

Last weekend, Dan Sklar, Emily Watson, Dan Stone and I took 16 7th graders on the 7th grade retreat. We spent a wonderful, Indian summer weekend with them, exploring their ideas about God and Judaism. We talked and played and laughed - and I was, as usual, impressed by their ability to think and explore their feelings about this amazing heritage they inherit.

On Saturday afternoon, one of the parents who joined us asked me why it was necessary to take them away. It is, he pointed out, a lot of work to schlep all these kids to Eisner. What is it about leaving our home base that makes this kind of in-depth thinking possible? Some of the kids had an especially hard time being away from their parents - why did they have to endure separation to have the wonderful class experience?

A great question. And one which we find again in this week's parsha. Why does Abram have to leave home to be able to worship this God?

I think we have to leave home to find ourselves. I think we have to learn to be on our own, to survive the painful isolation and loneliness of separation in order to know how strong we really are. As a therapist, I know that change must be preceded by discomfort, and that real change creates its own discomfort. So Abram must make his way in the world, without the safety net of his father's house, his land, his people. Through this fearful trial, he can create lasting change - in himself or for all of us.

On Saturday afternoon, we asked the kids what they had done on the two hour break they had just finished. They mentioned reading, showers, kickball, catch. Then we asked them what God was doing during their break. They sat stunned for a few minutes, and then one of the kids said God was watching over them and their families. Leaving home allows us to know how much we value those left behind, even as it allows us to know who we are without that proximal support.

So God was right - Abram needed to leave so that he could be strong enough to found a nation. And to teach him - and us - the lesson that where we come from matters, and matters deeply.

Betsy Stone