apologize to the persons affected, we make amends and when in a similar situation, we make different choices. This process is surprisingly similar to that suggested by alcoholics anonymous in a 12 step program.

One of the important steps toward change, especially when dealing with addiction, is to change your environment, change your friends. Those friends will tempt you back toward an old and familiar behavior pattern. But the same thing applies to all behaviors.

If you want a diet to be successful, we have to change the food in our fridge.

Jim Rohn, an early mentor to Tony Robbins, famously said, “You’re the average of the five people you spend time with.”

This same principle applies to our environment.

I want to share two different stories with you to hopefully help you understand differently...not just intellectually, but spiritually and emotionally what I’m challenging all of us to do.

A close reading in the book of Genesis of Abraham's call by God reveals something fascinating.

In Genesis chapter 11, we read at the very end of the list of all of the “begets” where Abram and Terach are and what they are doing.

At this point the chronology gets challenging as we attempt to understand when exactly did the family leave their native land of Ur and how long were they in Haran? Afterall, the entire family was in Haran *before* being called by God. What were they doing on their journey?

One version found in the Dead Sea scrolls, has Abram living in Haran for five years before ever hearing the call from God.¹

I will share with you God's call and then my answer as well as what I believe Abram doing in Haran.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ:

The LORD said to Abram,

“Go forth from your native land
(the land of your birth)
from your father's house
to the land that I will show you.

God emphasized **leaving** during his call. If you add a few words to the verse...it helps us make sense of the story:

Go from your native land (known terrain)

Go from your birth nation (native culture)

Go from your father's house (the ways you know how to deal with the world)

¹ Traditions of the Bible, a Guide to the Bible as it was at the start of the Common Era by James Kugel, (Harvard University Press, 1998) p. 270.

Then go to the land I will show you.

It wasn't just that Abram had to leave physically where he was from, he also had to leave his native culture along with the expectations of how things should and could be done. He had to leave the idolatrous ways of his father's household. He had to let go of every single thing he learned as a child and move on to forge a new path.

When I thought about Abram needing to change everything, I also thought about two famous people from American history, who were also tasked with navigating off the map into uncharted territory - Lewis and Clark.

What both Abram and Lewis and Clark learned by going on this kind of journey, a journey necessitating a change of their mental state, was three things: **Letting go, Learning as they go and to Keep going.**

Letting Go

Abram and Lewis and Clark all had to *let go*. Abram had to let go of how he interacted with God and his family. He could no longer worship idols or even see the stars in heaven as he had when he lived in the country of his birth. It took living in Haran to break free from how he

was brought up and start to free his mind to see other possibilities.

While much of the knowledge Lewis and Clark had it was not everything they needed to be successful on their trip. When Lewis and Clark began their journey, they began it as a military expedition, funded by congress with a clear mandate.

1. Determine a water pathway to the Orient for trade purposes
2. Explore newly acquired territory from the Louisiana Purchase.

As their journey progressed, how they managed the group changed.

Additionally, the tools they brought with them, including the canoes couldn't help them up the Rocky Mountains. In fact, they went off the map and had to *let go* of preconceived ideas of what they would find. They had to look around and learn what was really in front of them.

((In the words of Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan:))

Instead [of seeing what he thought - a gentle plain leading to the Pacific, Merriwether Lewis] there were just more mountains - “immense ranges of high mountains still to the West of us,” he wrote, “with their tops partially covered with snow.”

At that moment, in the daunting vista spread out at the feet of Merriwether Lewis, the dream of an easy water route across the continent - a dream stretching back to Christopher Columbus - **was shattered**.²

The shattering of expectations allowed Abram and Lewis and Clark to be able to make room for what was to come next.

Learning as they Go

In the case of Abram, he entered the promised land only to find a famine and continued south to Egypt. Most know the story of him in Pharaoh's palace, acquiring wealth and heading back up to Canaan. Abram had to be resourceful, use what tools he had to achieve his goal of familial success.

For Lewis and Clark, they had to learn as they went and engage in **adaptive growth**. They had an option once

² Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns, Lewis and Clark: An Illustrated History (New York Knopf, 2012) p.118

facing the Rockies to return to Washington and send a crew better equipped for facing the mountain. They proceeded on. While on their journey they saw never before seen animals such as grizzly bears and coyotes, as well as unknown geography.

On the way, they encountered Sacajawea. Sacajawea, born Shoshone, kidnapped at age 11 or 12, one of the wives of a French Canadian trapper became the guide, who functioned as a translator, and rescued them when their boat almost capsized costing their supplies and journals. She was able to navigate territory that she knew and grew up in. She helped broker the deal to acquire the horses the corp needed and functioned as their pilot. She was a nursing mom and a dedicated member of the corp. Their journals don't mention what it was like for the men to travel with her. Ken Burns indicated in his documentary, that she most likely warmed their hearts. Her presence, they learned, made secure their passage since war parties never traveled with women, especially nursing mothers.

Keep going

What is even more striking is what happened when they arrived on the coast. The Corp of Discovery had finally

made it to the Pacific Ocean, their supplies were low, they were tired, delayed and facing a long wet winter in November. They did something unfathomable as a military expedition when faced with a decision on where to camp - Lewis wanted to be closer to the shore and Clark further upstream. They gathered together - for they had become a family - and took a vote. Previously when faced with a decision in the fork of the Missouri River, these same men did not vote and went against a majority of the men. But now everyone would have a say including Clark's slave and Sacajawea as recorded in their journal. This was the first time an African American and a woman were permitted to vote in American history.

When the winter passed, they began their journey home. What was striking, instead of retracing their steps and take a familiar and safer route back, they split up so that they could cover more territory and keep exploring. In the end, they traversed 340 miles over land, 140 through rugged mountains and 60 of which was through snow - without wearing thick hiking boots.

Lewis and Clark, like Abraham and his family, grew together. They reframed and reconsidered old assumptions or "stories we tell ourselves," they asked challenging questions to be able to face the road in front of

them and see the road for what it is. These individuals were at their best selves while exploring uncharted territory. They operated by the rule of law, but the men never mutinied or were never punished with lashes. They became a team.

Transformation is possible. Engaging in *teshuvah* can be done. Allow the sound of the shofar to be your wake up call to let go of the rivers behind you and focus on the mountains ahead. As we pray collectively as a group, focus on developing your selves in continuous learning and not on what you already mastered. Let us allow God to walk with us through the uncharted territory of our lives ahead.

May you be blessed with a L'Shanah Tovah!!!!

I remember as a child learning about them and thinking it was a very cool story. As an adult though I really started to understand only this past year what these individuals actually did. They were charged by President Thomas Jefferson to find the pathway that was believed to exist from the time of Columbus. At the time, there was a world wide belief that there was a way to navigate via water to the Pacific ocean and open trade routes to the Orient. The reality proved to be much different.

To prepare for the journey in 1803, Louis went to the American philosophical Society to learn modern science, receive basic medical training and begin purchasing advanced weaponry and supplies. They loaded up their keelboat and began heading up the Missouri River. They believed that it would take 18 months to two years to complete what ended up as a four year journey. Since 1492, an awareness began to develop in the world, that the world is not what it seems.

While on their journey they encountered wild life like grizzly bears and coyotes never before seen by white men.

They began their journey as a military operation, funded by congress to investigate the land purchased in the land

deal with President Jefferson from the French - the Louisiana Purchase and to find this water route.

They had set out defined by the myth of a water passage and now were dealing with the reality of the mountains. When we reflect on their accomplishments , we can do so with amazement - the path in front of them was vertical. But Lewis believed in the mission when he wrote in his journal: "I reflected that I had yet done but little, very little indeed, to further the happiness of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation...and resolved in the future...to live for mankind, as I have heretofore lived for myself."³

"There are those who sense the ultimate question in moments of wonder, in moments of joy; there are those who sense the ultimate question in moments of horror, in moments of despair. It is both the grandeur and the misery of living that makes man sensitive to the ultimate question."
Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, p. 367

Abraham hears a compelling voice, and he is far from the last mortal to accommodate such an imposition. We all feel compelled to acquiesce to deeds that make us uneasy. Our lives and our civilization require us to

³ Lewis's August 18, 1805 journal entry, cited in Milton, *Lewis and Clark journals*, 224

willingly submit to the voices of compulsion, the internalized authorities that tell us, "Just go along and do it, everybody else does." Haven't we all felt that pressure in our lives, the entire weight of family and culture and religion pushing us toward practices we would otherwise not want to perpetrate, making us act in ways that we would ideally want to resist? We perpetuate this "objective" coercion in both little and big ways: when arguing with children about what they have to wear, we insist they must don an offending garment because that's how people dress when they go to... Haven't we all heard ourselves stop a child from doing something he or she wants to with the line "little girls don't do that" or "little boys don't play with that, it's for girls." And so the voice uses our voices to sound objective, as though built into the nature of the cosmos, beyond dispute or hope. It starts pushing us from our earliest childhood, telling us, "But you have to do it this way, this is how it's always been done. This is how everybody does it."

As we grow, that same voice continues to command us, telling us what is worthy of recognition and what is not. The voice tells us that excelling in literature is for nerds but excelling in athletics is the key to popularity. The voice tells us that knitting and sewing is mere craft while painting and sculpting constitutes high art. It tells us that there is one right way to develop, that there are skills that make parents' smile, and other skills that don't. Some strengths make teachers like you, and other strengths don't. And so we are pushed and shaped and forced, throughout our childhood, throughout our schooling, to become something different than what we are inside. Instead of being nurtured so we can blossom, we are sculpted to accord to someone

else's vision. The forces that make us deny our own inner gifts don't stop with childhood. The pursuit of our own well-being, financial security, and professional prestige makes us do all kinds of things that we would otherwise not do. A small inner voice may even occasionally acknowledge that our acquiescence is ridiculous and yet we do it because, well, everybody does it, and that's the way the world works, and it's always been done that way. And we begin to feel that the voice is the objective voice of reality— compelling, imposing, and commanding. And we go along, because the voice seems too big to resist.