



Small in our Eyes...

Further Thoughts on Parashat Shelach

We “walk by faith, not by sight,” which means we must take hold of the promise of God, even in a world that “devours its inhabitants” and that is filled of seemingly invincible giants... Faith believes the possible, even in moments of testing and struggle.



Our Torah portion this week (Shelach) is a “heavy one” since it focuses on the Sin of the Spies and the subsequent failure of the people to trust that God would care for them. The people’s lack of *bittachon* (trust) in God is the most serious sin recorded in all the Torah, even more serious than the sin of the Golden Calf. This is confirmed by the testimony of the New Testament, which presents the fate of the Exodus generation as the dire warning of apostasy for those who claim to follow the Messiah (Heb. 3:7-4:2).

Notice, however, that in order to trust God, you must believe that you are *valuable* to Him and that He genuinely desires a relationship with you. God redeemed you so you could know and love Him. In this connection it is important to notice that the spies said, “we were *in our eyes* like grasshoppers” (Num. 13:33). They felt small because they had forgotten the reason for their redemption - they had forgotten their *identity* as God’s sons. Their lack of self-respect made them feel unworthy of the inheritance. The sin of the spies was not just that they doubted they could overcome the “giants in the land,” but rather that they were worthy people in God’s eyes... Sadly the spies view of themselves was *more real* to them than God’s view of them, and that is why they added, “and *so we were* (like grasshoppers) in their eyes.” From a spiritual point of view, this was profoundly tragic...

One lesson we can learn from the unbelief of the spies is that we must be careful to esteem ourselves properly. We are created *b’tzelem Elohim* (in the image of God), and that is the starting point for everything else revealed in the Torah. This foundational idea may be expressed as “respect *precedes* Torah.” Self-esteem and self-worth are very important characteristics because they enable the soul to *receive* the Word of God. This isn’t a selfish, narcissistic type of love. If you have no self-worth, then it is likely you will believe that the promises of Scripture are for *other* people, but not for you. You will regard yourself as an “outsider” or “alien” who is without promise of inheritance.



So we have to begin there, with the fact that God created you in His image and therefore you are of infinite value. You *matter* to God - and therefore you must respect yourself. It is no mark of holiness to shame or belittle yourself - *notwithstanding* your sinful nature - since you have a duty to honor yourself as one of God's created children. Dishonoring yourself violates the central ethical commandment of the Torah: "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*" (Lev. 19:18). How can you respect others if you don't respect yourself? You will regard yourself as "insect like" and will tend to view others as "gigantic" threats; you will act defensively and walk in fear of other people.... This is the path of a person living in the prison of fear, and it is a type of hell. Trusting in God's personal love for you presupposes that you are worthy to be loved and that there is a divine inheritance *for you*. Such faith gives you real courage to go take possession of the land as its rightful heir. Trusting in God means regarding God's view of you as *more real* than your own. It means allowing yourself to be elevated to honor so that you can be in a genuine love relationship with your Heavenly Father. "From now on, therefore, we regard *no one* (including ourselves) according to the flesh..." (2 Cor. 5:16).

We "walk by faith, not by sight," which means we must take hold of the promise of God, even in a world that "devours its inhabitants" and that is filled of seemingly invincible giants... Faith believes the possible, even in moments of testing and struggle. As Yeshua said, "All things are possible for the one who believes" (Mark 9:23).



"Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). "God is able to make *all* grace overflow to you, so that having *all* sufficiency in all things at *all* times, you may overflow in *every* good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). And May it please God our Heavenly Father to help us esteem ourselves properly so that we can receive, abide in, and walk in the reality and presence of His overflowing love. And may the LORD keep us all from the terrible sin of unbelief by always remembering that we infinitely matter to Him. Amen.