

“Ascending the Mountain of Innovation”
Text Study for Preparatory Session

Organizational change theorist William Bridges likens the transition that an organization undergoes to the children of Israel’s journey through the wilderness.

[That journey] took 40 years, not because ... the generation that had known Egypt had to die off before they entered the Promised Land. If you take that literally, it is pretty discouraging: things won’t really change until a whole generation of workers dies. On a less literal level, the point of Moses’ long journey through the wilderness is entirely applicable to the organization: the outlook, attitudes, values, self-images, ways of thinking that had been functional in the past have to “die” before people are ready for life in the present. Moses made the ending when he led his people out of Egypt, but it was the 40 years in the neutral zone wilderness that *got Egypt out of his people*. It won’t take you 40 years, but you aren’t going to be able to do it quickly, either.

William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, p.37

In your congregation what are the “Egyptyts” that need to be taken away from your various stakeholders?

The Midbar was clearly a place of *physical* deprivation, with shortages of both food and water, not to mention the sense of wandering aimlessly. But it was also a place of *spiritual* deprivation.

**How might you describe that spiritual deprivation?
What might have been its cause?**

On the other hand, the *midbar* was also a place of spiritual awakening, as the following commentaries point out:

The wilderness is not just a desert through which we wandered for 40 years. It is a way of being. A place that demands being open to the flow of life around you. A place that demands being present with all of yourself. ... *One who does not make himself ownerless—open like the wilderness—will be unable to acquire human wisdom or God’s work. That is why what was said was said in the wilderness of Sinai.* (Numbers Rabbah 1:7)

Lawrence Kushner, *Honey From the Rock*

The portrait of a people undergoing transformation in a place outside of normal geographic / cultural boundaries is a well-known phenomenon in traditional stories. Anthropologist Victor Turner speaks of the “liminal” experience, where the protagonist or initiate is separated spiritually and geographically from his origins in order to be changed into something new. ... The desert is the site of liminality par excellence: it is a harsh place that contains none of the succoring elements of human civilization, yet at the same time it leads the wanderer into

truer communication with nature and the divine, metacultural forces of the universe. It is a place of betwixt and between, which mirrors the experiencer's psychological state.

Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, p.341

To what extent might the transition to a more innovative model of the religious school contribute to both spiritual deprivation and spiritual awakening of the various stakeholders in your settings?

What kinds of spiritual strength and support might your congregation need?

What kind of support systems can you develop within your synagogue?

What kind of support systems can the Religious School Educators Network develop?