



Torah for Turbulent Times **"First Steps"**

Is that rain I saw this morning? Amen, we sure needed it! What a pleasant, brief reprieve from the heat and a joy to hear the pitter patter on the roof. It made me think of a song lyric, "When the rain falls, it doesn't fall on just one person's house." For good (or sometimes for not), we're all in it together. While it is certainly true that on the one hand, each of us is an individual with a unique experience of life. On the other hand, just like the rain, much of life impacts us all, as a collective. Be it as a family, household, community, town, state or country, we are all interconnected. Just knowing or feeling this can be a comfort when we're facing uncertainty or confronting fear.

This past Shabbat we discussed the Torah story of the twelve scouts who were sent into the unknown to check out the land and to "strengthen themselves." For forty days (a favorite Biblical number) they explored, only to return to camp with devastating news. Facing uncertainty and fear, they reported that the men inhabiting the land were giants. The way they expressed this says a lot about how they were feeling in the face of their own unprecedented time. "We looked like grasshoppers to ourselves and so we must have looked to them as well." (Numbers 13:33) This truly upset the collective people of Israel, who then stayed up all night weeping. They railed against Moses and Aaron. You'll remember this trope, "Why did you bring us here?! If only we had died in Egypt..." The scouts' report truly frightened and unnerved the people. They longed to go back to how things were. It's hard not to look back. Almost like it's hard for us not to look back to our lives, pre-pandemic.

And just at the right time, another perspective is offered. Two of the twelve scouts, Joshua and Caleb, step forward and say, "It's a good land, have no fear." (14:8-9) Have no fear. In my opinion the leaders are not saying there is no fear. Rather, it's real, but don't let it frame, paralyze or control the experience of taking the next essential

steps. The journey before each of us is different, but in some ways it's the same, like the rain that falls upon our homes and gardens.

As human beings, we have highly social needs. Knowing that we're in this as one, sticking together, leaning on, and supporting each other, can give us just the nudge we need. The nudge to reframe our story in a way that is helpful, perhaps cautionary, but not subservient to fear. The nudge to take our steps cautiously, for as the saying goes, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." (Lao Tzu)

-Rabbi Mark