



Torah for Turbulent Times: "From Anticipation to Disappointment, and Back Again"

For a full year I've had the pleasure of studying Torah together with my daughter in preparation for her bat mitzvah, which was scheduled for next weekend. There was much anticipation in our hearts and in our household, as we were counting down the days. Flights and venues were booked. A deposit was put down for the DJ. The invitations arrived. And then, so did the pandemic. After some tears, we decided to postpone until next year. Then, camps were cancelled for the summer. What next? Disappointment set in. Summer? Who really knows what we'll be doing now. With a new bat mitzvah date set for a year from now, blessings of continued good health, a mix of a little prayer, hope and luck - we're back again, to anticipation.

This coming Shabbat begins the Book of Numbers, known as *B'midbar* in our Torah cycle. *B'midbar* translates to "wilderness." What a place to be in! It's wild, dangerous, unprecedented and full of unknowns. The origin story of our ancestors is one of transitions, first from slavery to freedom, and then from wandering in the wilderness to arriving at a place they could call home.

Our collective people were born of anticipation, yearning for the taste of freedom. Leaving Egypt was no "walk in the park" and soon enough many were disappointed. Once across the Red Sea and on the shores of freedom it didn't take long until the kvetching began. "How much longer? Why did you bring us to this desert to die? What's to eat and drink?" Disappointment parched their souls until they arrived at a small mountain. There, on Mt. Sinai, as the story goes, G-d spoke, revealing the Torah. While it would still be another 40 years, anticipation was born anew.

We're back to counting down the days. How many days until our holiday of Shavuot? Ten. How many days until the bat mitzvah? About 365. While some aspects of life are slowly returning, they remain at a minimized capacity. How much longer will life be like this? We really don't know.

Meanwhile, what can we do? We can heed the science and stay safe. We can take care of each other. We can dream up plans. As I imagine our ancestors must have done during all those years of wandering, we can take one step and one day at a time. And, we can anticipate what comes next...

-Rabbi Mark