

BAMIDBAR

ADVERSITY

The children of Israel begin their 40 years in the desert. They will face many challenges and hardships. They will lose their leader, they will face battles, there will be a lack of food and water. For the sake of our own development, we need to venture out of our comfort zone, sometimes failing and sometimes succeeding. How have you dealt with obstacles or failures in the past? What might help you in the future?

RITUALS

The Jewish people create a ritual for setting up the camp. Ritual is important in our lives. When we build order into our lives, we begin to manage the seemingly overwhelming tasks and take comfort in knowing that there are some things that will remain constant in our hurried lives. Do you have individual rituals that get you through the week?

SOME THINGS ARE BORING

The Jewish people begin wandering the desert. However, the journey is more than aimless wandering. They will be tested and there will be a time for renewal. We can learn from this that it is important to appreciate the “boring” moments of life. In working through the boredom there is much to learn, like patience and fortitude. What important things can you find within a seemingly boring moment?

NASO

VOLUNTEERING OURSELVES

The parsha gives the laws of a Nazarite. A Nazarite’s goal is to achieve a higher-than-required level of holiness. The Nazarite’s discipline can lead us to reflect on what we can take on voluntarily to become a better role model, ethically and spiritually. We might refrain from speaking Lashon hara, or volunteer to do social justice work. How can you uplift yourself?

MAKING MISTAKES

Here we learn about the comeback process after making a big mistake. Mistakes are a feature of life and they happen for a particular reason. When mistakes happen, there should be an acknowledgment of error and a process of improvement. How can you benefit from your mistakes?

DEDICATION

This parsha talks about dedicating the mizbeach. When you dedicate something special, it shouldn’t just be about the dedication. It should go beyond that. It should symbolize something important. Next time you are dedicating your time or possession, think about the meaning behind it. How can you incorporate its’ significance into the dedication?

BEHALOTECHA

CURIOSITY

The parsha describes the seven lamps that light up the sanctuary. The lamps can be seen as education, and the way we light up the minds and hearts of others. Education is not only a matter of mastering information, it's about questioning and exploring. Invite others to engage in conversation with their own questions and thoughts about things like God, the Jewish people, and what we practice ritually.

BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN OTHERS

Two men are prophesizing in the camp. Instead of being threatened, Moshe welcomes them. Often, when we see the strengths of others, we are threatened. Somehow, we think, their strengths mean the diminishment of our own. However, sharing power is the best kind of leadership out there. A leader should encourage and facilitate leadership in others. Even if we don't see ourselves as leaders, we should still try to bring out the best in others.

SHOWING APPRECIATION

Miriam got leprosy as a punishment for speaking badly about her brother. This meant that she, along with the entire nation, had to wait until she was healed so that they could continue traveling. The reason Moshe wanted to wait for one person was because he had so much appreciation for all she had done for him growing up and now was his chance to show it. What can you do to let those who you appreciate know that you really appreciate all they do?

SHELACH

VOICING OPINIONS

Calev and Yehoshua do not agree with the report of the spies, and they decide to speak out against it. It can be difficult when we find ourselves with a different view point than that of the larger group. It can take a lot of strength to stand up for what you believe in, but it is important not to simply follow the tide. How do you feel when someone in a group introduces a new perspective?

KEEPING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

The attitude of the spies rubbed off on the nation. Instead of making a realistic evaluation of the report and planning accordingly, they mourned. Mistakes and mishaps can happen, but we are responsible for our reactions, and only we can ensure that a small mishap remains nothing more than a small bump along the journey of life. How well can you keep life's challenges in perspective?

COURAGE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE

The ten spies lack courage and see themselves as very small, saying they are as "grasshoppers" in the eyes of the inhabitants of the land and in their own eyes. They lack the self-confidence it takes to do what is required. To have a positive self-image and to develop a sense of the courage, we need to make an effort to try new things. Where do you think courage comes from?

KORACH

COMMUNICATION

Moshe decides to reach out to some of the rebels and asks them to meet with him. Regardless of whether the person agrees to it; this action says much more about the one who asks than it does about the person who receives the request. It is a brave thing to do and can be very rewarding. Do you think that reaching out is a sign of strength or weakness?

AGREEING TO DISAGREE

Korach was completely disinterested in everything other than himself. Korach had an uncaring coldness toward the plight of others and toward the needs of the nation. Even when we disagree with someone, we still need to infuse ourselves with sincere care and concern for them. We all have our own opinions, and we should be able to voice them and have healthy discussions with our peers.

STANDING UP FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN

Korach stood up for what he believed to be unfair. While the way he went about it was incorrect in the Torah's eyes, he still had the courage to object and voice his opinion. When you object to something, there is a proper way to do it. Be sure to be sensitive; you can be respectful yet effective.

CHUKAT

THE POWER OF WORDS

Out of temper, Moshe hits the rock twice instead of speaking to it. As punishment, God takes away his opportunity to go into the Land of Israel. This teaches how careful we need to be with our words, especially when we are role models. Words can push people apart, but they can also bring people together. By taking the time to think before we speak, we have a better chance of finding the right words in every situation. How can you affect others with your speech?

BULLYING

Again, out of temper, Moshe calls the people "rebels". He uses this hurtful label in public. Showing tolerance and respect for others, despite their shortcomings, is essential. We should discourage labeling others. Being respectful to others who are different from us, rather than trying to raise ourselves, is what we should strive to be like. How can social groups and cliques be hurtful?

LOSING CONTROL

Moses loses control, losing patience with his people who are constantly complaining. We might be dealing with ongoing frustrations, but whatever the issue may be, it is better to address the deeper issue than for us to lose control. Did losing your temper ever accomplish anything worthwhile?

BALAK

TEMPTATIONS

The Israelites are camped in the desert and find themselves tempted in many ways by foreign culture. They indulge their temptations, and it causes havoc in the community. Our lives are full of temptations. It is important that we know what our values are so that we can make sure that they outweigh the temptations we encounter. What do you do to resist your temptations?

JEALOUSY

Bilaam realized that in order to curse the Jewish people he would need to physically see them, thereby arousing feelings of jealousy and anger. Jealousy is when one spends too much time looking at what others have. Instead, we should be looking at ourselves and what we have, appreciating our blessings. We each have unique capabilities, and we should focus on those instead. What are your unique talents?

MODESTY

Bilaam observed the Jewish encampments, and the first thing he noticed was their modesty. Their tent doors faced away from each other, ensuring each other's privacy. He saw their modesty in the way they conducted themselves, and he was impressed beyond words. Beyond words to curse, that is. He was so inspired that he began to bless the Jewish people! It is hard to dress in a modest way and speak in a refined manner. If we realize what we can accomplish through our actions, it helps us conduct ourselves in a modest way.

PINCHAS

BALANCING PASSIONS

Pinchas sees a fellow Israelite behaving in a way that he believes to be unjust. His passion is fueled and in his desire to right this injustice, he takes the law into his own hands. He did in fact see the man breaking a law, but does that mean that it was acceptable for him to serve as a judge and jury? Passions drive us to take action, but sometimes we must refrain. How do your passions affect your actions? How can you use your passions for the good?

STANDING UP FOR YOURSELF AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The five sisters have no brothers and do not stand to inherit their father's property because they are women. They daringly stand before Moshe and the whole assembly to make their request to inherit the property of their father, even though they are daughters. Moshe confers with God and then fulfills their radical request. It is important to advocate for yourself. You never know what will happen if you don't speak up. What are the benefits of standing up for oneself?

ABOVE AND BEYOND

The general rule in the Torah is that a kohen has to be born into the family of kohanim. One can't just become a priest. But there was an exception made for Pinchas. Pinchas did an act that was beyond what was expected of him: he risked his very life and killed Zimri, one of the tribal leaders of the Jewish people who was leading them to sin. Pinchas thought only about the will of God; he did much more than what anyone would have expected. We can't become kohanim, but we can be sure that when we do more than what is expected, God will reward us in an exceptional manner too.

MATOT/MASEI

KEEPING YOUR WORD

The Parsha discusses vows and the importance of not breaking a pledge. Judaism teaches not to make a verbal commitment unless you really mean it. How can you value keeping promises?

RECOGNIZING ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND SAVORING MEMORIES

Moshe keeps a written record of the progress of the Jews wandering through the desert. Each stage of their journey is written down. In this way, they could always see where they came from and how far they still have to go. What were your accomplishments last week, last month, last year?

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR ACTIONS

Moshe accuses Israel's enemies of tempting the Israelite men to sin, instead of placing the blame on the Israelites themselves. Is it helpful to place the blame on someone else? Does accusing others fix the problem? As difficult as it can be, take responsibility for your own actions.

