

Rabbi Fine

Sinai Annual Meeting 5771

In the Torah portion for this week, Shlach Lecha, as the Israelites are camped in the desert, God tells Moshe to send 12 men to scout out the Land of Canaan. Moshe does so, sending a leader from each tribe on the mission to check out the land and its inhabitants. The leaders of the Israelites are asked to look forward from Sinai where they have received the Torah to what lies ahead for them, just as our own leaders here are asked to look forward from where we stand tonight at Sinai to see what lies ahead for our community.

In the desert, the Israelite scouts return 40 days later from their mission with a cluster of grapes so large it had to be carried on a staff between two of them, as well as pomegranates and figs. When they return to the community, they show them the fruit and tell the Israelites; “we came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.”

At this point in the story, the scouts have not yet given their varying spins on how the Israelites should respond to this new information, and I believe they have exemplified what we ask of our leaders here at Temple Sinai as well. There are two aspects to your role.

We need our leaders to look forward with vision, seeing beyond where we are now, and to see the tremendous possibilities of where we are headed. We need our leaders to work together to bring tastes of this future fruit to our kahal, our community. At the same time, we need our leaders to see with clear eyes the real and significant challenges that we face in arriving and living in this future place.

Holding these two elements hand in hand – the possibilities and the challenges – is the first essential task we ask of our Temple Sinai lay leadership. The second stage is equally important – how we then respond to what we see before us.

In the desert, 10 of the Israelite scouts respond by spreading fear among the community about the challenges ahead. Speaking of the giants they encountered in the land of Canaan they say, “We looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them.”

They responded from a place of fear and doubt. Two of the scouts, Caleb and Joshua responded differently, saying “let us by all means go up, and we shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.” Caleb and Joshua responded with courage and hope.

Tonight, we are at a moment of transition of leadership, which for me is bittersweet. I want to express my gratitude to the outgoing board members for their service to our community. In particular I want to thank our outgoing president Michael Silverman.

I've had the pleasure of meeting with Michael every other week over the past two years on Thursday mornings, along with our very regular work together on all sorts of Sinai business.

Not everyone is aware how much time and effort has gone into Michael's service for our community. It has indeed been very significant. Michael has given greatly of his skills, time and effort to leading Sinai during a period of transition. I am deeply appreciative of this Michael, and equally thankful that we have had the chance to get to know each other personally in a way we would not have otherwise. I'm very happy you will continue to be involved by leading a strategic planning process in the year ahead, something I think you have particular skills with.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Robin Dale who is moving on from her work in our office. While Robin has been a paid staff member, she has given of her time and heart in a way that is way beyond that of an employee. It is clear to me that Robin's dedication to serving Temple Sinai is inextricably tied to what it means to her to be Jewish – giving of oneself for the benefit of community. We will miss your daily commitment and the playfulness and humor you have brought to the shul. As with Michael, I am very glad you will be staying deeply involved as a lay leader, and I am grateful to have had this chance to work with you and develop a friendship that I know will continue beyond your working here.

I likewise want to welcome our incoming board members and leadership. I am excited to work with our new president Myranne and her executive committee and board. We have been building a lot of momentum for positive communal change in the past two years. I think that like the Israelites we are in a great position of being able to see more clearly than before our challenges and also our opportunities.

Unlike the Israelites, I don't think we have forty years of wandering in the desert ahead of us. Now is the time. I look forward to working with our lay leadership to make the coming year one of real progress in a great variety of realms. Like Caleb and Joshua, I believe we are poised to respond to bridge the gap between where we are and where we are headed with courage and with hope.

Ken Yehi Ratzon. May it be so.