

Yashar koach! Thank you for the very thoughtful Torah that you've shared here this morning.

Harlowe, you talked about how when our ancestors scouted the land to see if they could enter it and live there safely, they were overcome by fear of what they saw there - and therefore were unable to move forward toward the life that they so wanted for themselves and for their children. You talked about how while fear *can* be a survival reaction, it can also sometimes hold us back. BUT - you taught us - learning how to move through our fears, to be afraid, but to **act** anyway, to **try** anyway - is a significant opportunity to grow.

Jacob, you explored the idea of anger. You suggested that God's anger was way over the top in a moment when our people could have benefited from a more calm, compassionate God. You helped us think about the consequences of expressing anger in the form of rage and what it could look like for us to grow our ability to control or focus our anger. Perhaps God's learning here, as encouraged by Moses, is a lesson for us, as we learn how to best express our anger, too.

In fact, through this very human experience of fear and anger and how we choose to respond to these, we can see how the story of Sh'lach l'cha echoes through the times that we are living right now.

So as we know, our people are in the wilderness when Moses tells the 12 spies to go and do reconnaissance in the land that they're journeying toward to find out: are the people who dwell there weak or strong, few or many? Are the towns open or fortified? Is the soil rich or poor?

And they go and do as Moses asked. But when they come back, they try to convince the people not to continue on this fool's errand of entering the land, for, they believe, they will surely die trying.

To help make their case, they say: עַמְלֵק יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב וְהַחִתִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהָאֱמֹרִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּהָר וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב  
עַל-הַיָּם וְעַל יַד הַיַּרְדֵּן:

Amalekites dwell in the Negev; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites inhabit the hill country; and Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan.”

They paint this fearful picture of enemies on every border - literally no way to get to this land of freedom and redemption that they yearn for. They say: we cannot enter *ki chazak hu mimenu*, because they are so much stronger than we are. We can feel their fear, their resignation, even their anger weighing them down in despair.

But, our ancestors were a little confused by what they were seeing, evidenced by the text itself.

It turns out that they delivered this part of their report in a very telling way. We tend to translate their words as that the Amalekites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites surrounded the land. But in our text, the Hebrew word used for each of these peoples is written

in the singular, not the plural. An “Amalekite” is in the south, the Hittite, the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, as if they were imagining one giant person, much bigger than they were, blocking their way home. One person up against a bully who could surely take them. Which makes their fear and their panicked rage make a lot more sense. They were projecting how they saw themselves. They didn’t just feel small or weak - they each felt alone.

See, even though the Israelites had once before come up against the Amalekites in the wilderness, the text describes their victory over them due only to Moses holding up his staff - and not to their collective action. These were not yet a people who knew how to stand shoulder to shoulder at a moment of crisis. So they each saw themselves as just one person - and how could one person go up alone against someone so much stronger than them? They allowed their fear to isolate them from each other and their anger to make them retreat.

We can see echoes of this encounter in our world today as we often find ourselves up against powers far greater than any one of us. And *maybe* we can learn from our ancestors what we might do differently now lest we find ourselves sentenced to another 40 years of wandering **this** wilderness.

This weekend is Pride Shabbat - a joyful celebration of our LGBTQ family and an affirmation that every person, created in the image of God, should be able to be their whole beautiful selves always. And so through that lens, I want to tell you a different story, but one with components similar to parshat Shelach L’chah. In this story, there’s also a land that we yearn to live in - a land of greater freedom and love, gentleness, compassion, and safety for all people. And in this story, there are also strong and powerful adversaries trying their best to prevent us from making it to such a redemptive land.

But unlike parshat Sh’lach l’cha, this is a story whose ending is so far unwritten.

So, here’s what’s happening: in the context of their apparent witch hunt against transgender people, the federal government has subpoenaed NYU Langone hospital, for the records of minors who have received gender affirming care in their facility. Gender affirming care often refers to psychological counseling and puberty blockers so that a young person, in long term conversation with their parents and their doctor can choose to live in a body that reflects who they know themselves to be. Research has shown that such interventions can reduce suicidality of young trans people by 73%.

The government is threatening the doctors that have treated these young people with massive fines, losing their licences, and even prison sentences. For caring for their patients. This administration has already intimidated NYU Langone into not providing this life saving care for trans kids anymore and now they’re going for the jugular.

And in the process, they will make public the private information of these young people, including their names and other identifying information, putting these beautiful, brave children at risk of being targets of ignorance and hate. And this isn’t theoretical for us. This is impacting

some of our own incredible CBE families. There's good reason to be afraid, there's good reason to be angry. And *chazak hu mimenu* - those leading this charge are incredibly powerful and it won't be easy to stop them. There's a world we yearn for that envelops each person in dignity and love, a world where we protect our children - and actions like this threaten our ability to manifest that world.

So what can we learn from our ancestors and from your teachings this morning?

Well, Harlowe, you taught us that we need to ask: Is our fear keeping us safe or holding us back? Can we find a way through our fear, to be afraid but to take action anyway? And what about our anger? Is it dangerous or helpful here? Jacob, the word "anger" comes from the Norse word for grief. So we might ask: Is our anger coming out of us as a flood of rage that hurts us and others and doesn't change anything, or can we channel our anger into a powerful expression of grief over this cruelty and a demand for the world that our children and all children deserve?

Our ancestors allowed their fear and anger to control them, to trick them into seeing themselves as weak and most destructively, as each one person alone. But there is another way.

The deadline for NYU Langone to release all these files was this week, **BUT** a bunch of impacted families - even in their fear and in their anger - have stood up - together. They filed a class action suit together with the ACLU, the NYCLU and Lambda Legal.

We have some basic human instincts when we feel afraid and angry. One is to withdraw and isolate ourselves and another is to reach out to others. What if we learn from our parsha that the path of isolation and retreat in the face of fear and anger is not our path? **These** families have chosen to stand shoulder to shoulder before those who would block their way. Because each one of them is definitely weaker than the federal government, but together? Well, the ending of this story is still unwritten.

But we do know the ending that the spy, Caleb, tried to write for his people. He responded to **their** fear and anger with the words: *aloh na'aleh ... ki yachol nuchal* - let us go up there now, for together, we can surely do this.

Ya know, it's interesting. Moses asked the spies to come back with the answers to his questions, but Ramban taught: "They gave an answer to all that Moses commanded them to learn, except for one question: *whether the people in the land are few or many.*" They just couldn't get their heads around that idea.

But Moses knew. He wanted our ancestors to see and realize that in fact, **they** were the many, the massive, the multitudes. That was how they would have been able to move through their fear and their anger, and toward the world that they yearned for - by joining together in common cause.

We're going to try to do the same. This Pride Shabbat we're inviting each of us to see ourselves as part of something bigger than ourselves. If you are a trans person, gender-non conforming, gender-fluid, or you have a child or a family member who is, and you'd like be part of exploring how we at CBE can come together to protect trans youth and people, to work for this world that we yearn for, that is compassionate, inclusive, loving, safe, and free - whether it's on this specific issue at NYU Langone or in other ways - please come talk to me after services or reach out by email so we can write a different ending to **our** Sh'lach l'cha saga. When those in power would rather we lament, *chazak hu mimenu* - they are just too strong for us - we'd like to answer in the collective: no, you are not.

Jacob and Harlowe, you taught us that we have the capacity to not see fear and anger as obstacles, but instead as emotional reactions that provide us with a choice. We can let them control us or we can harness them for our own growth; we can respond by turning away from others or by turning toward others. And how it is our own choices and not the emotions themselves that will determine how we tell our stories. We're so proud of you for modeling for us a way through in these difficult times.

May we each be gentle on ourselves as we traverse this wilderness. May we persist in yearning for a land of love and freedom and goodness. And when we do meet fear and anger along our way, may we turn toward each other and find that in fact, we are the many and we are ready.

Amen. Shabbat shalom. Happy Pride.