



Women's League for Conservative Judaism Women's League Shabbat 2019/5779

D'var Torah

Shabbat Shalom. As Women's League for Conservative Judaism commences its second hundred years, we recognize our continued movement forward with the shared Torah Fund theme "*Atid – Future.*"

Albert Einstein once said, "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving." Sometimes we feel boxed in – we stand on the brink of a new experience, a new job, a new task at work, a move to a new city, a new baby, riding a bicycle for the first time, wondering what will happen next. It can be terrifying. There's no going back and moving forward into the future, *atid*, seems impossible.

Imagine the Israelite slaves. They made hasty preparations and quickly left Egypt. God has led them, in a seemingly roundabout way, to the Sea of Reeds. There they are, encamped before Pi-hahiroth, closed in between Migdol and the sea. They can see the Egyptians advancing on them. There's no turning back. They cry to Moshe. "Wouldn't it have been better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?" Moses tells them to "have no fear. Stand by, witness the deliverance the Lord will work for you today..." But, God responds, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward."

Talk about feeling boxed in. It takes courage to take the first step, to move forward. The Torah tells us that Moshe held his arm over the sea, God drove the sea back turning the sea into dry ground, the waters split and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming walls to the left and to the right. It was not easy for them. The rabbis recognized how difficult it must have been to take the first step into the sea. According to Midrash, the sea did not split at first. One person, Nachshon, probably had a Lily Tomlin moment. Lily Tomlin said, "I always wondered why somebody didn't do something about that. Then, I realized I was somebody." Nachshon was somebody, he was the one who had the courage to take a step forward; he stepped into the sea, up to his ankles, up to his knees, up to his waist, up to his neck, up to his nose and then the seas parted and the Israelites, as a community, walked between the parted waters, the Egyptians on their heels. As they trekked to freedom, *Az yashir Moshe u'v'nai Yisrael*, Moshe began to sing and the people joined him in song. When they were safely on dry land, the Egyptians no longer a threat, Miriam and the women led the people in song with dancing and timbrels.

Having reached the shore and celebrated with song and dance, the Israelites needed to organize, they needed structure and they needed to add to their leadership team. Enter Yitro, father-in-law of Moses. He brought Moshe's wife and children to him. He offered advice to Moses. He taught him about avoiding burnout by delegating responsibilities. He guided Moshe in setting up a court system with chiefs to decide minor disputes, leaving Moses the major disputes. His job completed, Yitro returned to his community, leaving Moses in charge. For the next 3 months, Moses led the Israelites to Sinai. At Sinai, God became the leader, creating a covenant with the people and giving them laws, structure for the community. Now God stepped back, making way for new leadership.

As they journey through the wilderness many leaders will come forward, each using his or her talents to guide the people. Bezalel will use his artistic talents to help the people create the Tabernacle. Aaron and his sons will establish the religious rituals. Tziporah will become a leader behind the scenes as Moses listens and takes advice from his wife.

These leaders of the wilderness possessed the same qualities that each of us possesses. They were trustworthy and acted with integrity. They strove for excellence. They made others feel valued. They provided service to others. They built relationships. They communicated effectively. Everyone did not possess the same qualities; it took all of the leaders together to move the people through the wilderness.

The crossing of the Sea of Reeds was not the culmination of the Israelite experience, it was the beginning. We may not have a sea to cross, but according to Rabbi Adam Greenwald, "we bear the responsibility of being a descendent of Nachshon... *Be'chol dor va'dor* – in each generation we are called upon to step into the breach, to carve a path for future generations...We are summoned to live in such a way that someday others will look back on us and say 'Because they were brave, there was space for us to walk behind.'"

It's our turn. We are the generation that must step up. We are the "somebody." Let's use the leadership qualities and the talents that we have, to lead our Sisterhood, our synagogue and our community, our *kehillah*. Let's develop relationships, bring others with us to programs, to study, and to pray together. Let's offer service, to those less fortunate than we are and to those who need our assistance as they experience illness or loss. Let's also offer help to members of our Sisterhood and synagogue as they plan programs to enhance our Jewish lives in this community. Let's communicate effectively, using our best technique – painting or drawing, singing or dancing, writing or speaking - to share the beauty and joy of Judaism with our Jewish community. Let's lead with integrity and trust, moving forward in our current wilderness as we journey to our Jewish future, our *Atid*.

Shabbat Shalom

Barbara Ezring (Southern Region)
WLCJ Education/Program Team Coordinator, 2017-2020