

We have, in this week's Torah portion, *Shlakh Lekha*, a 'classic' in biblical narrative. God says to Moses: "Send (for yourself) men to scout the land of Canaan..." (Numbers 13:2)

From the end of that initial verse, we learn about the individuals who were chosen to scout the land. Each one is a chieftain for their tribe, and each tribe was represented. So according to the text, each tribe is represented by one of its leaders; the elite of each tribe takes part in this mission.

What follows is astonishing! After a few verses containing a rather neutral description of what the scouts found throughout their reconnaissance expedition, the story becomes rather dramatic. Most of the members of the group bring a very bad report about what is there awaiting the Children of Israel.

Only two out of the twelve, Joshua bin Nun and Kalev ben Yefune, insist that this is not an impossible mission, that the Children of Israel are capable of conquering the land and, furthermore, they reaffirm the description of the land as '*eretz zavat halav udvash*;' a land that flows with milk and honey.

In the unusual form of the verb *Shlakh Lekha* (opposed to just *Shlakh*), the *Midrash* comes to inform us that this mission was exclusively for human purposes – 'send for yourself,' translates the *Midrash*. This mission is only necessary if you, Moses and the heads of the tribes, need it. God is more than certain about the quality of the land and the feasibility of its conquest; it is not for God's sake that the scouts have to be sent, it is for the people.

Still, the outcome is not the one that God and Moses would have expected. The report that most of the spies bring back is demoralizing and discouraging.

The text leaves one question unanswered. How is it possible that ten men come back with such a strong negative opinion and two, only two, come back with an equally strong, but in this case, very optimistic and positive opinion.

How is it possible that, having them all seen the same reality, their perceptions are so dramatically different?

The answer is 'this is human nature.' In my own experience, the pessimists, the worrywarts, the 'naysayers,' will outnumber those who see the positive in the project, whatever the project might be. The optimists, those with a positive outlook, will indeed see the challenges, but they will also see that the project is worth trying and that if they commit to it, it will not only happen, but it will produce amazing results.

When your children, or your spouse, or a friend are at a crossroads, and they hesitate if they should take the easy path or the one that involves more risk but produces a more rewarding outcome, I hope that you will be the voice of encouragement and support for them not to be afraid, to face the risks.

When it comes to our community life, it is no different. The gate to the Promised Land is right there, at the end of the road; we need to support each other, feel strong, and feel the encouragement to take that path that leads to the Promised Land. There is no point in staying wandering in the desert with no aim and no goal. 'The land is a land that flows with milk and honey.'

Shabbat Shalom!

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