

PERMISSION TO CONFUSE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shlach

Permission to Confuse

Our parashah relates how Moshe sent Spies and they brought back a bad report. We read (13:31), "But the men who had ascended with him said, *'We cannot ascend* to that people for it is too strong for us!'"

Later in the parashah we read (14:40): "They awoke early in the morning and ascended toward the mountaintop saying, 'We are ready, and *we shall ascend* to the place of which Hashem has spoken, for we have sinned!'" (14:40)

What changed between the time that Bnei Yisrael accepted the opinion of the spies that, "We cannot ascend," and the time that Bnei Yisrael said, "We shall ascend"? R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi z"l (1745-1813; the Ba'al Ha'Tanya) explains: In their hearts, all of the Jewish People are believers. Sometimes, the yetzer hara manages to overcome a person and causes him to act or speak contrary to his innate belief. That is what happened here. However, as soon as Bnei Yisrael heard how angry Hashem was at their saying, "We cannot ascend," their evil inclinations immediately were subdued and their emunah was able to express itself in the statement, "We shall ascend!"

Unfortunately, in the case of the Generation of the Wilderness, it was too late to undo the damage that their words caused. Nevertheless, every person can learn from this not to despair when heretical or immoral thoughts cross his mind. The yetzer hara only has permission to confuse a person, but it is never able to uproot a Jew's core beliefs. (Likkutei Amarim, end of ch.29)

"[Kalev] said, 'Aloh na'aleh / We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we can surely do it!' But the men who had ascended with him said, 'We cannot ascend to that people for it is too strong for us!'" (13:30-31)

Why did Kalev repeat himself: "aloh na'aleh" - literally, "ascend we shall ascend"? Shlomo Ephraim

Luntschitz z"l (1550-1619; rabbi of Prague) explains: Kalev meant, "It surely is possible to *ascend to Eretz Yisrael if we first elevate ourselves through teshuvah and good deeds. Hashem certainly can defeat the inhabitants of the Land, but we must prepare ourselves.

The other Spies disagreed. They replied, "If it depends on us, it is not possible. Unless we can be sure that Hashem will have mercy, it is hopeless, for it--the yetzer hara--is too strong for us." (Kli Yakar)

What was wrong with the Spies' argument? R' Hershel Reichman shlita (rosh yeshiva at Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan / Yeshiva University) answers that their logic may have been correct. Nevertheless, they were wrong because Hashem promised that Bnei Yisrael would inherit the Land.

What led the spies, who Rashi z"l describes as great people, to err? R' Reichman explains further: As the Kli Yakar implies, the spies didn't believe that the generation that had been slaves was capable of elevating themselves to the point where they could build a nation in Eretz Yisrael. It would be better, the spies thought, for Bnei Yisrael to remain in the protective cocoon of the desert and for their children to enter Eretz Yisrael.

R' Reichman continues: This understanding of the Spies' error explains why they were punished so severely, i.e., with immediate death (see 14:37). There simply is no room for a "leader" who does not believe in his flock; such a person is no leader at all. (Heard from R' Hershel Reichman shlita - 12 Sivan 5774)

From the same source:

"Chevron had been built seven years before Tzo'an of Egypt." (13:22)

Rashi comments: The verse cannot mean that Chevron was chronologically older than Tzo'an. Rather, Rashi writes, "Tzo'an must have been the best part in the land Egypt since the residence of the kings was there, as is written (Yeshayahu 30:4) 'For in Tzo'an were its princes,' yet Chevron was seven times better than it."

Surely Tzo'an was a city of grand palaces and boulevards! In what sense was Chevron better than it? R' Reichman explains:

Tzo'an was a beautiful city, as long as one looked only at the surface. In reality, it was a city built by cruelly abused slaves and inhabited by an immoral people. In contrast, Chevron was a graveyard, the burial place of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs; on the surface, there is nothing beautiful about Chevron. However, its pnimiyut / inner essence is truly beautiful.

It was that pnimiyut that ten of the Spies failed to see.

Memoirs

This week, we conclude our excerpts from "Megillat Eivah"--literally, "The Scroll of Hatred"--a memoir by R' Yom Tov Lipman Heller z"l (1578-1654), author of the Mishnah commentary Tosafot Yom Tov. In 1629, while serving as rabbi of Prague, R' Heller was imprisoned on a charge of insulting Christianity in his writings. R' Heller was sentenced to death, but was given permission to ransom himself for 12,000 Reichsthaler in cash [approximately 685 pounds of silver], payable immediately. In last week's excerpt, R' Heller related that the ransom was reduced to 10,000 Reichsthaler, to be paid in installments. After listing, and blessing, the people who gave or lent him money to pay the ransom, R' Heller continues:

I have already accepted upon myself to be among those about whom the master of wise men [King Shlomo] said (Mishlei 12:16), "One who conceals shame is clever." Therefore, I will not describe the great opposition that tried to prevent others from giving guarantees for my ransom. I had many opponents in Prague. In any event, they have already died, and their sin has been removed . . .

While I was still in prison, before I received the guarantees--which, as mentioned, were delayed in coming--the Chancellor informed the activists on my behalf on Tuesday, the 18th of the month of Menachem [Av] that, by command of the Emperor, I could no longer serve as rabbi of Prague. This was worse in my eyes than everything else that had happened to me until then. All of my prayers and my pleading before nobles and officials accomplished nothing, and I was in great pain. I was left with no source of income [at a time when he had undertaken large debts to pay his ransom]. But, Hashem gave me strength to withstand all of these misfortunes. Blessed is Hashem forever, amen and amen.

On Friday, the 28th of Menachem [Av], the guarantees were received, and I was released from imprisonment. His majesty, the Emperor, further showed me kindness with regard to his decree that my books be burned. Instead, he required only that certain words be erased from the copies that were in my possession. [In subsequent printings, the names of R' Heller's books were changed to avoid further bans.] . . . But, the decree regarding the rabbinate, the Emperor would not annul. On this very day, at the conclusion of 40 days, I left prison "clean"--as if to say, "empty-handed." [See Shmot 21:28 and Rashi there.]

After many investigations, I found out who did this to me [i.e., caused me to be banned from the rabbinate]; someone with a good reputation in the eyes of the Emperor. I came before that man on Tzom Gedaliah 5390 [1629], and told him of my pain and suffering. I told him that I am not asking to reclaim the fortune that was taken from me; only this I ask: to be returned to my previous position. He responded, "I will tell you the truth. I did not agree with the Emperor's desire to take money from you. My goal was only to have you removed as the rabbi. The reason for my enmity is that I was told

that you used to brag before the Governor of Prague and Bohemia that you defeated me in debates when you lived here in Vienna." I answered him: "Look, please, my master, and from this you can judge the truthfulness of all of my enemies' lies. [When I was appointed rabbi,] I traveled from here [Vienna] to Prague with ten wagons and many Jews who accompanied me, and also ten soldiers to protect me on the road. Ask them when that occurred, and you will learn that it was close to Pesach. That Governor of whom you speak was dead and buried several months before my trip!" Immediately, his attitude toward me changed. He said, "I cannot do anything about the rabbinate, but I will seek another trade or profession for you and will do everything in my power so that you can serve Hashem as you desire. In the meantime, my home is open to you." I told him that my only desire is to be employed in G-d's service [i.e., as a rabbi] . . .

[R' Heller concludes his memoir by noting that the 40 days that he was imprisoned were the same 40 days--17 Tamuz through 28 Menachem Av--that Moshe Rabbeinu was on Har Sinai praying for Bnei Yisrael to be forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf, a fact that cannot be a coincidence. He further describes his deliberations about whether to command his descendants to observe the day of his release--28 Menachem Av--as a festival. Eventually he concludes that he will not do so because his redemption was incomplete, leaving him unemployed and in debt.

Approximately one year after our story ends, R' Heller was appointed rabbi of the city of Nemirov.]

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **[Torah.org](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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