

True Leadership...

Shelach 5782/2022

As the book of Bamidbar progresses, we realise that the central arc of the book is the transition of the nation and her leadership. The climactic point of that transition is found in this week's Parasha, where the Jewish people have engaged in a mission of espionage, and those tasked with carrying it out, betraying the national vision. This betrayal condemns a generation, but also forces the development of true leadership.

Once ten of the twelve spies deliver their disparaging and fear mongering report, Caleb stand up and silences the Jewish people¹. The people are agitated, and they are baying for blood. Moshe and Joshua are all in the firing line. Caleb isn't willing to let this happen.

Rashi explains that Caleb's speech to the people called out their attack on Moshe and explained the many things that their leader had done for them². The Chizkuni goes a step further and says that Moshe had been unable to silence the people – they were no longer listening to him – and so Caleb steps in, breaking the agitation, distracting the crowd, and giving Moshe the ability to speak³. The Or HaChaim adds that Caleb reminded the nation of Moshe's king like status, and that they should have reverence and awe for him⁴.

Dr Erica Brown, in her book Leadership in the Wilderness, explains that Caleb's silencing was important, but his lack of denying the other spies reports, meant that he failed in his leadership task⁵.

However, I believe that this seemingly small moment elevates Caleb into his future leadership trajectory and showcases his true colours as an extraordinary leader. Why is this?

That moment where Caleb decides to stand up against an entire nation, to be the counter cultural revolutionary, would have been scary. This rabble was out for blood, anyone who got in their way could have met their demise, and yet Caleb takes the risk. More so, that action was not against an enemy, but against his fellow tribal leadership and his nation – these were brothers and sisters. As J.K. Rowling writes, it takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our friends⁶.

The Book of Maccabees notes that Caleb was rewarded for this moment, with an eternal heritage in the Land of Israel.

This is a moment of true bravery, a moment of true leadership. Doing something that bucks the trend and tries to change the course of history. Caleb wasn't successful in stopping the agitation, but he activated his leadership and showcased what it truly means to be an *ivri*!

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**