



Shabbat Emor
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Pushed and Pulled
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There is a preacher named T.D. Jakes, the pastor of a non-denominational megachurch in Dallas, who saw something in the book of Deuteronomy that I had never seen. It comes from Moses' poetic speech in *parshat haazinu*, in which Moses observes *nesher yair kino*, a mother eagle stirs its baby eagles who are happily at rest in their nest. This is the climax of Moses' life. This is the end of the Torah. This is Moses' closing argument. Why is he talking about nests?

Pastor Jakes' answer is that while nests are comfortable, that baby eagle cannot soar until it leaves the nest. This is not only a problem for baby eagles. It is a problem for all of us.

We love our nests. We love our safe spaces. We love our comfort zone. But comfortable can become too comfortable. Familiar can become too familiar. Safe and secure can become too safe and secure in ways that prevent us from soaring, from becoming who we are meant to become.

This is a human dilemma, and it is universal. That is why Moses talks about it at the end of the Torah.

How should we think about whether to leave our comfort zone, and if so, when? How would we know the right time?

Moses knows a thing or two about leaving his comfort zone because he has seen a thing or two. In fact, he personally leaves his comfort zone not once but twice, under very different circumstances, both of which have a lot to say to us today.

His first comfort zone is growing up in the palace of Pharaoh as a prince of Egypt. After being adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh, Moses has a massive case of Egyptian privilege. He

could pass day after day pleasantly, without a care in the world. There is only one problem. If he stays in that palace, living the life of a prince of Egypt, he cannot soar. He cannot fulfill his destiny as the one who liberates the slaves from Egypt.

What prompts Moses to leave the comfort of his palace? The Torah's narrative is that Moses *was pushed out* of the palace. He kills the Egyptian taskmaster who is beating up on the Israelite slave, the other Israelites start talking about what he did, he becomes a wanted man, he has to run away.

This first model—being *pushed out* of our comfort zone—happens to us all the time. You like your job well enough. But you lose your job and have to find a new job. Pushed out of your comfort zone.

You are living in a city that you like. But your spouse has a great opportunity in a new city. So off you go. Pushed out of your comfort zone.

You have some health challenge you did not want, do not deserve, but it is here and it limits what you used to be able to do, so now you have to find new things that you can do. Pushed out of your comfort zone.

It is hard to be pushed out of our comfort zone. There are a lot of feelings here. A lot of emotion. The sting of rejection. The challenge of change you did not ask for and do not want. It is easy to feel depressed and down on ourselves after we have been pushed out of our comfort zone.

Here is the question. Here is where the work begins. Can we reframe this push as an opportunity to reinvent ourselves in a way that will be a blessing to ourselves and to the world?

Consider the story of Whitney Wolfe, which she shared on an npr podcast called *How I Built This*. After college Whitney Wolfe gets a job at what would become Tinder, at that point a

hi tech start up dating ap. She is in her early 20s, she has a lot of energy. She goes to Southern Methodist University, from which she had graduated, and tells the women in the sororities that they have to sign up with Tinder; and she tells the men in the fraternities they have to sign up with Tinder; and she makes this pitch in college after college. Use of Tinder soars, and her career soars with it. By her early 20s she finds herself a senior executive in a very hot hi tech company.

But then something happened, and she is pushed out. What happened she could not discuss for legal reasons. But she shared that after being pushed out she was seriously depressed. There were mornings when she could not get out of bed. She received a lot of bullying on social media, and she began to lose confidence in herself.

She faced a crucial question, and it is a question we all face when we are pushed out of our comfort zone. Is this the end of my story? Is my story I was happy in my comfort zone until I was pushed out, and now I am depressed, end of story? Or is this the beginning of a whole new story, of a redemption story.

Whitney Wolfe chose to write a whole new story by reframing this moment as an opportunity to be a blessing. She saw two problems with dating aps at the time, including Tinder. The dating ap world can be cruel, leaving people exposed and vulnerable. And women do not have coequal power. She was determined to not let her pain go to waste. She was going to come up with a new ap that solved *both* of these problems.

She founded a new dating ap called Bumble that gave women more power in the dating ap process by allowing them to make the first move, and that demanded decency and kindness. People who were not decent and kind were permanently barred from using this ap.

Bumble is phenomenally successful, both commercially and as a kinder gentler dating ap—I have not actually used it myself, but that is what I read—and Whitney Wolfe's reputation

is stronger than ever. Not only is she a tech innovator, but she is a resilient tech innovator with good values who has managed how to instill those values into the marketplace.

When we are pushed out of our comfort zone, can we transcend the sting of rejection, the challenge of change we did not want, even the depression that can sometimes ensue, to reframe this trauma as an opportunity to be a blessing, and can we summon the resilience to bring this blessing into the world?

Moses leaves a second comfort zone as well, but in an entirely different way. After being pushed out of the palace, he lands in Midian where he meets and marries a daughter named Tziporah of the Midian priest Jethro. He has a nice life in Midian. He and Tziporah have two sons. He tends the flocks. Being a shepherd is peaceful, predictable and safe. There is only one problem. He cannot soar if he remains a shepherd in Midian.

When God calls out to Moses from the burning bush, Moses is not being pushed, but pulled. He is being called to something big and important.

Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt. Exodus 3: 9-10.

Moses objects. It is scary to leave our comfort zone.

The burning bush invites us to ask ourselves: when are we going to take a risk, when are we going to venture into unfamiliar, unpredictable, unsafe territory, in order to have some greater impact that we could not have doing our familiar routine?

A woman named Elizabeth Ryan graduates college without a clear path. Her major in college had been psychology and women's studies, and in her early 20s she was not entirely clear what was next. She gets a job as an emergency medical technician in her hometown of Ithaca, New York. Part of being an EMT she found immensely gratifying. She loves people,

being with them, helping them, listening to their stories. But at the same time part of being an EMT was not satisfying to her. She would drop off these patients and families at the emergency room, and that was the end of her involvement with that family. She wanted more. She didn't want to just transport people. She wanted to heal people. She wanted to work with them to make sure that this moment was the point from which their healing and blessings could rise.

Roll the film forward, she went to medical school, and when she graduated, she felt called to work in the trenches on what she sees as one of the most urgent public health challenges of our time: opioid addiction. She returned to Ithaca and works day after day treating people who struggle with opioid addiction, helping them wean themselves off of their addiction to a new life. In her clinic, there are cards listing the names of people who succumbed to opioid addiction, followed by the words "should be alive today." Greg should be alive today. Penny should be alive today. Anita should be alive today. Her calling is to replace these cards with more hopeful cards that say: "Since joining this clinic, I have been able to..." and list positive accomplishments that former opioid addicts are now able to do because they are former addicts.

Elizabeth Ryan had her burning bush, calling her, pulling her, to some noble goal. Help people. Heal people. End opioid addiction. Do we have our own burning bush? What important work are *we* called to do?

When is the right time to leave our comfort zone? When is familiar too familiar, predictable too predictable, safe too safe? When does the security of our comfort zone get in the way of our soaring?

There is no simple answer to these questions. But the story of Moses invites us to keep our eyes open for possibilities. Whether we are pushed, or pulled, our disruption can lead to our destiny. What nest do you have to leave so that you can soar? Shabbat shalom