

HOW FAR IT MIGHT TRAVEL

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven; "Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here? Why do you dissuade the heart of the Children of Israel from crossing to the land that HASHEM has given them? This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land." (Bamidbar 32:6-8)

The Malbim points out that from here we find out something that was not clearly stated earlier. We had the impression that the main problem of the spies was that they had spoken badly about the land. Now, forty years later, we learn that the more serious crime was that they had spoken words that were discouraging to the Children of Israel. A whole generation later and Moshe is still extremely guarded on this issue. How vulnerable then is the average person to being discouraged. See how important it is to lend encouragement to others and not to do or say anything that might soften their resolve.

On our way out of town one Erev Simchas Torah we stopped by to visit Rabbi Hershel Mashinsky ztl. He was sitting in his Sukkah. He greeted each of us individually with his usual warmth. As we were speaking one of the young children reached uninvited into a bowl with sugar cubes and grabbed one. I quickly tried to stop him. Rabbi Mashinsky with his sweet softness said to the child, "Nu?! A brocho!?" The child said the appropriate blessing to which we all answered, "Amen!" Then Rabbi Mashinsky chimed in, "That was a smart brocho!" We carry that phrase till today and employ it daily- "A smart brocho!"

On the flip side, my wife told me that she had taken the time and expense to buy something new for one of our young daughters. The little girl had selected an outfit she liked very much and the first day she was proudly wearing it, another child said to her, "Where did you get that shmata???" She refuses to wear it again!

A teacher of thousands over the past 29 years told me this week the disheartening words spoken to him by a teacher of his more than three decades ago and how it hurt him so. "You'll never achieve anything." Still, he attends the dinner each year, remembers clearly, but never says a word.

A woman keeps a framed note on her table from an educator that met her son once, years ago, and took the time to write that he's a fine boy! How simple it is to add zest to another's day or entire life! A husband, with glowing praise, eulogizes his young wife by recalling that he had purchased a van that his wife had advised him strongly not to buy and after it turned out to be a lemon she said

nothing at all.

Rabbi Zelig Plskin writes in Gateways to Happiness, "Be aware of the positive traits and behaviors of the people with whom you come into contact and help them build upon their strengths. Encouragement is a much more powerful tool for change and growth than blaming and condemning. You can bring about miracles in a person's life if you believe in their potential.(P. 388) With the casual power of remote control, and in a given moment, one can easily turn someone on or turn them off, and never know how far it might travel. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.