

Rabbi Judith Schindler
Temple Beth El
Stillness and Movement
Parashat Vayeshev 5775

We live in a world of struggle between two powerful drives: Stillness versus movement; rest versus work; dwelling versus moving forward; staying where you are versus creating change.

We live in the tension between the two. Sometimes we yearn to stop and sometimes we yearn to move. This week's parashah opens with that tension. "Vayeshev Yaakov B'ereetz M'guray Aviv - and Jacob settled in the land where his father had resided." The commentator Kli Yakar notes that Jacob settled not just physically but spiritually. He had experienced a tumultuous two decades filled with Esau's murderous anger, Laban's deception, the rape of his daughter Dinah, and the death of his beloved Rachel. Jacob is tired and now wants to stop physically so that he can elevate himself spiritually and find tranquility.

Jacob's stopping stands in contrast to his father's and grandfather's movement. Abraham and Isaac were in a state of what in Hebrew is termed "m'guray" residing. They experienced temporary stops on their journey through life.

Jacob's stopping stands in contrast to his son's movement. In the course of just one chapter, Joseph will be cast into a pit, sold in to slavery and taken to Egypt. Joseph grows in the movement he experiences through Genesis. We grow in the same way through our movement.

Judaism is about movement. A story is told of a wealthy businessman who was passing through the Polish town of Radin and didn't want to miss the opportunity to meet the Chofetz Chaim, the great leader of his generation. Upon entering, the businessman was taken by scarcity of the Chofetz Chaim's furniture. There was only a bed and a table.

"Where is your furniture!?" the business man asked with curiosity.

To which the Chofetz Chaim responded by, "Where is your furniture?"

The businessman explained that he was only passing through.

The Chofetz Chaim explained that he too, was only passing through. The Chofetz Chaim was passing from this world ultimately to the next.

Judaism is about movement -- from secular time to sanctified time, from haughtiness to holiness, from selfishness to making the others a central part of your daily lives, from taking things for granted to celebrating what we have through blessings.

Our Reform Judaism is marked by movement -- by ingenuity and creativity.

Reform Judaism reflects continual changes in liturgy.

"Let us pray in a language we can understand," We asked in early 19th century Germany and we continue to pray that way today.

“Let us change in music,” we asked. “Let us add instrumentation to elevate our offerings.”

“ Let us evolve our principles” we said in the 20th century. “Let us create a culture and philosophy of inclusion rather than exclusion. Let us welcome the intermarried. Let us welcome diverse families. Let us welcome those who of varied sexual orientation and gender identification. Let us focus not only internally but externally fight for the equality and rights of all.”

As Rabbi Rick Jacob said when he was installed as the leader of our movement in 2011, “We are the Reform movement and we are going to get moving.” And I would say, “We are the Reform movement and we are moving. We are continually reforming Judaism so that it speaks to all of us in the most effective way.”

Yet it is not only the Reform movement, even traditional Judaism strives to move within the realm of halachah. Chabad for example is a movement constantly trying to be innovative to make Torah accessible to the masses. Rabbi Groner shared with me, The Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson) was always coming up with innovative of how to reach deeper into the soul of the Jew and make that connection. He initiated many campaigns such as the mitzvah mobile driving around large cities to get people to put on tefillin or shake the lulav at Sukkot.

The Rebbe once gave a talk before Rosh Hashanah on a double portion called Nitzavim-Vayeilech. The Rebbe taught, the word *nitzav* means that one “stands firmly ensconced” in contrast to the word *omed* which means simply “to stand on ones feet.” The word *nitzvav* means firmly grounded. And the word *vayilach*, the second part of this late summer Torah portion, means to advance. The two portions *nitzvaim* – standing and *vayeilech* - moving forward complement each other. They are not a contradiction. In order for a person to expand their horizons, they need to be grounded. They still need to be connected to their core.

Movement and stillness. Both have lessons to teach.

May we learn from the journey. May we learn from the rest. And in our movement may we create change that makes a difference and lifts people’s lives.

As we sing the Mi Chamocha we celebrate the journey from slavery to freedom as we stop to celebrate.