



## Leadership and Diversity • Parshat Shelah

Diversity in groups creates a higher chance of seeing positive change, according to Forbes Council Panel in the “14 Important Benefits of a More Diverse Leadership Team” (June 24, 2021). Because society is diverse, diverse leadership means “greater depth and breadth of experience and perspective.” Diversity increases awareness of different pockets of society, sensitivity to other ways of looking at the same scenario or set of facts, and “pressure-tests assumptions and judgments.” This almost always maximizes learning, innovation and honesty. Diverse groups help create more inclusive decisions and outcomes.

“Every team must be made up of people with different roles, strengths, temperaments and perspectives,” writes Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his essay “The Counterpoint of Leadership” (Tetzaveh, *Lessons in Leadership*). “They must always be open to criticism and they must always be on the alert against groupthink. The glory of Judaism is its insistence that only in heaven is there one commanding Voice. Down here on earth no individual may ever hold a monopoly of leadership.”

Diversity in teams has many positive dimensions, but it’s not always easy to create or navigate. Jon Katzenbach writes in *The Wisdom of Teams*, that,

“Teams do not seek consensus; they seek the best answer.” If there is too much consensus, then diversity fails in its value.

This is apparent when reading this week’s Torah portion, *Shelah*. “Send agents to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people...” (Num. 13:2), we read as we open the parsha. Whereas God generally told Moses what to do, here He imbued Moses with the authority to select leaders for this reconnaissance mission from each of the twelve tribes: “...send one participant (*ish ehad, ish ehad*) from each of their ancestral tribes, each one a chief (*nasi*) among them.” The verse stresses both the singularity of each leader within his tribe and the group as a whole who must work together as one.

Rashi explains that “each one was a leader among them.” Seforno adds that the individual selected had to be the best leader from his tribe, one who could recognize the significance of the land. For Rashi, it’s a leader. For Seforno, it’s *the* leader. Moses needed to think very carefully about the qualities of each person and the composition of the group. Select the wrong people or the right individuals but not a productive combination of them, and the mission would fail. And the mission did fail.

The Torah names each person selected according to his tribe. These men had a historic role. People long into the future would need to know their names. Each of these leaders carried the important task of evaluating the land according to Moses'