

Shelach Lecha June 5, 2021

This is Pride Shabbat. When I received the GJC Shabbat update on Tuesday, I noticed that the Charry had a Dvar dedicated to Pride Shabbat and that Dorshei's service was dedicated to Pride Shabbat. Masorti's contribution to this special occasion was missing so when Sylvia sent out the notice on Wed about what still needed assignments, I was happy to sign up for the Dvar- well happy and nervous because I usually give myself at least three weeks to prepare. Not this time. I actually had no set notion of what I would say about Pride Shabbat but I knew it was very important to acknowledge. Luckily it was not a far stretch to connect this weeks parsha Shelach Lecha with Pride.

The other day, in preparation for a bike ride, I put on my rainbow wrist sweatband given out at the Sixers game last month. During my ride, as my mind wandered, which it

always does, but especially on bike rides, I began to ask myself - what if someone sees me wearing this wristband, assumes I am a lesbian, is homophobic and beats me up.- imagine a tree with lots of branches always rustling around — that is my brain. After I thought about getting beat up, I thought about fear and bravery. All one has to do is study about the Stonewall Riots or any march or fight for justice and you will learn about brave people. Then I thought about being a Jew and the history and current state of anti-Semitism and I was reminded again of what it means to live in fear. I think about how the Black Lives Matter movement grew out of people tired of living in fear. And I think about how much fear I live in and to what extent I am not even conscious of this fear I embody.

It turns out, eight years ago, on the 40th anniversary of becoming a Bat Mitzvah, I celebrated here in the minyan,

family members came from out of town, we hosted a nice kiddish. Luckily thanks to computers, it is easy to save and then search for past divrei Torah and much to my surprise, I wrote one on Shelah Lecha. I could have reread that one, I mean who remembers what someone wrote 8 years ago but It also turns out my questions about this parsha are slightly different today.

Here is the brief overview:

In this parsha we learn that 12 spies, one man from each tribe, went to Canaan from Egypt to make sure the land was suitable and safe. According to the JPS commentary, it was not G-ds plan to send the spies but an initiative that came from the people, which Moses approved. G-d had already scouted the land and decided this was the right place for the Israelites to live but the Israelites did not trust G-d. The spies wanted to check if the land was good or evil, meaning, would

it be possible to grow food, they also checked on the people who lived there, were they weak or strong, they also planned to bring back a sample of the fruit of the land.

Ten spies were negative about the land and two spies were positive Joshua and Caleb. Commentators tell us that is because Joshua and Caleb kept their faith in Gd the entire time unlike the other spies. Because of their lack of faith the Israelite were punished and spent 40 years wandering.

Shelach Lekha concludes with Moses instructing the Israelites regarding setting aside challah, the observance of the Sabbath, how to treat strangers, and the laws of tzitzit.

In his commentary on this parsha in The Heart of Torah, Rabbi Shai Held starts off by saying” There is something profoundly tragic about the Book of Numbers: A people liberated from slavery, protected by a faithful God, and promised a good life in a land flowing with milk and honey,

simply cannot overcome its fears, its lack of faith and its inability to trust.”

It is tragic that it is so hard to overcome fear, lack of faith, and to trust God. We grow impatient with the state of our lives, with the state of the world - Clearly and obviously we do not and cannot control the schedule of things outside of our control. God has his/her/their own schedule of how things should play out.

The spies report “we cannot attack that people for it is stronger than we” And as Shai Held points out, the spies go as far as Hebron near where Abraham was promised by Gd that he would inherit the land and still the spies do not have faith or trust the Israelites will be okay. The Israelites were impatient and lacked faith that Moses would come down from Sinai with the tablets and built a Golden Calf and the spies,

representing the Israelites distrusted what they saw in Canaan and refused to believe God was with them. Shai Held and others have noted that when one has been enslaved or traumatized in some way “fear displaces trust and faithlessness carries the day.”

Held posits the question posed by the text is “whether what we imagine possible is limited to what we see before us or whether we can discern possibilities not immediately apparent to the eye”. This is the case for the spies where Caleb and Joshua saw what the other spies saw but they could also imagine the positive possibilities, the other spies could only focus on possible danger.

In circling back to Pride Shabbat, Most of you probably know that this is Pride Month which is why we have Pride Shabbat. And it is Pride month because of the police raid at the

Stonewall Inn, a gay bar, on June 27, 1969. Fed up with police treatment, the gay community rioted for a number of days. This watershed event led to the ever evolving LBGTQIA movement and to the yearly parade which began in NYC and expanded exponentially. The parade and all the parades are a sign of unity. The LBGTQIA community marketing with allies. But it is not without controversy. For instance if you have been following the news, this year in NY the question arose - should LBGTQIA police be allowed to march as police (no for the board, yes by some community members, lots of resignations from the board) Has the march become too corporate, yes, no, a counter march was organized that is less commercial and more grassroots- which is how the original parade started.

To answer Shai Held's question "whether what we imagine possible is limited to what we see before us or whether we

can discern possibilities not immediately apparent to the eye".

Some history has shown that it is not faith or trust that inspires confidence in possibility and/or change, it is activism, for some it is not either/or, it is not binary, it is all of it, faith, trust, activism, love and the necessity for change because the status quo is not okay. This is true for LBGTQIA people, for African Americans, for migrants, you name it and likely the status quo is not okay.

For the Israelites, the generation had to die and a new generation born to be ready to enter the promised land. Every time we get to some version of a promised land, there are new challenges, new struggles, one step forward, two steps back. Pride Month teaches us to continue fighting for our rights, to continue being allies, to believe when you cannot see it yet. To feel the possibility of a better day.

Shabbat Shalom

