

א בִּיסַל תּוֹרָה!

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The Sin of the Spies

By Sara Canner '28

In this week's פרשה, Hashem tells משה to send twelve spies, one from each tribe, to scout out the land of בנען. Before they depart, משה renames one of the spies, changing יהושע's name to יהושע (י"ג:ט"ז) (במדבר). By giving him this name "יהושע", which is a compound of G-d's name and הושע ('may G-d save'), משה is in effect praying for him (סוטה לד:). משה recognizes the immense psychological and spiritual danger of the mission, anticipating that the other scouts might falter. By embedding a prayer for divine protection into יהושע's new identity, משה provides him with the spiritual strength needed to resist the upcoming conspiracy. Following this, משה instructs the spies to determine whether the people of בנען are strong or weak, to gather information about the landscape and the quality of the fields, and to see what the cities are like. Lastly, he tells them to return with fruit from the land. After forty days, the scouts return with giant, bountiful fruits, confirming that the land itself is perfect. However, ten of the scouts deliver a terrifying report, claiming that the inhabitants are too powerful to conquer and providing בני ישראל with devastatingly discouraging news.

The only spies to stand strong and offer a better perspective are כלב and יהושע, who remind the people to have faith that Hashem will help them overcome the nations. Plunged into despair, בני ישראל cry out, "וְלָמָּה ה' מְבִיא אֶתָּנוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְנָפֶל בְּחָרֶב" "and why is G-d bringing us to this land to fall by the sword" (במדבר י"ד:ג). בני ישראל feared that they had been freed

from Egypt only to be crushed by the nations occupying their destined homeland.

The תורה describes these spies as the leaders of each tribe, so how could such great leaders have failed so badly? Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains that they actually had the highest of intentions. In the desert, the people lived an idyllic life of spiritual bliss, where all their material needs were miraculously met; life revolved entirely around the משכן, and their sole pursuit was to understand Hashem and His תורה. The spies feared that upon settling the land, which required physical labor, the nation would fall from this high spiritual peak. The giant fruits of the land and the promises of material wealth that they foreshadowed, frightened them, and they shared these fears with the people.

But weren't the spies just being honest? They were tasked with going to the Promised Land and bringing back fruit and a report, which they did. Weren't they just sharing their findings?

The key to understanding their mistake is that משה did not ask them to provide an assessment of whether or not the people would be able to enter the land. If Hashem willed it, surely there would be a way. משה asked them only to report the facts, leaving the interpretation open. Instead, they let their fears dictate the narrative. The בעל שם טוב teaches us that we are like spies in our own lives. When we encounter challenges and difficulties, we need to hold back from becoming prophets of doom. We have Hashem on our side, and we can surely succeed. We always have a choice: we can focus entirely on our flaws, the

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difficulty of our circumstances, or how overwhelming a problem seems, which leads to despair and giving up. Or, like כלב and יהושע, we can recognize the difficulty but choose to focus on our inner strength and Divine backing.

Dealing With Rejection

By Benjy Gerber '28

Something odd occurs in this פרשה portion. After the incident with the spies, G-d announces that almost none of the Jews will be allowed to enter the land of Israel. He then tells the Jews about the מצווה of giving sacrifices when they are in Israel. This contrast is jarring as one second G-d is telling the Jews that they will never enter Israel, and the next G-d is telling the Jews what to do when they enter Israel.

The רמב"ן explains that G-d was consoling the Jews for the thoughts that they were having, as the Jews were worried that they would never have possession of the land of Israel. This would be because their children also might grow up to become sinners, and G-d would take away the land from them. Therefore, Hashem is telling the Jews that they would acquire the land and that they would also be devoted enough to G-d to offer Him sacrifices.

Alternatively, the אור החיים says that after the incident with the spies, the Jews lost all meaning in their lives. The Jews believed that their goal was to make it to the land of Israel, and now that that was not going to happen, they fell into despair. G-d then came to tell them that it would be their children who enter the land of Israel, so they need to teach their children the laws of the תורה and what to do when they get to Israel. That is why we have this section about the

sacrifices that they would give in Israel, it is so that the Jews will teach their children the laws.

אבן עזרא says these sacrifices are to comfort the Jews for something else. He says that the Jews were worried that G-d would never forgive them for their sins, which is why the Jews tried to ask G-d for forgiveness earlier. Due to this, G-d gives the Jews laws about atonement for sin, so that the Jews should know that they have been forgiven, and that they can be forgiven in the future. אבן עזרא further explains the reason why immediately after this G-d says not to think of yourself above G-d and then gives the laws of ציצית, is to say to tell the Jews, "Do not try rebelling against Me again and the ציצית will be your sign to remember that."

The Jews went through a lot on their journey: they were slaves, then freed, then crossed a sea on dry land, received the תורה and the promise of Israel, then the spies kept them from the land. It was a wild and difficult journey that was supposed to end in happiness with their arrival in Israel, but they never received it and were heartbroken. Sometimes in people's lives there are things that happen with permanent consequences, but this story seems to be coming to teach us that that is not the end. You should not linger in the past, you should focus on the future and how you will make it better. You should not stop because you can never reach your goal, you should keep going to help someone else make it.



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