

## **D'Var Torah Eikev**

I want to talk about privilege. And its complications. It's something that I think many of us have felt lately—how do we respond thoughtfully, compassionately, and with integrity in response to The Black Lives Matter movement, to the way the pandemic has impacted our country, and to where we can do better as Jews, both in terms of how we are within our community and how we engage with the larger community of our towns and beyond.

I have these conversations with some of you, my fellow congregants and we've struggled about how to feel safe. When and where to speak, when to be silent so that the voices of others can emerge and be spotlighted, and what actions to take. And for me, what I've noticed is that the benefit of privilege is safety, something I am very grateful for as a parent of a little one. And yet, how uncomfortable is this privilege, which affords me the luxury of staying home and taking care of my two-year-old. It is hard to at the same time feel thankfulness, and also guilt. How is it that I have this, but so many others do not? How do I use my privilege so that no families have to compromise safety for economics, safety for education, or safety for any other right that we all deserve as human-beings?

It feels as if we too, just like our ancestors, are standing on a precipice, ready to cross over into new territory, though ours right now is more of an ideological landscape, whereas our ancestors were about to finally enter the land G-d promised after 40 years of wandering.

Right now, it is hard not to compare our America, or at least the perception many of us had about our great nation (and perhaps we still do in some way) to the land that G-d promised to deliver us. In Eikev, our Torah portion, Moses recounts the flaws of his fellow travelers and gives them instructions on how to live, honoring G-d's promise.

He reminds us that we have been granted a flourishing land full of abundance and in order to enjoy it, we have to hold up our end of the bargain. Moses reminds us we have been arrogant, we have doubted, and we have caused undo suffering because of our stiff-necked-ness. But yet, G-d is holding up G-d's part of the deal, of bringing us to the land, in spite of ourselves, and our human nature. And here we are today in America where me has become more important than we.

Rabbi Shira Milgram argues that now it is imperative that "We need to move beyond, "It's mine," "I earned it," "I worked for it," "My ancestors won it for me," or "God promised." We need to shift our perspective somehow from ownership to gift. The land, the water, springs and fountains, wheat and barley, vines, figs and pomegranates, olive trees and honey are all gift."

In these days of the pandemic, I've come to realize all the gifts I have, of being able to stay home with my daughter at this time and take her on socially distant hiking and park adventures. The gift of having a good friend to go out and venture out as women, the gift of creeks, sunflowers, conversations. The gift of a house, a partner, a garden, a CSA share, of connections on the phone, on the computer, and even through car windows. I'm grateful for my daughter, for her ability to show me how to see things to delight at all the time.

It is very easy to forget, to grow comfortable, complacent, and even think that what we have is somehow related to our value or what we have done to get it for ourselves. It is a strange thing to revel in this and then to realize just a few miles away, other families do not have diapers, food, and have to risk their lives daily to earn a living to care for their families. Or that their livelihood is now gone. That I do not need to be afraid of police or worry that one day, my daughter will not receive the same education, health care, or countless other things as a result of what she looks like.

While I am very easily able to name what I am grateful for, the challenge comes in knowing how to be a vehicle of consciousness and justice, because when others are suffering, we too our suffering. I think when Moses is instructing the people to love and follow G-d, it is more than just a prayer to be spoken. The prayer he speaks of is action. It is living and becoming the words that we meditate upon. To be compassionate and to love requires doing. To forgive requires action, to learn requires responsibility.

I think as Jews, we have always felt the weight of this covenant—after all it was written on stone and carried down a mountain—and whether we take it literally, figuratively, metaphorically, it is a felt sense of connection. Now more than ever, it is time for us to breathe and care for each other and create the world that we wish to enter into. Just as many of us are examining and questioning and wandering or wondering, we have resources in our texts, in our temples, in each other and in ourselves. May we all be the peace that we seek and really see the gifts we have been granted to bring the light of change into our world. May these days of ours serve as a reminder of what we all have endured, what we all continue to endure, and how we make an impact in our lives and in the lives of all around us, and the generations to come. Moses reminds us, it is a good time to remember what we have been promised and perhaps it is also a time for us to make promises to ourselves, to our loved ones, to our community, to our environment, and to our country. Shabbat Shalom!