

Dear Chavraya,

As we walk down the street, does the way we see ourselves indeed begin within ourselves, or is it formed through the gaze and perceptions of others? Self-image is a lucrative commodity in America. The lives of so many young people, and not just young people, are turned inside out through the marketing of image.

In this week's Torah portion, *parashat Sh'lach L'cha*, there is a profound teaching about self-image and the way we project ourselves in the world. Twelve scouts were sent ahead of the people of Israel to scout out the land of Canaan, to see what it would be like upon arrival there. All but two of the scouts, Calev and Yehoshua, came back and said that it was pointless to keep going forward. They sought to foment rebellion, urging that new leaders be appointed to take the people back to Egypt. They said of their expedition, "We saw giants there, the sons of Anak, descendants of the giants." And then they said, "We were in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and so, too, were we in their eyes."

The power of their own words was lost on the scouts, but it needn't be lost on us. The way they assumed that others saw them was a consequence of how they saw themselves. May we nurture ever so carefully the delicate tendrils of self-image as they take root in the gardens of our children's souls; even as we weed in our own soul gardens to make room for the native flowers to bloom.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor