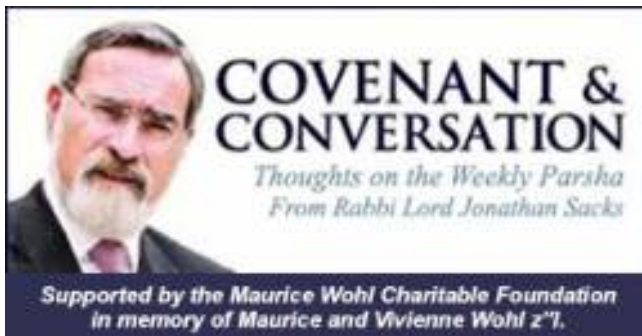


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Two Kinds of Fear

One of the most powerful addresses I ever heard was given by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, on this week's parsha: the story of the spies. For me, it was nothing less than life-changing.

He asked the obvious questions. How could ten of the spies have come back with a demoralising, defeatist report? How could they say, we cannot win, the people are stronger than us, their cities are well fortified, they are giants and we are grasshoppers?

They had seen with their own eyes how God had sent a series of plagues that brought Egypt, the strongest and longest-lived of all the empires of the ancient world, to its knees. They had seen the Egyptian army with its cutting-edge military technology, the horse-drawn chariot, drown in the Reed Sea while the Israelites passed through it on dry land. Egypt was far stronger than the Canaanites, Perrizites, Jebusites and other minor kingdoms that they would have to confront in conquering the land. Nor was this an ancient memory. It had happened not much more than a year before.

What is more, they already knew that, far from being giants confronting grasshoppers, the people of the land were terrified of the Israelites. They had said so themselves in the course of singing the Song at the Sea:

The peoples have heard; they tremble;
Pangs have seized the inhabitants of
Philistia.
Now are the chiefs of Edom
dismayed;
Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
All the inhabitants of Canaan have
melted away.
Terror and dread fall upon them;
Because of the greatness of your arm,
they are still as a stone (Ex. 15:14-16)

The people of the land were afraid of the Israelites. Why then were the spies afraid of them?

What is more, continued the Rebbe, the spies were not people plucked at random from among the population. The Torah states that they were

"all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel." They were leaders. They were not people given lightly to fear.

The questions are straightforward, but the answer the Rebbe gave was utterly unexpected. *The spies were not afraid of failure*, he said. *They were afraid of success.*

What was their situation now? They were eating manna from heaven. They were drinking water from a miraculous well. They were surrounded by Clouds of Glory. They were camped around the Sanctuary. They were in continuous contact with the Shekhinah. Never had a people lived so close to God.

What would be their situation if they entered the land? They would have to fight battles, maintain an army, create an economy, farm the land, worry about whether there would be enough rain to produce a crop, and all the other thousand distractions that come from living in the world. What would happen to their closeness to God? They would be preoccupied with mundane and material pursuits. Here they could spend their entire lives learning Torah, lit by the radiance of the Divine. There they would be no more than one more nation in a world of nations, with the same kind of economic, social and political problems that every nation has to deal with.

The spies were not afraid of failure. They were afraid of success. Their mistake was the mistake of very holy men. They wanted to spend their lives in the closest possible proximity to God. What they did not understand was that God seeks, in the Hasidic phrase, "a dwelling in the lower worlds". One of the great differences between

Judaism and other religions is that while others seek to lift people to heaven, Judaism seeks to bring heaven down to earth.

Much of Torah is about things not conventionally seen as religious at all: labour relations, agriculture, welfare provisions, loans and debts, land ownership and so on. It is not difficult to have an intense religious experience in the desert, or in a monastic retreat, or in an ashram. Most religions have holy places and holy people who live far removed from the stresses and strains of everyday life. There was one such Jewish sect in Qumran, known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls, and there were certainly others. About this there is nothing unusual at all.

But that is not the Jewish project, the Jewish mission. God wanted the Israelites to create a model society where human beings were not treated as slaves, where rulers were not worshipped as demigods, where human dignity was respected, where law was impartially administered to rich and poor alike, where no one was destitute, no one was abandoned to isolation, no one was above the law and no realm of life was a morality-free zone. That requires a society, and a society needs a land. It requires an economy, an army, fields and flocks, labour and enterprise. All these, in Judaism, become ways of bringing the Shekhinah into the shared spaces of our collective life.

The spies feared success, not failure. It was the mistake of deeply religious men. But it was a mistake.

That is the spiritual challenge of the greatest event in two thousand years of Jewish history: the

return of Jews to the land and state of Israel. Perhaps never before and never since has there been a political movement accompanied by so many dreams as Zionism. For some it was the fulfillment of prophetic visions, for others the secular achievement of people who had decided to take history into their own hands. Some saw it as a Tolstoy-like reconnection with land and soil, others a Nietzschean assertion of will and power. Some saw it as a refuge from European antisemitism, others as the first flowering of messianic redemption. Every Zionist thinker had his or her version of utopia, and to a remarkable degree they all came to pass.

But Israel always was something simpler and more basic. Jews have known virtually every fate and circumstance between tragedy and triumph in the almost four thousand years of their history, and they have lived in almost every land on earth. But in all that time there only ever was one place where they could do what they were called on to do from the dawn of their history: to build their own society in accord with their highest ideals, a society that would be different from their neighbours and become a role model of how a society, an economy, an educational system and the administration of welfare could become vehicles for bringing the Divine presence down to earth.

It is not difficult to find God in the wilderness, if you do not eat from the labour of your hands and if you rely on God to fight your battles for you. Ten of the spies, according to the Rebbe, sought to live that way forever. But that, suggested the Rebbe, is not what God wants from us. He wants us to engage with the world. He wants us to heal

the sick, feed the hungry, fight injustice with all the power of law, and combat ignorance with universal education. He wants us to show what it is to love the neighbour and the stranger, and say, with Rabbi Akiva, "Beloved is humanity because we are each created in God's image."

Jewish spirituality lives in the midst of life itself, the life of society and its institutions. To create it we have to battle with two kinds of fear: fear of failure, and fear of success. Fear of failure is common; fear of success is rarer but no less debilitating. Both come from the reluctance to take risks. Faith is the courage to take risks. It is not certainty; it is the ability to live with uncertainty. It is the ability to hear God saying to us as He said to Abraham, "Walk on ahead of Me" (Gen. 17:1).

The Rebbe lived what he taught. He sent emissaries out to virtually every place on earth where there were Jews. In so doing, he transformed Jewish life. He knew he was asking his followers to take risks, by going to places where the whole environment would be challenging in many ways, but he had faith in them and in God and in the Jewish mission whose place is in the public square where we share our faith with others and do so in deeply practical ways.

It is challenging to leave the desert and go out into the world with all its trials and temptations, but that is where God wants us to be, bringing His spirit to the way we run an economy, a welfare system, a judiciary, a health service and an army, healing some of the wounds of the world and

bringing, to places often shrouded in darkness, fragments of Divine light.



The Laziness of the Spies

Bamidbar Rabbah, 16:4: “Send for yourself men” – ‘This is what the verse said: ‘Like what vinegar does to a person’s teeth and like smoke getting into a person’s eyes, this is what a **lazy** messenger does to the person who sent him¹.’”

The Midrash on the Torah Portion of Shelach cites a verse in Proverbs to describe the damage that the ten spies did. It compares it to what vinegar does to a person’s teeth and smoke to a person’s eyes. The Vilna Gaon in his commentary to Proverbs, explains that when a person wishes to stimulate his appetite, he usually drinks something. However, if by mistake he drinks vinegar, it will certainly not stimulate his desire to eat something, rather on the contrary, it ruins his appetite because it ruins his teeth. Likewise, if a person wants light to read by, or if he needs a source of illumination for any reason, but he lights wood that is still moist, it will cause a lot of smoke and make it even more difficult for him to read or see anything. The Vilna Gaon explains

that a lazy messenger is similar with regard to the person who sent him. In contrast to his expectation and hope, the lazy messenger not only does not accomplish his mission, but also causes disappointment and aggravation that is even worse than if he had never been sent in the first place. The Midrash is teaching that the spies were comparable to the lazy messenger who ultimately made things far worse and caused great aggravation and disappointment to Moshe, who sent them on their mission.

The commentaries speak very harshly of the spies and offer a number of reasons as to why their sin was so severe – they were haughty, desired honor² that led them to their grave sin, such as love of honor, seeing the bad in the land, lack of trust in God, and so on. However, laziness does not seem to be among the negative traits that led to their sin. Indeed, according to the Rashbam, they volunteered to go to the Land, which involved a great amount of effort and danger. This is not the action of a lazy person. Hence, some commentators ask where did the Midrash see the trait of laziness in their behavior?

Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller addresses this question based on a teaching of Rabbi Shneur Kotler.³ He was discussing another comment of the Vilna Gaon on Proverbs. The verse states: “How long will you be lazy, one who sleeps? When will you arise from your sleep?”

This verse seems to be repetitive in that it makes two mentions of sleeping. The Vilna Gaon explains says that the verse is alluding to two types of laziness. The first is laziness in action – this refers to laziness whereby one does not want

to exert himself physically. However, there is a second type of laziness – laziness in thought. The first part of the verse is speaking about physical laziness. The second part of the verse is referring to laziness of thought. The laziness that we usually think about is physical laziness – for example when someone is too lazy to get up and do something. However, there is another, much more subtle form of laziness: Laziness of thought – this includes failing to learn lessons from events and failure to expend the mental effort to think deeply and not on a superficial level, resulting in incorrect conclusions.

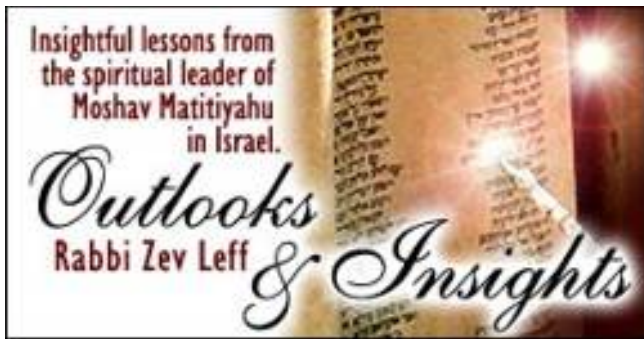
It is this kind of laziness that the Midrash was addressing when it described the spies as lazy. They were certainly not lazy in their actions, but they were lazy in their thought. Where do we see this laziness of thought? The commentaries suggest two ways that their laziness was manifest.

Firstly, they cite the first Rashi in the Parsha that addresses the juxtaposition between the story about Miriam’s lashon hara at the end of Behaalotecha and the episode of the spies. Rashi writes that this comes to condemn the spies for their wickedness in that they did not learn from Miriam’s punishment for lashon hara and they spoke lashon hara about the Land.⁴ One could find differences in the two case, namely that they didn’t speak badly about a person, rather a Land, yet Chazal still criticize them for not thinking about the lessons to be learnt from the story with Miriam and applying it to their own situation. The commentaries explain that this was a manifestation of laziness in thought. They did not exert the mental energy to contemplate the ramifications of Miriam’s punishment.

Another manifestation of their laziness in thought is that they viewed the things that they saw in the Land in a superficial way. For example, one of the complaints of the spies was that Eretz Yisrael was “a land that consumes those who dwell there.”⁵ How did they come to that conclusion? Rashi explains that when they arrived in the Land, the whole country was involved with funerals. Their immediate conclusion was that it was very dangerous to live in the Land. If they would have taken the time to think about the matter, they may have considered a different option – that God caused many people to die so that they would be preoccupied with burials and mourning and would not notice the spies in their land. That, indeed was the true reason for the deaths. However, to realize that would require expending more effort to think on a deeper level, yet the spies were too lazy to do this.⁶

We have seen how, included among the negative traits of the spies was laziness of thought. This lesson is very applicable to our daily lives. It reminds us of the importance of thinking deeply about surrounding events, and applying them to our behavior. May we all merit to avoid the failings of the spies.

1. Mishlei 10:26.
2. Based on the Zohar that they did not want to enter the Land of Israel because they would lose their position as Nasi there.
3. Cited by Rabbi Yissachar Frand.
4. Rashi, Bamidbar, 13:2, Dh: Shelach lecha anashim.
5. Shelach, 13:32.
6. This is not to say that there were other causes of their negative interpretations of the land, including that they had personal reasons for not wanting to enter the Land. Nevertheless, it is evident from Rabbi’s depiction of their laziness, that this was also a factor.



Sin of the Spies - Who's in Charge?

"Moses renamed Hoshea son of Nun, 'Joshua.' " (Numbers 13:16)

Prior to the departure of the 12 spies, Moses changed the name of his disciple Hoshea to Joshua. That changed contained within it a prayer that God save Joshua from the plot of the spies. It remains to be explained, however, why Moses agreed to send the spies in the first place if he was aware of a plot to malign the Land of Israel. In addition, why did he pray for Joshua alone and not for Calev and the others?

The Vilna Gaon (in *Emuna VeHashgacha*) explains that there are three ways in which God manifests His Divine Providence. The first is called *hanhaga nissis*, the manifestation of overt miracles. This was the manner in which God related to us during the 40 years in the desert. A Cloud of Glory accompanied us by day and a pillar of fire by night; we ate the Heaven-sent manna; and our thirst was quenched by water from a well that flowed from a rock, which accompanied us on our journey. When we sinned, Divine retribution followed immediately in an unmistakable fashion.

The second type of Divine Providence is called *hanhagas nissim nistarim*. In this stage, God relates to us through hidden miracles. This describes the manner in which God related to us in the Land of Israel, prior to our exile. At that time, a direct relationship between nature and Torah observance was evident. When we kept the mitzvot and toiled in Torah, the rains fell in their proper times and amounts, health and wealth were our lot; and when we sinned, drought and famine followed.

Since our exile from Israel, we have experienced the third type of Divine Providence, *hester panim*. In this stage, God hides His face from us and our ability to see God's Divine Providence in the world becomes impaired.

The Vilna Gaon explains that the various manifestations of Divine Providence differ only in our perception. In reality, God controls and guides the world equally in a period when we experience Divine miracles as a matter of course, and in a period where all we see is the workings of nature. God merely hides His face in the latter period.

NEW LAND

Our forefathers in the desert were aware that upon entering the Land of Israel, the manner in which God related to us would change from one of open miracles to one of miracles within nature. Manna would no longer descend from the heavens; rather, we would plow and plant and harvest in order to eat. A well would no longer accompany us; rather, we would depend on rainfall to quench our thirst.

Their mistake, however, was to reason that if their lives were apparently subject to the same natural order as the rest of the world, then their ultimate success or failure depended on their own military prowess. This was a grievous error.

It was this mistaken outlook from which Moses prayed that Joshua would be spared. Moses reasoned that he could better prove to the people their mistake by letting them actually see the Land of Israel. He hoped that they would realize the impossibility of conquering Israel with their own might. And yet God had assured them that they would in fact conquer the land. They should have concluded that God obviously planned to continue aiding them, even if in a less openly miraculous fashion.

Joshua, who was to lead the Jewish people during this new stage of Divine Providence, required a special prayer that he be spared from a distorted perspective on nature. The name Joshua signifies - *Hashem Yoshiah* - May God save you. The Divine name represents the synthesis between the apparent cause and effect of the natural world and God's intimate spiritual link with man - the *yud* represents God's creation of the World to Come, and the *heh* the creation of this world. Moses prayed that Joshua see nature as nothing more than a veil to God's direct Divine Providence. Hence Nature - *HaTevah* - and *Elokim* are numerically equivalent.

RAINFALL AND TEARS

Moses told the spies to bring back the fruits of the Land of Israel precisely to drive home the lesson that they would still be completely dependent on God's beneficence. Without water, fruits cannot

grow, and in Israel water depends solely on rainfall, which is obviously not in man's hands. Moses wanted them to recognize that even though there would be more effort required to secure a livelihood in the natural setting of Israel than in the desert, the final result would depend no less on God than when the manna descended directly from Heaven.

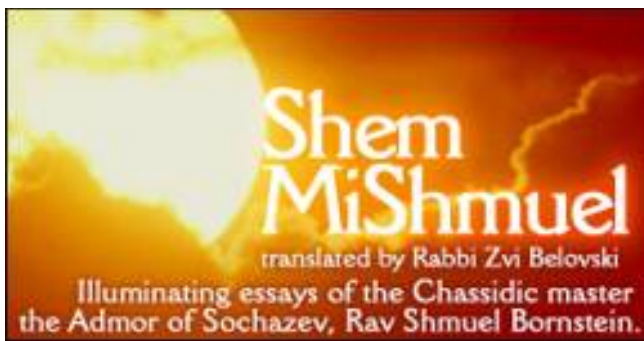
Unfortunately, only Calev and Joshua grasped this point. The others saw only that it was beyond their "natural" abilities to conquer the land, and concluded that even God Himself, as it were, could not help them since He had chosen to let them be governed by the natural order. This reasoning led to the purposeless crying on the night of Tisha B'Av when the people wept as a sign of hopelessness.

To correct the purposeless tears of that Tisha B'Av eve in the desert, our Holy Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av and we were thrust into exile where we would come to see clearly our dependence on God. But rather than crying over our helplessness, our tears on Tisha B'Av must proclaim: "God, You promised that we would be redeemed from this exile. We cannot achieve this redemption through our own efforts. Therefore You must redeem us."

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, the great Mirror Mashgiach, explains the Mishnah at the end of Sotah to mean that Moshiach will not come so long as we attribute our successes and failures to "natural" causes. As long as we look for political, economic and sociological explanations of world events, and excuse ourselves from Torah learning

on the grounds that we must earn a livelihood, we will not merit an end to our exile.

Let us strengthen our faith and trust in God so that we can finally dry the tears of Tisha B'Av and celebrate it with jubilation, for a Redeemer will have come to Zion.



Too Late

A large section of the *sidrah* relates the story of the *meraglim* (spies). Twelve men, one from each tribe, went to assess Eretz Yisrael prior to *klal Yisrael's* intended assault on it. The outcome is well known: ten of them returned with evil reports, and it was their information which was accepted by a distraught nation. As a punishment for not trusting in God to lead them to the Promised Land, the ten spies were killed, and the rest of the nation were condemned to spend a further thirty-eight years in the desert. During this time, all of the adult males would die, leaving their children to inherit the land. After their punishment was announced, a band of repentant people attempted to enter the land:

They arose early in the morning and went up to the summit of the mountain, saying, "We are here, and

we will go up to the place which God described, for we have sinned." And Moshe said, "Why do you transgress the word of God? It will not succeed. Do not go up, for God is not among you, so that you shall not be smitten before your enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword, for you have turned aside from God, and God will not be with you." They insisted and went up to the summit of the mountain, but the Ark of the Covenant of God and Moshe did not move from within the camp. The Amalekites bore down and the Canaanites who live in that mountain, and they smote them and crushed them to Charmah. (Bemidbar 14:40-45)

This episode begs two straightforward questions. Firstly, why did they wait until the next morning to begin their assault on the land? Surely, once they had heard the decree against them, which had prompted their *teshuvah* (repentance), they should then have attempted to enter the land without delay. Secondly, and more importantly, why was their *teshuvah* unacceptable? The verse clearly states that they admitted their sin ("for we have sinned"). Why was God not prepared to accept their repentance and allow them to enter the land?

A DEEP PROBLEM

The evil report of the *meraglim* stirred deep-seated discontent within the nation:

All the assembly lifted up their voice and cried, and the people wept all that night. (Ibid., 1)

All the assembly lifted up their voice and cried - this is as the verse says, It cries out against Me, so I have hated it (Yirmeyahu 12:8). This cry caused you to be hated. (Bemidbar Rabbah 16:20)

Underlying this is an expression of Yisrael's inherent holiness. We are accustomed to viewing the Jewish soul as essentially undefilable. When sin does occur, it is temporary and superficial and can easily be eliminated by the process of *teshuvah*. The Jewish soul can be compared to a white garment. If the garment becomes stained, the appropriate cleansing procedure will restore it to its former glory. Indeed, when a sinner cries out to God in repentance, these tears of contrition "clean" away the sin, leaving the pure, undefiled soul.

This all applies in general circumstances, where the sin is of a normal magnitude. However, in certain rare situations, the sin penetrates deeply into the soul of the transgressor. A simple cleansing process is inadequate to expunge this defect, just as rinsing a deeply stained garment will not restore its previous appearance. We may suggest that this happened to *klal Yisrael* after they heard the report of the *meraglim*. This is expressed by the crying, which is mentioned by the verses and expounded upon by the Midrash. The *kol*, the coarse, raw sound which they emitted, came from deep within them. This expressed the fact that they were profoundly affected by the reports about Eretz Yisrael, and

the evil which came in its wake had intensely penetrated their inner beings. This explains the Midrashic interpretation: once the people cried in this uncontrolled manner, they were hated, for they had distanced themselves greatly from God, allowing the sin to pollute them completely.

The ordinary *teshuvah* process is insufficient to expunge sin of this nature. It was simply too deeply rooted in their personalities. Indeed, even crying out in repentance could not help them, for they had defiled that avenue:

...and the people wept all that night.
(Bemidbar 14:1)

God said to them, "You have cried in vain..." (Ta'anis 29a)

It seems that repentance and even the cry of contrition were not available to them. This is reflected by Moshe's summary of the events in Sefer Devarim:

You repented and wept before God,
but God did not listen to your cry and
did not incline His ear toward you.
(Devarim 1:45)

Teshuvah could not work at this stage; neither repentance nor weeping could reverse the damage done. We now understand why God did not accept their contrition after the decree against them was promulgated. Let us now consider why those who decided to enter Eretz Yisrael waited until the following morning to begin their assault.

A TIME FOR CHESED

It is highly probable that when the people pondered their error, they realized how severe it



was and how deeply it had penetrated their souls. It is likely that they knew that it would take years of wandering and perhaps eons of Jewish history to erase the damage done. As such, they were aware that they had no appeal to God through *teshuvah*, for, as we have seen, it was inadequate. This does not mean, however, that they had no hope of repairing their relationship with God, for they could still yearn for God's *chesed*. Maybe God would ignore their sad reality and forgive them as an act of mercy, allowing them to enter the land after all. The mystics consider the morning to be the time of Divine *chesed*. This is evident from the fact that Avraham, the paradigm of *chesed*, prayed to God in the morning. Thus they waited until the morning to ascend the mountain, for it was at that time, more than any other, that they could hope for God's mercy. Alas, the decree could not be rescinded, and so their attack failed.

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