

## Shelach Lecha

By Rabbi Amanda Golby

Shelach Lecha tells of those sent by Moses to scout the land, and the consequences of 10 of the 12 bringing back discouraging reports. 'Shelach lecha' is an interesting term in view of what is to come. God says to Moses, 'send', but literally, 'send for yourself'. God has already promised, as far back as the beginning of Sh'mot, Exodus, that they will be going to 'a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey'. Now it is as though God is saying that if these words are doubted, Moses can send those whom he chooses. The account in Devarim tells us that they are being sent at the people's insistence.

The twelve are to report back on the people, the land, the cities and the natural resources, and, as we know, ten while being favourable in some aspects, also dwell on the difficulties, particularly with regard to the people.

The people were giants, and 'we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them'. Interestingly they do not know how they looked to them. It is their fear that makes them believe it, and again it is important for us to think of our fears at different times, as we try to work out what is real and what is in our imagination. Only Caleb gives a positive report, and this causes the people to lose faith, to want a challenge to the leadership of Moses and Aaron, and indeed to want, not for the first time, to return to Egypt, preferring, in the words of Sheldon Kopp, American author and psychotherapist, 'the security of known misery to the misery of unfamiliar insecurity'. These events end tragically with God destroying the ten scouts who incited the community, sparing only Caleb and Joshua.

In Jewish tradition, this sin and that of the Golden Calf which are regarded as the most serious breaches in the relationship between God and the Israelites, and it is no accident that the Golden Calf was said to have been made on 17<sup>th</sup> Tammuz, and the spies' report is linked with Tisha B'Av. The golden calf was clearly the sin of idolatry, but what about the report of the spies? In Numbers 13:31, they said: 'We cannot attack that people for it is stronger than we, mimenu'. The traditional understanding is that 'mimenu' refers to the Israelites, and that their strength means the land cannot be conquered, but Rashi suggests it is in fact God. If we understand that the real sin of the ten was to deny God's

powers, we fully appreciate why this act was regarded as so destructive.

This can speak to every generation, but perhaps particularly resonates at the present time when there are so many uncertainties for us, so many questions about the role of government, and indeed the role of scientific and medical 'experts' holding a range of views, and no easy answers. It is truly challenging to have to balance the needs for health with the economic challenges. Leadership is always a privilege and a burden, and, week after week at the present time, as we read Torah, we are reminded of that.

Our task is to retain faith and continue to do our best at the present time and hope that when we do return to 'normal', or at least a 'new normal', some of the gains of this time will remain.

Many, however, have experienced losses, whether it is the devastating loss of loved ones or so much else that will be different and difficult, and there are, and will remain, many occasions for doubt. We can legitimately doubt political leaders, but we hope to maintain and work with confidence for the Jewish, national and global future. May we have the courage to hold on to the vision of Caleb and Joshua.

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