



## To Not Return To Egypt

### Parshat Shelach

#### D'var Torah by Rebecca Stone

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In every generation there are people who choose to repeat history rather than make history. Sometimes this is a conscious choice, and sometimes we get so caught up with the way things are and the systems we've learned, we forget that we are supposed to be the change agents.

In 1821, freed slaves from the US and from slave ships were given a chance to start over. They were sent to Liberia to colonize the country. They were given complete autonomy and tasked to start their lives over as freed men. They were given a chance at freedom, a chance to remake their lives and shape a new history in a continent torn apart by the slave trade. Instead of creating a vision of peace and equality, instead of seeking to eradicate the system of injustice that had completely dehumanized them, these former slaves recreated the slave hierarchy- only this time they were the masters enslaving others. Although these men were finally free, their victim mentality confined them to thinking within the construct of slavery and oppression. They couldn't see beyond their learned experiences; couldn't question the status quo and break the mold. They were too reactive and abused to be visionary leaders. They repeated history because they were unable to challenge history- to stare it in the face and defy the ugliness that exploited them.

This story is one of many stories that reminds me of the spies in Parshat Shlach. In Parshat Shlach, yet again, the Jewish people cannot see beyond their own limits. They beg to return to Egypt rather than face a land of giants. They have not learned, after ten plagues, a splitting sea, and a revelation at Sinai, that they deserve redemption and liberation rather than oppression. It is the Jewish people's restrictive thinking that incurs G-d's wrath. G-d is forced to purge the old leadership and only permits a new generation to enter the land- a generation that can let go of the patterns of the past, that dares to dream a new dream, that has not been burdened and imprinted by the traumas of Egypt.

What would it look like to completely throw out the old logic model- the model that perpetuates war and hatred, exploitation and poverty? Instead of working within the paradigm that keeps us returning to a restrictive "Egypt" mentality, what does it look like to work off a blank slate and recreate systems entirely? This is G-d's message to us in Parshat Shlach. It is our job to get angry when the status quo- a status quo of race and immigration discrimination in the US, of global warming and toxic pollutants in our skies, of violence and dehumanization between Israelis and Palestinians- does not promote healthy change. If we threw out the old, we just



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might defy the odds and create the change that's so desperately needed to fix our broken world. But it will take challenging the basic tenets that have never been questioned before. It will take a new generation of leadership starting from scratch—with no basic assumptions. It will take fighting against the largest giants. May we merit the vision and courage to fight against the giants, to challenge the basic premises of the world in which we live. And may we finally have the wisdom and the clarity to let go of "Egypt".