

Moses, Great Religious Figures, the Wilderness, and Your Career

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

On a Christmas vacation over ten years ago, I went home to Detroit from Los Angeles, where I was practicing law at the time. I was taking a 10-day vacation. Over the course of those ten days, I found myself having trouble getting to sleep every night. When I did get to sleep, I would wake up in the middle of the night and have a difficult time getting back to sleep. All I could think about was how much I disliked my job and the work I was doing. I could not get it off my mind and I felt like I needed to change.

Over those ten days, that was all I thought about. I spoke about it on every chance I got. When I got home from Christmas break, I sent an email to my supervisors in the law firm giving two week's notice. I had no idea what I was going to do; however, I knew that I certainly did not want to remain in the firm any longer—or continue practicing law.

Had I not taken that 10-day vacation, I might have stayed at the law firm another year, or more. It was the break that really gave me the strength and time to think. I was alone in my father's house, in an area where none of my friends were living, and I had time to think, and to be alone. Away from the daily emails and pressure of my cases, I reached a decision that changed my life forever, and resulted in the founding of numerous businesses and companies that have helped millions of people get jobs.

Two of the busiest times of the year for recruiters are the early Fall and then again in January and February. The reason for this is that a lot of people quit their jobs in the summer and then again in early January. Why do so many people quit jobs at this time? *Because it is very common for people to quit jobs right after they take their summer vacation and then again after they take a winter break.*

I am not saying people do not change jobs at other times of the year (of course they do). Nevertheless, the busiest amount of quitting comes at these specific times when people have gone off and had time to think.

A familiar theme of religion and other literature is suffering a crisis, making a trip into the wilderness and emerging changed: In fact, this story is part of the framework of Judeo-Christian religious theology.

- Moses makes a 40 year trip into the wilderness in the Bible.
- Jesus spends 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness.
- Joseph Smith does this prior to writing the Book of Mormon and founding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
- Muhammad does this prior to founding Islam when he travels to the caves around Mecca to meditate.
- Buddha wanders the wilderness for six years seeking the meaning of life.

In each of these episodes, these men were upset about life and they sought seclusion in the wilderness to reach important conclusions about their future. These decisions were so important and fundamental that the men ultimately ended up changing the futures of others as well.

What is it about making a trip into the wilderness that creates such powerful changes in these men? How can it be that the majority of the most significant religious figures in history experienced profound changes only after stepping outside of society and isolating themselves from the world?

One of the most famous biblical stories is the story of Moses in the biblical book of Exodus. Moses was born to Jews in Egypt during the reign of a vicious monarch, Rameses II. The Jews had originally left Israel during a drought and settled in Egypt. While the Jews originally settled in Egypt as friends of the Egyptians, this friendship was soon forgotten and soon the Jews were enslaved by the Egyptians.

At the time Moses was born, Rameses II had declared that all Hebrew children should be killed. Moses' parents were able to hide him for some time; however, this eventually was no longer possible. When he was three months old, Moses' mother put him in a basket and placed him in the Nile River hoping that someone would find him. Incredibly, Rameses II's daughter found him and raised him as her son.

When Moses had grown older, he learned that he was, in fact, a Jew, and not an Egyptian. Not too long later he saw an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moses was infuriated at the way the Jew was being treated and killed the Egyptian. In order to avoid being prosecuted for killing the Egyptian, Moses fled from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula, where he lived for the next forty years. Moses eventually saw a sign (a bush that was on fire but not burning) and when he went to inspect it, he was commanded by God to lead the Jews out of Egypt.

Since the Jews were slaves of the Egyptians, persuading the Pharaoh to let them go was not an easy task. However, God was allegedly very angry by this and sent ten plagues against the Egyptians. The final plague was the killing of the firstborn son of all the Egyptian families. After this, the Pharaoh relented and freed all of the Jews. Despite allowing the Jews to leave, the pharaoh still pursued them. The Jews were eventually trapped at the Red Sea. God wanted to save the Jews and parted the Red Sea so the Jews could escape. As they crossed, God closed up the sea and drowned the Egyptians.

Moses then led the Jews through the desert to Mount Sinai. Here, he descended the mountain alone and received the Ten Commandments directly from God.

The story of Moses share many commonalities with other stories of men who went into the wilderness. For example:

- Moses felt alone and isolated
- Moses felt the existing order was wrong
- Moses felt untouched by God

- Moses felt the need to take action
- Moses did not take action without separating himself from the existing order to think
- Moses took dramatic action
- Action was taken with God's blessings and power, and it changed his life and everyone else's

When I think about all of these men, I cannot but help also think about how much thought the average person puts into making a career change. In fact, when you are in a job you do not like, you are likely go through each of these steps:

You Feel Alone and Isolated. When you are in work and a job that you do not like, the chances are good you will feel alone and isolated. You feel as if the people around you cannot identify with how you feel. Typically people who are unhappy in their jobs do not feel that others around them can understand what they are going through. It is hard to talk to coworkers when you do not enjoy what you are doing. You feel as if there is no one you can speak to or rely on.

One of the worst jobs I ever had was as a garbage man. I was working with a group of men who were unionized and knew that I would likely quit very soon. I did not fit in and felt very alone in the job. Many of my lunches were eaten alone and I could not share in a lot of the conversations and so forth at work. The management where I was working knew that I was there for a "short term" and typically gave me the worst jobs. I felt very alone and very isolated. I can still experience that feeling in the pit of my stomach when I think about it.

You Feel the Existing Order is Wrong. Most people who are interested in looking for other jobs (or are doing so) feel that the management of the organization is not running everything correctly. They feel that the management should be doing something differently and believe that things would be different if management did something in a different way. They do not feel comfortable with the way the company is being operated and want things to change.

It is very common for people who are angry at "the system" or the way a company is being run to "jump around" between jobs. Each new company they go to, impresses them as having something new wrong, or not being everything they expected it to be. Many people who are disenchanted with the way things are working start their own businesses. Many people quit their professions all together.

You Feel Untouched by God. These are some powerful words and I do not mean them in a religious sense, however. What I do mean is that you may feel that you are working in a job where "your heart" or "your spirit" is not in what you are doing. This feeling of having your heart and soul in your work and what you are doing is very real and important. Nothing is more important than feeling energized by your job.

When I am doing certain types of work, the thought of doing the work depresses me a great deal. When I am doing the work, I feel completely de-energized, and do not feel any sense of excitement or anticipation with the work. When I am doing other types of work I feel the opposite. I feel inspired and incredibly excited by the work that I am doing. I feel as if I am playing and not working. When you are doing this sort of work, your heart and spirit is in the work. This is the most important type of work you should be doing and you need to seek out this sort of work.

I have yet to meet someone who does not become "energized" and inspired by doing certain types of work. I have yet to meet someone who does not feel drained, uninspired, and dulled by other types of work. You need to avoid the work that drains your energy and seek out the work that inspires you.

You Feel the Need to Take Action. When someone does not like their job, they feel the need to take action and change what they are doing. You feel the need to do something completely different from what you are currently doing.

When I was growing up, my mother worked for the State of Michigan in a job that was often quite boring and repetitive for her. She and her best friend used to sit around talking and planning about opening up a dude ranch in Wyoming (they were serious). Many of the people I know who are lawyers are always talking about quitting the practice of law, and starting a business doing something else. In fact, most people I know who are in unfulfilling jobs feel the need to take action.

When I was practicing law, I felt the need to take action and do something different. I just did not know what. In fact, none of this even became clear to me until I had quit my job. I just knew that something needed to change.

Since I have made the change away from being an attorney, I feel energized and never feel like things need to change. I feel like I am "on" all of the time and I do not feel like I need another job. When you are in a crisis mode and do not enjoy what you are doing, you feel the need to make a change.

You Separate Yourself from the Existing Order to Think. It is ironic and yet very instructive that so many important decisions in religious texts came after people separated themselves from the existing order to think. Most religious figures actually physically separate themselves by going into caves, the forest, the desert, and so forth. In order to see things differently, they all needed to get away where they were not part of the existing social order—or a product of its influences.

I believe that this particular part of the religious stories is among the most instructive and the most meaningful ones. I know so many attorneys who are incredibly unhappy in their jobs and do not enjoy what they are doing. They are surrounded by other attorneys, and however, cannot possibly see being in a life doing anything else that being an attorney. The attorneys I have known who have made major career changes typically (like me) only did it after extended vacations.

Who knows what happens when we are away from the "daily grind". But you can never really think and see things the way they truly are unless you separate yourself from your life. You would be amazed at what this can do. The thoughts will come to you about what you should do, whether you want them to do, or not. You often need to be away for these thoughts to come.

I cannot stress enough the importance of a long vacation and separation from your day-to-day life if you are seeking to make a profound change in your life. Getting away from what you are doing will give your mind time to process its next course of action. You will see clearly what you want to do next.

You Take Dramatic Action. I have told this story in other articles of mine but it is so fascinating and "on point" that I would like to share it again. Several years ago I was on an 8-day retreat for men and women. The theme of the retreat had something to do with learning ourselves based on how our parents raised us. It was a very good retreat and I enjoyed it immensely. The men and women were each segregated in individual cabins on a large property and prohibited from fraternizing with each other when class was not in session. In addition, there was a period of a few days when none of us were allowed to speak at all. We were not allowed to speak to anyone in the outside world during the retreat (no cell phones, laptops, and so forth were permitted) and there was also no television.

At the end of the retreat the facilitators formed a circle and asked everyone to go around and share what they had gotten out of the retreat. To my astonishment, out of a group of perhaps 15 women in the retreat, 4 of them shared that they had gotten so much out of the retreat that they had decided to divorce their husbands! Each of these women was in her 40s and 50s, and I presumed that they had been married for some time. At least one person I recall stated that he was going to quit his job. It was the isolation that allowed them to reach these conclusions and think.

A few weeks after the retreat, all the participants had a conference call to discuss the changes they had undergone. On the call, a few of the women who were divorcing their husbands chimed in about how much strength the course had given them, and so forth. While it may have been the retreat that gave them the course, my belief is that what really worked wonders on them was the time away from their husbands and daily lives.

Action is Taken With God's Power and Blessing. By "God's power" I mean with spirit. When you are in a profession that you love, you are doing something with "spirit" and energy. When you are in a job you do not like, you are not doing it with any spirit at all. Instead, you are down and not excited.

When I was practicing law, it was all I could do to get out of bed by 8:00 am each morning to get to work by 9:00 am. I could not stop myself from watching the clock on my computer monitor during the day (waiting for the day to end). I would sit there hoping for my boss to leave so I too could leave, and not be the first to leave each evening. I was completely dispirited by the work I was doing. I gained weight. I was cranky and not fun to be around.

When I started in my current job over 10 years ago, I found myself popping out of bed at 4:30 am to start work—I was excited to get to work. I would be working even at 9:00 pm and not even realize that everyone else in the office had gone home. To be short and to the point: I was animated with "spirit" for my work and I was not "dispirited" like I had been in my previous job as an attorney. I loved what I did.

The spirit I have for my work has enabled me to start companies which help people get jobs. It has enabled me to make a real difference in others' lives and feel good about doing it. It has allowed me to feel like I have a purpose in the world.

Conclusions

If you are unhappy in your current job, then the odds are pretty good that you too need to take a trip "into the wilderness" to find your true calling. You often need to separate yourself from the influences of the world to really make a difference in the lives of others and do something meaningful. You need to discover what energizes you and your spirits. You need to understand the best use of your natural gifts and powers on this earth.

The lesson of great religious figures is important to learn from, irrespective of whether you believe in religion or not. They have experienced something that has changed their lives and the lives of millions as well. In fact, the world largely is governed by, united by, and divided by their teachings. All of the greatest religious figures went through the same changes you too may need to go through in your career as well.

THE LESSON

If you are unhappy in your current job, you need to step back and take a break in order to determine your true calling. Separate yourself from the world's influence to make a truly meaningful difference. Discover what energizes you and your spirit, and identify the best use of your natural gifts and abilities. Whether or not you believe in religion, you can learn much from the lessons of great religious figures, as they went through the same changes that you yourself must undertake.