

## Chapter 10–Learning Guide

### I-In-Class Discussion Questions

1-The statement from the Talmud with which the chapter begins reads as follows: “Each tribe was unwilling to be the first to enter the sea. Then sprang forward Nachshon the son of Amminadab and descended first into the sea.” (Sotah 37a) How does the author of this chapter interpret this *midrash*? How is it connected to Moshe’s story? How else can this statement be interpreted?

2-In describing his ordeal, Moshe says, “it was all or nothing, black or white, good or bad, holy or not!” Why do you think Moshe saw his decision in such stark either-or terms?

3-Moshe knew how hard his leaving would be on his parents and friends. “Of great concern to me was the welfare of my family and friends who would be devastated by such a move on my part.” Do you think Moshe is being honest with himself? Is he really concerned about his parents and friends? Or, is his real concern his own welfare?

4-Moshe was agitated and extremely lonely. “I spent many sleepless nights tossing and turning in my bed.” He says that the hardest part of his ordeal “was the fact that I had to struggle with it all by myself. I had *noone* who I felt I could talk to, since on such a matter I could trust noone.” Why do you suppose Moshe was so lonely?

5-“I finally made the big move! On the first day of what would have been my fifth year in yeshiva, in the beginning of the *zeman* or semester, I left my home with my suitcases. My parents ordered a taxi for me. Last kisses good-bye. My mother: ‘*Shtiyg* away (learn well and grow spiritually) sweetie.’ ‘Okay, *Eema* (mom).’” Do you think Moshe’s actions as described here are unethical? Is it always wrong to lie?

6-Moshe felt that if he returned to Israel, given the cultural expectations there, he would have to give up his religion completely. Why does Moshe think this way?

7-In the end, do you think Moshe did the right thing? To what extent does an Israeli citizen have an obligation to serve in the armed forces?

8-If Moshe had come to you for advice while he was staying with his grandparents, what would you have told him?

9-What does Moshe mean when he writes “I gained the ability to take charge and make decisions myself, which is a most valuable tool in my possession.” Doesn’t everyone have freedom of choice?

10-Do you think Moshe is trying to live a life of integrity or is he just running away from his problems? What is integrity?

### II-Essay Questions

1-Is there a biblical story that is similar to Moshe's? What can be learned from comparing Moshe's story to the biblical story?

2-It might be okay to lie sometimes, but only under very special circumstances. Here are two examples where it would be okay...

3-What are Moshe's two most admirable characteristics? What are Moshe's least admirable characteristics?

### **III-Connection**

The following is an excerpt from an article written by Dr. Daniel Tropper founder and president of Gesher, an organization dedicated to bridging the gap between religious and secular communities in Israel:

The visions of the ideal Jewish state remain as conflicted today as ever, the need to find a balance between democratic and halakhic imperatives as urgent. Without a compromise accepted willingly by both sides, the dissatisfaction, anger and fear fermenting just below the surface will erupt. And when that happens, we will find two adversaries far more alienated from one another and far less understanding of the other's position. The opportunity to heal and bridge, however, is still available. Indeed, we would be wise to use this wonderful hiatus in confrontation to educate toward tolerance and Jewish commitment.

This Tisha Be'av we should reflect on how to overcome internal strife and rivalry and develop a Jewish consensus which passionately preserves the Jewish character of the state while recognizing the pluralistic nature of its society. What's needed are new and innovative programs stressing both our glorious Jewish heritage and the significance of Western democratic values. (The Jerusalem Report, July 26, 2004, p 46)

Requirements:

Go to the Gesher web site and summarize the philosophy of this organization.

Do you believe that the work of this organization can contribute in a positive way to helping to bridge some of the perceived gaps between religious and non-religious Jews in Israel?

### **IV-Personal Journal**

- 1-What would you have done in Moshe's situation?
- 2-What would you have told Moshe if he had come to you for advice?
- 3-The event in my life that most closely resembles Moshe's is the following...

### **V-Group Project**

1-Moshe contacted an organization that is designed to help people like him who are thinking about leaving the *charedi* world. He met with a guidance counselor who advised him on some of the consequences of his decision. A few months after meeting the advisor, Moshe had resolve once and for all to leave his familiar community.

Prepare a 5 minute skit to fill in some of the gaps in Moshe's story. The skit should depict the conversation between Moshe and the guidance counselor. What do you imagine these two people said to each other?

### **VI-Vignette**

#### **A Question of Integrity**

Mark Israel was tired and irritable when he arrived home at 11:00 PM from a contentious board meeting of the local centrist orthodox high school.

His wife, Esther, greeted him with a smile and an offer to microwave his dinner for him. Mark was in no mood to eat. The meeting had been called a week before to discuss plans for the school's expansion. The school had been growing dramatically the past few years and everyone agreed it was time to build a modern campus to accommodate the increasing needs of the student body.

Mark looked at his wife and spoke. "The only item on the agenda was the new building. But before we even had a chance to talk about it, Gabe Levine, the guy they're naming this building after, rather dramatically got up to speak."

Mark tried to do a plausible imitation of Mr. Levine for his wife. "Before we get to the issue of the new campus and how precisely we're going to finance this project, I'd like to bring up another issue. It pains me to say this but there have been many complaints, especially among some of my good friends, made against our principal, Rabbi Cohen. I know this issue has come up before and I know many of you are strong supporters of Rabbi Cohen, but I believe it's time we take a good hard look at weather or not he's really our man, especially if we're going ahead with this expansion. I've been in business for a long time and I know when it's time to bring in new blood."

"I couldn't believe my ears," Mark nearly yelled at his wife. "Rabbi Cohen has been with this school for 20 years. He built this school from scratch when nobody else thought it was possible. The teachers love him and the kids love him. But he doesn't know how to make nice to Levine and his cronies. Levine won't talk about the new building until we agree to fire Rabbi Cohen."

Only he doesn't even have the nerve to use the word 'fire' - Levine says we should ask him to 'retire early'. Can you believe this guy?"

Esther felt sorry for Mark and asked him, "What can we do?"

"I'll tell you what we can do," Mark hollered. "We can tell this guy to go to hell. Until now, ninety percent of the board members supported Rabbi Cohen. He's an educator's educator! We don't need Levine and we don't need his lousy money."

"I'm not so sure about that," Esther responded quietly after a long pause. "Maybe there could be some kind of compromise. You know, Rabbi Cohen is getting older. Maybe he could use an assistant principal or some other kind of help. Would that satisfy Levine?"

With this Mark erupted. "Whose side are you on? Why should this guy call the shots just because he's got the money? If they fire Rabbi Levine because of this bozo - I'm gone - I tell you - I'm gone."