

A Brief Synopsis of
Who Moved My Cheese
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Change can be a tremendously upsetting event, disturbing the fragile comfort of the status quo. Departing from the known down the path of the new often requires a special mindset to dispel the knee-jerk negative thoughts that inherently come to mind and instead embark upon the path of discovery with an open mind and positive outlook. To act as a guide to the unknown, Spencer Johnson wrote a lighthearted parable entitled Who Moved My Cheese as a way for readers to step back and analyze the effects of change on their life from an outside perspective.

It all begins with a gathering of high school friends in Chicago after their high school reunion. They reflect back on the divergent paths their lives have taken and take note of the fact that they often don't want to change when things change. One of them then uses the time to relate the parable of Who Moved My Cheese to the others.

The parable's four principle characters are two mice named Sniff and Scurry and two littlepeople named Hem and Haw. The four of them live in a maze and spend their days scurrying about in the eternal pursuit of cheese, however each of the four has his own unique approach to this hunt. Sniff is extremely good at sniffing out cheese, while Scurry specializes in scurrying after newly discovered cheese. Hem and Haw are not so single-minded in their cheese pursuit, but rather spend more time philosophizing about the hunt.

One day the four stumble onto a piece of cheese so large that Hem and Haw declare that they shall never again need to search for cheese. They become accustomed to this constant source of cheese and push aside any thought of ever having to find another piece. The two mice, however, never stop exploring their surroundings and are constantly attuned to change in their environment. Meanwhile the supply of cheese is

slowly dwindling and one day this chunk of cheese is finally exhausted and the four are left with nothing. Sniff and Scurry are able to take this new development in stride and scamper off in search of a new cheese source. However, Hem and Haw are not able to cope with such an abrupt life-altering change and instead have to sit down and take stock of their new state of affairs. Haw eventually is able to overcome his fears and follow Sniff and Scurry's lead of wandering off into the maze in search of new cheese, while Hem remains behind, laboring under the delusion that somehow, someday, his cheese will someday be replaced.

Haw is at first frightened by the change in affairs that has led him to wander the hallowed halls of the maze in search of new cheese. He eventually realizes, however, that he is enjoying the change of pace and that the hunt really isn't so bad. Eventually Haw catches up with Sniff and Scurry and the new piece of cheese they had discovered.

The moral of the story is that each of us will experience change at some point in our lives, and we will all deal with it in different ways. Some of us will never let ourselves become satisfied with the status quo and instead will constantly be on the lookout for change in our environment so that we will have advanced warning of impending change. Others will allow themselves to become blinded to the world around themselves while they focus on the gluttony of the familiar and comfortable. They will not notice the downward spiral of the source of their comfort until it is all gone and nothing remains. Then some will reluctantly move on, driven by necessity, in search of something new, while others will remain behind in the fruitless hope that their comfort will somehow be restored. The ones who move on will have a chance to find a new source of comfort, while those that remain behind are doomed to failure.

I found the book to be entertaining, however, I would stop short of saying that it influenced my life in any dramatic way. My life has been defined by tremendous change, and I have learned to never be satisfied with the status quo, to always strive for more, so to me this book is simply a reiteration of the morals I have learned from life. For others, the book has the potential to be a useful resource to help someone cope with unexpected and unwelcome change, providing a way of externalizing the conflicting emotions caused by change and allowing one to step back and evaluate one's life from the perspective of Sniff, Scurry, Hem, and Haw. By providing four easily-relatable characters, Johnson helps the reader to characterize his or her own reactions to change in terms of one of these characters and evaluate the long-term consequences of those actions. However, ultimately, the Hem's of the world, paralyzed by fear and distracted by comfort, will never be able to gain the strength to break free and scamper down the maze in pursuit of new cheese.