

A WAVE OF DESTRUCTION

by Rabbi Label Lam

"And Moshe sent them from the Desert of Paran according to the word of HASHEM, all men heads of the Children of Israel they were!" (Bamidbar 13:3)

There is nothing more dear before the Holy One Blessed Be He than a messenger that is sent to do a Mitzvah and he puts his heart and soul into his mission. (Midrash)

We are all messengers in that we are sent from HASHEM into this world to do Mitzvos! (Sefas Emes)

How had the spies that Moshe sent, who were superior people, failed so badly?

In the 60's an experiment was performed in a public high school in California. The result of that human experiment was made into a brief docudrama entitled "The Wave". It's the contents of that film I would like to describe. It begins with a group of American high school students witnessing graphic footage of the terrible events of the Holocaust. One of the students asks the teacher how something like that could happen unchecked by German society.

The next day in class the same teacher criticizes his students for straggling into class and then slouching in their chairs. He challenged them to find their seats in a set time. After many tries they do it successful. Then he shortens the time and they manage to do it with precision. Now sitting with straight backs he reminds them of how-good it feels to do things with discipline. He teaches them to chant in unison, "Strength through discipline!"

Another fine day he teaches them that it is not good enough to have good and disciplined practice for yourself alone. He launches a campaign to recruit other students in the high school to be a part of their exclusive club.

Some friction and resistance begins to percolate amongst the student body between friendships but most find themselves swept in the wave of enthusiasm. He installs within them a new "mantra", "Strength through community!"

In the last bold phase the teacher encourages those students who are full-fledged members of the club to gather in the school auditorium for the next great step. With all present he begins by announcing that this club is not just a local happening but rather it is a part of a national action and it is time for them to meet for the first time and accept orders from their national leader. He introduces a new phrase, "Strength through action!"

With the attention of the masses riveted upon the primitive monitor and their hearts primed to meet

their national leader, the image on the screen comes into focus and lo and behold there is the grotesque image of that infamous brute Hitler delivering one of his impassioned and animated speeches. The faces of the students are filled with horror and then self- disgust. This was all the long and dramatic answer to the question, "How could such a thing happen?"

One can have the power of personal discipline and a cohesive community, and still be led to ruination by a deviant cause. Just look at the world around us. Perhaps that is the meaning of the Mishne in Avos "On three things the world stands. 1) On Torah, 2) On Work-Avoda and 3) On Acts of Kindliness". All three are required. 1) Work on the self through discipline. 2) Living beyond self for community and 3) Devotion to truth- Torah. So too with the spies, in spite of their personal credentials and lofty communal stature they only failed to heed Moshe, and by following the opinion of faulty hearts and earthy eyes they created a wave of destruction. Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.