

Sunday, June 5, 2016 D'var at TBZ June 18. 2016

In just a few weeks, in fact on 4th of July weekend, we will read *parsha shelach l'cha*. It includes part of the story about the spies with which some of you may be familiar. The Israelites had trekked through the wilderness for almost 40 years. They were at the threshold of Canaan, the land that God had promised to the patriarchs. Moses sent 12 men, one from each tribe, to go into the land and explore it. What is the land like? Are the people who settled there strong or weak? Few or many? And what about the land itself: is it fat or lean? Are there trees and vegetation or not?

All except 2 of the spies returned with a negative report. As unpleasant as the wilderness had been, they had become accustomed to it and quite frankly-spoiled by the way God took care of their every need during those years.

This generation of Israelites was frightened and rather than having to wage war and then settle a new and unfamiliar land, they wanted to return to Egypt.

In their negative report, the spies described the land as a "**Land that devours her inhabitants**". *Eretz ochelet yoshveha* - There are many commentaries on this verse, but one is particularly interesting to me, now, at the time of my ordination at the age of 67! Reb Yitzhak Kalish from Vorka, was an 18th century Polish rabbi. He makes a drash, an interpretation, on the language of "yoshveha". Since-the word for "inhabitants" is the same root as the word for "sitting" the Rebbe reads the verse as follows: "The Land of Israel devours those that sit in the same place." Or in other words, someone who is not willing to grow and change will not merit the Land of Israel.

I have already been blessed with 67 years of walking through the world, wearing a variety of hats and working at a variety of jobs. Every experience I've had, every encounter with another human soul, every struggle of my own or of beloved family and friends, have all come together to help me understand that as a human being, and now, as a rabbi, I want to "*be*" Torah- to

walk through the world living and sharing the wisdom I have garnered throughout my 67 years and specifically during the seven years of studying our sacred texts in *chevruta*, with peer colleagues, with teachers, and as a community. Perhaps the special gift I can now embrace from the rabbinical school at Hebrew College is that I have developed my own Torah to share, to teach and to live.

Last Monday, the 2nd day of Shavuot, we observed Yizkor. The next day I attended a funeral. With those two consecutive days praying for the souls of our departed loved ones and then Orlando on top of that, I was able really to focus on the words of *ale mole rachamim*, which I heard so many times one day after the next. In just the first 5 words, I found an articulation which is the source of certainty about the way I've tried always to live my life but will perhaps be more empowered with my new title.

אל מלא רחמים God full of compassion, full of mercy;

שוכן במרומים who dwells above?! Wait a minute! *REALLY?* Our God dwells above? In the heavens?! Not down here on earth with us and where we need our God to be??

My God is not on high. My God dwells in the hearts and souls of whoever will let God in. That, I believe is my task-no, bringing God “down to earth” so to speak, is our task- together.

I believe that each one of us has her own unique spark of the divine within herself. My divinely inspired task is to help *you* see that spark within yourself. When we embrace that fact that each one of us is created B'tzelem Elohim, in God's image; we will practice compassion because God is compassionate. We will take care of the hungry and the poor-because God does those things. In those ways, *through our own actions*, we will bring the One God, creator of all life, down from on high, to earth, where God is needed most.

We are reminded in this week's Torah portion, Naso, that from its very beginnings, the "one nation" of Israel has been comprised of twelve distinct tribes. Each tribe had its own stone on the High Priest's breastplate, its own flag, its designated place in line when the people of Israel

journeyed through the desert, its designated position when they camped around the Sanctuary and finally, each tribe was allotted its own territory, land *suited for its particular vocation*.

We, all of humanity, can also become united-as a world -wide community with the same common goals. When we honor and celebrate each other's differences, within that paradox of unity and individuality, each one of us will thrive.

Who we *are* is God's gift to us. What we *become* is a gift we give to ourselves, to each other and to God.

May each of us be able to see and love the blessings of who we are and ultimately to share with each other, who we are constantly becoming.