

Shlach Lecha – 5782

As I sit down to write my D'var Torah for the week, I am churning inside. It has been such a momentous week for us. Twice this week, I sat glued to my iPad for three hours as I tried to get some work done AND watch the hearings of the January 6th Committee of the U. S. Congress. As the hours ticked by, there was one astounding revelation after another about the perversion of democracy south of us by the duly elected then-president of the United States. I kept on thinking about how the history books will pose the question of how the American people could have been so willfully blind to the foibles and picadilloes of Donald Trump and not known or understood that it would end badly for them. Then, as if that were not enough, proof of just how much had changed because of him, the U. S. Supreme Court unexplainably overturned the most significant precedent-setting piece of legislation in the last fifty years, Roe Versus Wade, thereby declaring that half the population did not have control over their own destinies. One has to shake one's head and wonder how they could limit the power of the state to determine gun ownership and usage and then the very next day, completely reverse themselves and rule that the state COULD limit the rights of women.

Go figure! But now here I am reading about the episode of the spies and how HaShem told Moshe Rabeinu to send spies out ahead of the camp into the promised land and scout it out. The spies came back and did not report to Moses as a group. They each obviously had an opportunity to relate what they saw and how they felt about those observations. All of the spies agreed that the land was flowing with milk and honey, and it was a wonderful, plentiful, bountiful place to live. But all but two saw these powerful men, so they said, that they felt incapable of overcoming in order for the Children of

Israel to make it their home and live where they had been promised and how they had been promised. There is wailing and crying and protestations of remorse for having left Egypt and slavery. So, what does HaShem do? The text tells us he was outraged. He was filled with anger at the lack of confidence in the people and their inability to see the way ahead as theirs to grab, not shelter from. So why do we read about Caleb and Joshua? Why does the text share their names and their positions? After all, we are Am Yisrael, but the spies each have names mentioned pointedly at the beginning of the parsha.

As we journey through life, we are individuals, each of us trying to make our way through the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Far too often, we find it easier to hide behind others, agree with the crowd rather than taking a position and standing up for what is right. I well remember a movie I saw a very long time ago called the Power of One about a young man in South Africa who spoke truth to power and how that played out. We all of us probably know enough about the story of David and his fight against Goliath and who won in that battle. Our media have been filled over the years with the stories of men and women who have taken a stand against injustice.

What is significant today is that not all of those men and women were immediately successful in their pursuit of justice and what is right. Nelson Mandela languished in jail on Robbin's Island until the events in his country caught up with the fight for freedom. Martin Luther King died before he could see the promised land. Volodymyr Zelensky is on the tv screens all around the world even now. Liz Cheney's stand against Donald Trump is in stark contrast to those of everyone else. Moshe Rabeinu, for most of his adult life, was unafraid of doing what was necessary to solve the problems of his people.

What do these towering figures all have in common? They are not taking for granted the Power of One. Joshua and Caleb were ultimately rewarded for their belief in the power of HaShem by being allowed to enter the Promised Land. Not even Moshe was able to do that. But they were allowed to live out the forty years of wandering and lead the Children of Israel into the promised land, proud and unafraid, as they had been in today's parsha.

So why does the parsha today end with the verses about the Tzetses that we are commanded to wear and what role has that played in our tradition? It is easy to forget because today, unlike a generation ago, far too many boys, and increasingly, girls, don't have to don them as part of their training for bar mitzvah and wherever you might go to daven, if you do go, some morning, more often than not, only a handful of men and / or women will be wearing them. Putting on tefillin is part of the morning ritual and included in the Siddur which we read during Berachot HaShachar. We thank HaShem for giving us life and we kiss the phylacteries, the tefillin, to remind us of our FAITH in HaShem, a faith which enables us to confront those slings and arrows that life throws us our way.

The uproar over the events of this week, about gun control, about abortion, about democracy and the values that are being waged over each, requires us to search for strength and insight into our future path. Sitting down there, on the bench where Harold & Marcia are sitting, used to be Jack Silverstein. Oftentimes, when Jack would sense that I was perplexed or troubled, because he was my first employer at the age of 13, he would remind me of the three P's.... perseverance, perspicacity, and patience. His wisdom and soft-spoken ways were often a consolation to me, and we need to be reminded of them now. And that the Power of One.....each of us, as

individuals, can make a difference by how we respond to the challenges of life. And this week has provided us with monumental challenges.....just like those spies we read of this morning. WE ought not to wander in the desert, but charge ahead full steam and grab on tight, as we sing every day..... Eitz Chaim He.....the Torah is a strength because it shows us the way. Shabbat Shalom.