



WORDS TO THE WISE

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Shelach: Feelings are real, but they aren't reality

“Feelings are real, but they aren't reality”, I saw this quote recently and I think its profound. In *Shelach* we learn about the fateful mission of the *meraglim*, the spies, sent to report on the land of Israel. Their mission was meant to fortify the spies and the rest of Israel with a renewed faith/*emunah* and trust in Hashem. We now know that mission was a spectacular failure, the spies returned with a spiteful report, which led to fear. The nation of Israel was terrified to enter the holy land. As a result, the Jews were punished. The journey to the promised land was delayed significantly, they would now have to wander the desert for forty years. The very last portion of their infamous report is intriguing. The spies complained, regarding the might of the inhabitants of Canaan, “We felt as though we were mere grasshoppers, and so were we in their eyes”. The *midrash* explains, G-d would have forgiven them for feeling like insignificant insects. However, it was entirely wrong for the spies to project those feelings and conclude with certainty that the inhabitants of Canaan viewed the spies the same way they viewed themselves. This interpretation presents an enlightening paradigm. Even when the spies felt insignificant, they should have understood that although they felt small, and that was a real feeling, their feelings were not necessarily in line with reality.

At times, we can feel insecure, inept, or vulnerable. Although feelings like that are usually inaccurate and misplaced, they are forgivable. We are creatures of emotion. It is even forgivable when those feelings point to a lack of proper *emunah*, belief and reliance on G-d. However, the *midrash* teaches us, we must be very careful to separate the way we feel from the way we think. It is wrong and unforgivable to allow our fears and vulnerabilities to discolor the world at large. There is always hope, we have no right to transpose our own insecurities onto other people, and other circumstances. The world is a beautiful place, and Hashem conducts the world in a beautiful way. Our negative feelings and experiences don't change that.