



**Mirror, Mirror...**  
***Torah Reflections on Parashat Shelah***  
Numbers 13:1 – 15:41  
16 Sivan 5774      June 14, 2014

In this week's Torah portion, Shelah, God orders Moses to send a delegation of scouts/spies, one from each of the twelve tribes, to go into the land of Canaan and report as to who lived there? Was the land good? Were there trees? Were the cities fortified?

When the scouts return, ten spies advise against attack because the occupants of the land were Nephilim (giants). The spies report that conquest is impossible saying that "we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them" (Numbers 13:33). Two of the twelve spies, Joshua and Caleb, disagreed. They said, "let us by all means go up, and we shall gain possession, for we shall surely overcome it."

What does it mean to see oneself as a small, defeated creature. Those ten spies were revealing their own perception of themselves...as passive and resigned. No external force would have caused them to feel like this. Somehow they experienced themselves in a self-deprecating way and lost sight of their sacred mission. They defined themselves as a defeated people...not a community created in the image of God but as one resigned to a lesser status than God's sacred community.

Midrash (legend) suggests that God was upset with the spies not for their own self-perception but for projecting that self-perception onto others:

"I shall forgive them this remark," said God. But when they said; "And so we were in their sight," God asked: "Did you know how I made you appear in their sight? Who can say that you did not appear in their sight as angels? What have you brought upon yourselves?" (Numbers Rabbah 16:11)

How different the story would have been if those spies saw themselves as angels and not grasshoppers. Perhaps it is our human destiny to look upon ourselves as "lesser than who we are." We judge ourselves not by our strengths but our weaknesses. How many of us look in the mirror each day and feel truly content with who we are and what we have become. It's somehow easier to remind ourselves our weaknesses/mistakes rather than our gifts/strengths. What a different day we could have if we believed that others looked at us as angels, messengers of God.

The source of the problem for the ten scouts is their own self image, and how that self image shapes their confidence and ability to act. From this *parsha* we inherit another legacy through the powerful words of Caleb who said, "*Ki yahol nuhal lah*" (For we shall surely overcome it). In reality we all encompass the contrast between these two camps. Our work is to truly believe in ourselves and to continue to overcome those internal obstacles and feelings that push us down. This is not an easy task. As we are taught in

Leviticus, “You shall love your fellow human being as yourself.” One must find a way to love who one is in order to fully love another. These cannot be separated.

As we travel on this journey of life together may we be reminded that God created each of us in God’s image...an image of beauty, strength, kindness, and love.

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