



As a rabbi I am always trying to connect Torah to contemporary life. Sometimes that connection is a struggle and other times, like this week, it is immediately apparent. This Shabbat we read *Parashat Shelach* from the Book of Numbers.

In this portion Moses, upon God's command, sends a representative of each of the 12 tribes to scout out the land of Canaan. Canaan is the Israelites' destination on the journey out of Egypt. It is, as it were, the light at the end of the dark tunnel of escaping from slavery. But the scouts do not give a glowing report. They say that the land is flowing with milk and honey and they bring back samples of ripe fruit grown from the land, but they also provide an ominous report. They speak about the danger awaiting the people. They describe the people as giants who made them feel as small as grasshoppers. Two scouts, Caleb and Joshua, give a different, more optimistic report. They say that the Israelites are surely strong enough to enter the land and prevail. The other men retort, saying, "The country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers." (Numbers, 13:32). The Israelites respond to this report by crying and wishing they could return to Egypt.

Oh, how we can relate to this piece of Torah! Many of us are scouting the newly opened landscape as Covid restrictions are lifted and reporting back what we find to family and friends. Others of us stay back and await to hear the reports of those venturing forth. After a friend has gone to a restaurant we ask, "How was it?" A family member takes an airplane trip and we eagerly ask, "did you feel safe?" The reports and feelings are mixed. "It was so lovely to eat out with friends, but I was exhausted afterwards." "Flying to my ill family member felt just fine but I was not allowed in the hospital to visit when I got there."

Sometimes we feel like Caleb and rejoice in the long-awaited freedom. We have faith in our strength and the efficacy of the vaccines. Other times the new choices feel overwhelming and we want to return to the cocoon of quarantine like the Israelites who wanted to return to a familiar life in Egypt. Other times we just want to cry. We are exhausted, confused and traumatized by over a year of living with a pandemic. We are scared about re-surfacing, we do not feel safe, and our nervous systems are not used to all the stimuli we are encountering again. We relate to the scouts who imagine getting devoured by the new land.

So, what do we do? We do not need to end up like the Israelites who are subjected to 40 years of wandering in the desert. Instead, we are patient and forgiving of ourselves and others. We put on a mask with a vaccinated friend who is not ready to remove hers. Once we are vaccinated, we push ourselves to begin to enter situations that were not safe before vaccination. As we emerge from our cocoons, we allow ourselves the rest and space needed to re-adjust. We recognize our anger about how the world has changed and perhaps how it has stayed the same. We grieve when the light we find at the end of the tunnel is not what we had hoped. And all the while we give thanks for the delicious fruit we can now enjoy.

And lastly, we reach out for help when we need it. The entire team at JSS is available to support you, your loved ones and the larger community at this time of transition.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Renee Bauer