



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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The View from the Other Side

The Haftarah of Parshat Shelach appears to revisit a familiar story. Once again, spies are sent into the Land of Israel. Once again, they return with a report. Yet this mission is fundamentally different from the one described in the parshah. The spies of Moshe's generation stood at the threshold of the Land and saw obstacles. Nearly forty years later, Yehoshua's generation stands at that same threshold and discovers that the greatest challenge was never the land itself, but how it was perceived.

This is what makes the spies' report so surprising. They return with no discussion of military strategy, troop strength, or the fortifications of Yericho. Instead, they bring back a message from Rachav: וַיִּמַּס לְבָבָהּ, *Our hearts have melted*. And when they report to Yehoshua, they echo her words: וְגַם נִמְלְגוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵינִי, *All the inhabitants of the land have melted before us*.

The Abarbanel explains that this was the most valuable intelligence of all. A city may be fortified, but if the spirit of its inhabitants has already collapsed, the battle is largely won. What Yehoshua needed was not information about the walls of Yericho. He needed information about the hearts of its people.

Rachav reveals that the inhabitants of the

Land had been living with the memory of Kriat Yam Suf for forty years: *For we have heard how Hashem dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds before you...* The Radak notes that the fear of Israel had spread throughout the land because of the miracles Hashem performed on behalf of His people. The nations had not forgotten. They had been watching, listening, and trembling. The irony is striking. The generation that witnessed Kriat Yam Suf struggled to believe they could enter the Land. Rachav, who had only heard about it, had no doubt.

Modern psychology describes a phenomenon known as *threat perception*—our tendency to overestimate the difficulty of a challenge while underestimating our ability to meet it. The spies in Parshat Shlach fell victim to precisely this error. Confronted by the inhabitants of the Land, they concluded: וַנְהִי בְעֵינֵינוּ כְּחַגְּלָיִם, *We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes*. Notice the language. Before they worried about how others viewed them, they first diminished themselves. Their perception became their reality.

Rachav's testimony exposes how mistaken that perception was. The Canaanites did not see the Jewish people as grasshoppers. They saw them as the nation whose G-d split the sea, defeated mighty kings, and was guiding them toward their destiny. Perhaps this is why the haftarah accompanies Parshat Shelach. The greatest obstacles are not always the ones standing before us. Sometimes they are the assumptions we carry within us. ■

רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה
Peleg Shabtai ben Chaviva Leah