

Clear out of Options



A Teaching from Gershon...

That is what happened some 3,400 years ago.

Two and a half million stragglers were trudging their way across endless horizons of desert, of bare stone and burning sand. Women, Men, children, elderly and babes – all on their way toward nothing they'd ever known, to a land promised by a man who had never been there.

It had been a month to the day since they'd left a land of bounty and richness – Egypt – where, even though they lived a life of anonymity and bondage, they at least had viable shelters from the blazing sun and bountiful supplies of wide varieties of food and drink at the ready. And it had been a little more than a week since they had basked in the Oasis of the Seven Palms, where they'd enjoyed the welcome relief of water and shade and even fresh, ripened dates.

But now, today, they had run out of everything edible. The last of the Matzoh they had hurriedly baked before they left Egypt was gone. Not even a crumb was left, the last of it fed to the children and the elderly. Today – they were clear out of options. There was no oasis in sight, no village, no tree, not even a blade of grass or some cacti from which to manufacture some form or another of anything remotely edible. Ahead of them – emptiness, one sand dune after the other. Behind them – the same. It was too late to turn back toward the Oasis, let alone to Egypt, and as impossible to take another step farther into the void of oblivion, the chasm of uncertainty, the future of nothing, and the fate of doom.

Tribe by tribe, elder by elder, spokesperson by spokesperson, the people slowly, weakly, heavy with worry, weighed-down by concern, overwhelmed by the impossible, approached the stranger who had one day shown up from out of nowhere to lure them out of their stupor and liberate them from their bondage to

the **Known** with attractive promises of the **Unknown** – who had basically replaced one misery with another.

“If it is our divinely-ordained fate,” they said, “to fail on our journey and fall apart, could we not have rather done so back in Egypt where at least we’d have had the luxury of good food and beverage and other delicacies of life and joys of adventure and living before we die, instead of meeting our end here in the middle of nowhere, where there are no options, no choices, no hope remaining whatsoever?”

And Moses, and his sister Miriam, and their brother Aaron -- what could they say? What could they answer? They looked around them, behind them, in front of them, then to the left, then to the right. Nothing in their prophetic sights but the pathetic scenario of hordes of needy men, women, and children stretching as far as their eyes could see, and then – beyond them – endless expanses of absolutely nothing but dunes of sand and mounds of rock.

And there they stood, silent, bereft of response, for even they -- who had performed miracle after miracle, from splitting a raging sea to conjuring water out stone – could intuit no foreseeable option.

And then, from within the silence, from within the absence, from within the emptiness, a gentle desert breeze emerged, caressing lovingly the forlorn faces of each and every woman, man and child. And then, and then the breeze sang a soothing song audible to every individual as if sung to them alone:

*“I will rain down upon you
bread from the sky
So put away your worry,
put away your sigh
You will have what to eat
not only today
But every week, month and year,
the entire way
By morning it will come
and taste just like bread
And by mid-day my quail
will keep you well-fed.”*

And to everyone’s surprise, that is exactly what happened the following morning. And they called the heavenly bread *Mahn*, Hebrew for “**What?**” Because,

they could not identify it, as it was not of this world, not in the reckoning of how or what they had presumed about what would occur in response to their hopelessness.

Not only did they now have sweet-flavored wafer-like bread appearing from out of nowhere, but by mid-day swarms of quail arrived and offered themselves as nourishment, and these miraculous meals continued all along their forty-year journey across the desert from the Promise to its Realization, from the seed of their hope to its fruition, from their bondage in the Land of Constrictiveness to their liberation in the Land of Expansiveness, along the untamable wilderness of possibility and potential.

And from that moment on, throughout our lengthy and complicated history, we never again **ever** –not even for a **moment** – believed we were out of options.

Never.

In spite of two thousand successive years of exile, oppression, genocides and expulsions, we never ceased to sing along with the ancient breeze of courage and possibility that continued to caress us with its comforting breath of hope, eventually adding our own lyrics: “Next Year in Jerusalem.”

And then, one morning, we awoke from our 2,000-year-old dream to the sensation of our lips pressed against the cold but soothing ancient stones of the one wall that refused to collapse – the one wall that had waited faithfully for us, for it too believed that one day we would return.

For we are **never** without options, even when there aren't any. And it matters not which side of any wall we find ourselves stopped dead in our tracks. For no wall was ever built that could block the Will of the One Who Called Us into Being that we continue to become....

In the words of the 18th-century Rebbe Nachmon of Breslav:

השם יתברך עצמו מסתיר את עצמו בתוך המניע

“The Great Mystery conceals Itself within that which impedes you from knowing it.”

Said differently: “In the very obstacle that prevents you from discovering God, is precisely where God is waiting to be discovered.”