

Comments on Parshat Shlach Lecha

1) *V'chen hayinu b'eneichem*-- "and we must have looked like grasshoppers in their eyes, too." (Num. 13:33) In the Hasidic commentary *Itturei Torah*, the rabbis say that it was a sin for the spies to use those words. Why? The rabbis continued, if you look at imposing people and say that you feel like a grasshopper, that is a reasonable thing to say because it is based on your feelings. But when you say, "we must have looked like grasshoppers in their eyes," the *Itturei Torah* chides, "what difference should it make how we appeared to them?" What possible good is there in being concerned about how you appear in others' eyes?

– Rabbi Camille Shira Angel, Parashat Shelach, in *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*

2) What is the nature of the spies'— and by extension, the people's — failure? Ultimately, the question posed by the text is whether what we imagine possible is limited to what we see before us, or whether we can discern possibilities not immediately apparent to the eye. In more traditional theological language, the challenge is "whether to trust the bare word of God's promise or to have [our] vision limited by one of the observable realities before [us].

-- Rabbi Shai Held, *The Heart of Torah, Volume 2*, p. 127

3) The spies sent by Moses return both enraptured by the land and terrified at the prospect of making their permanent home in that elevated state of consciousness. So too, this portion blesses us with a mission: Spy out the Land of our Inheritance, taste the milk and honey that flows from the Land of Promise, and let that taste guide us on your journey. The blessing we receive is a glimpse. What we do with that glimpse becomes the challenge.

Over a lifetime we are given glimpses, flashes, and hints that open our awareness to the Reality of paradise and unity that underlies this world of

constant flux. We are graced with the timeless moment in which the infinite is revealed as the source of our finite world. We are sent to that land of expanded consciousness through imagination, practice and grace. We return from this taste of enlightenment either empowered to receive and integrate the supreme blessing into our lives, or completely terrorized by the incomprehensible immensity of what we feel is beyond our grasp.

"The land eats up its inhabitants," report the spies. And they are correct. The small ego-driven separate self cannot survive in the pure air of that land. The "I" will be dissolved, called beyond itself, merging with the beauty and the mystery of that place. The spies returned from their mission divided.

After a peak experience, we return to our life shaken. Whatever negativity is in us, born of grief or conditioning, is still there. Yet some part of us remembers that immensity, that taste of the infinite... Or tries to remember.

That is our work: to remember what we have glimpsed and to plant the glimpse like a seed in the soil of our lives.

-Rabbi Shefa Gold, *Torah Journeys: the Inner Path to the Promised Land*, p. 147-148.