

THE HONEY IN THE PROMISED LAND

by Rabbi Label Lam

And they went and they came to Moshe and to Aaron and to the entire congregation of the Children of Israel... (Bamidbar 13:26)

And they went and they came...Just as their coming was with bad advice so was their going already with a sour agenda. (Rashi)

What was so devastatingly bad about what the spies did? They reported things the way they saw it. Why did their discouraging report have such horrific consequences? The entire nation was made to take a forty year detour. The Talmud debates whether those doomed to wander and never enter the Holy Land had forfeited their portion in the next world or not. How did such great princes fail? Why was the whole nation implicated?

One hot summer day a friend of mine offered me a cold drink in his apartment. I had never seen this Israeli brand before. I studied the large Hebrew letters on the can:

Samech/Phe/Raish/Yud/Nun/Gimel. "What word is that?" I wondered. Then I got it! "Suffering!" "That's an odd name for a drink!" I thought, until I turned the can around to the other side and there written in English was the real name, "SPRING". The difference between an experience of suffering or spring may depend upon the perceived placement of a few small dots.

The Famous Psychologist Eric Fromm wrote the following: What is unconscious and what is conscious depends...on the structure of society and the patterns of feelings and thoughts it produces...The effect of society is not only to funnel fictions into our consciousness, but also to prevent awareness of reality...Every society...determines the forms of awareness. This system works, as it were like a socially conditioned filter; experience cannot enter awareness unless it can penetrate the filter." We can appreciate that the human intellect is not only processing information rationally, it is filtering out noise and images and tons of stimuli. Since we cannot respond to everything only certain things are allowed to enter our consciousness while others fly under the radar unnoticed.

The criteria of what we screen out and what we let in is either a factor of some individual or societal idiosyncrasy. We are not likely perceiving total reality at any given moment but rather some subjective version of truth based upon prior notions.

A young man visiting Paris for the first time went with his native Frenchman friend to the famous museum The Louver. There he glared unimpressed at masterpiece after masterpiece. The

Frenchman, unnerved asked if he liked what he had seen. The young man told him disappointedly, "All the paintings have milk on them." The Frenchman was astounded, "Renoir, Van Gogh, Monet, and the Mona Lisa all with milk on them!?" Then he looked closely at his visitor friend and realized that his glasses had milk on them. Aha!

A man walked into an old time tailor shop picked out a bolt of cloth and was measured for a suit. He returned on the appointed date excited to wear his new suit to that day's occasion. To his great dismay one arm on the jacket was six inches too short. The pant leg on the other side was also six inches too short. The man was livid. "Where am I going to get another suit for tonight's affair?" The tailor quickly advised him to raise his shoulder in a certain way so that the sleeve rested on the wrist and to lift his leg so that the cuff of the pant leg lay on the shoe. Contorted by the new suit he hobbled down the street. Two gentlemen were following behind. One said to the other, "Look at that unfortunate man!" The other responded, "But he sure has a great tailor!"

In "The Sane Society" Eric Fromm explains how a person can be considered well-adjusted but since he is in an insane society and although he is a paradigm of success- a prince he is crippled by the mental suit he is made to fit. He's a perfect production of an unperfected societal agenda. If the spies perceived milk on a masterpiece and read suffering into spring, then another generation having purified lenses would have to be trained to behold both the milk and the honey in the Promised Land! Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.