

SENDING NOTES

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

A few disconnected and connected thoughts. Think of it as a work in progress.

Note 1. The difference between the sin of the Egel (golden calf) when the generation was not punished with death and the Miraglim (spies) when the generation was consigned to die in the desert is that idolatry (the Egel) is a means for rationalizing Tayvah (desire). Tayvah was the basic sin of Adam and Chava, which is why there is the association between Matan Torah (giving of the Torah), Pre-Gan Eden, and the Egel. The realities of Tayvah are that it is intrinsic to the human condition. As such, there was no need for that generation to die out; instead, they had to be given the tools to combat their intrinsic Evil Inclination. (Not to suggest that "basic, primal, desires" are intrinsically evil. Just the opposite! However, when Tayvah is used in opposition to G-d's law it is the tool of the Evil Inclination.) Therefore, G-d gave them Teshuvah (the chance to repent) and the Mishkan. It was a lesson in the realities of life - we sin and we repent.

On the other hand, the Miraglim sinned with a lack of Emunah (faith). Emunah is not a product of Tayvah. Where Tayvah is a lack of discipline and self-control, Emunah questions the essence of G-d's reality.

(See the third Ani Mammin that establishes G-d as non-corporal and unlimited. There is nothing that G-d cannot do.)

Note 2. G-d is a Kol Yachol (able to do everything). As such, having faith in Him is the minimum that G-d had a right to expect from us after all He had revealed during and after the Exodus. (See Darash Moshe where my Grandfather Zt' l explains why after all the miracles and because of all the miracles, the Miraglim and the nation could question G-d's ability to take the 31 city-states of Canaan.)

Note 3. Even if we attribute positive motives to the report of the Miraglim, their lack of Emunah allowed them to think that they knew better than G-d. (Prelude to Korach) Bottom line is that they should have trusted G-d that He knew exactly what He was doing and that their responsibility was to model total trust and faith. Had they come back with the same facts about giants and fortified cities, but enthused and optimistic about the future, all of history would have been different.

Note 4. The ability to sin always involves a lack of Emunah; however, Tayvah functions as a rationalization for going against G-d. More honestly stated, it grants us the permission to do what we want to do and ignore what G-d wishes. Most of us are not comfortable thinking that we are going

against G-d. We would rather convince ourselves that we are only doing what we want to do and that we are too weak to resist. On the other hand, the sin of the Miraglim was founded upon a lack of faith not because they wanted to do something otherwise prohibited; rather, it revealed a true lack of understanding or acceptance of the absolute dominion of G-d and the absolute subjugation of will that is demanded of us.

Note 5. The reasons for not having faith are many. For some it is a question of Tayvah - they are the easy ones. Rav Dessler presents a strategy for battling the challenges of Tayvah. He points out that the Yetzer Harah's (evil inclination) strategy does not start with a ideological confrontation. Instead, the Evil Inclination starts by awakening our desire to do whatever we are restricted from doing. The proper defense at that moment is to appear to give in to the Yetzer a little. (Similar to dieting. It is difficult to deny all eating pleasures. That is why systems of controlled cheating or rewards are very successful.) Delaying the gratification till later or replacing the forbidden desire with a permitted one can do this.

For example, if while learning Torah the Yetzer tries to distract us by diverting our attention to other activities, tell yourself that as soon as you finish learning you will do the other thing that the Yetzer is pushing. The chances are that by the time the learning is over and the "immediate urge" will have passed, the individual will have grounded himself within the norms of his life and be able to withstand the Yetzer's push.

The reason this strategy works is because the Yetzer works through illusion. The immediate urge imposes itself at that moment as the single most important thing. It dominates our thoughts and captures our hearts. However, the truth is that the Yetzer simply diverted our judicial sense of discernment away from deciding between right and wrong and focused us on the very transient fulfillment of some desire or other. Once the moment has passed and we have been able to fight back with our own deceptive illusion, we have the chance to catch our ethical breaths and see the desire for the illusion that it was.

Note 6. The truth is that there is no external Yetzer. The Yetzer is one side or the other of the freewill coin that G-d gifted us with and set us apart from all other creations. If we can fool ourselves into thinking that something truly unimportant is important we can also fool ourselves into believing that the fulfillment of that desire can wait until after we finish the page of Gemara or the help we are giving to someone else. By that time the first urge / illusion will have dissipated and we are back to thinking clearly and properly.

As a simple illustration, ask yourself the following question. You rented a show that you have really wanted to see. It does not have to be returned to the video store for a week. How many of us will easily turn off the show - without any reluctance - to go to minyan, do homework with a child, spend time with a spouse, write a check to a needy stranger at the door, or simply go to sleep? Why do we struggle? Why the sense of "But I want to watch it now?" Why the urgency? It is all an illusion. It is the

Yetzer Hara weaving his magical equation of "I want it; I need it; I must have it now!"

Note 7. With the Miraglim there were two parties to the Yetzer's deception as to whether or not we would be able to take Israel from the 31 nations occupying it at that time. The first were the spies themselves; the second was the nation. The spies themselves were too great to fall into a simple illusion; instead they sinned on the sophisticated level of having lost faith in G-d. They did not know it at the time but they were motivated by lost faith.

(Gleaned from Rabbi's Notebook 2003 with some modifications and additions.)

I would like to suggest that the Miraglim saw the Promised Land as certain death and destruction for the nation. In analyzing the findings of their mission, the Spies predicted a difficult campaign to take the land. They had seen the great, fortified, cities inhabited by legendary warriors and they feared that the Jews would have to do battle against its inhabitants.

The Spies may have understood the need to battle for the land as a necessary stage for reintegrating the nation into the norms of life. Two years of miraculous existence in the desert was not the intended reality for the Jews. The intended reality for the nation was to model for the world how to weave belief and service into the daily fabric of life and living. To do so the Jews would have to stop eating Manna and stop depending on point-guards of clouds and fire. They would have to act out the norms of invasion and victory by sending spies, gathering information, planning a strategy, executing a plan, while knowing and accepting that every victory along the way was solely the result of Divine intervention.

The land of Israel was a "land that consumed its inhabitants." Only the strong in body and spirit could survive the demands and challenges of the Promised Land. Since the exodus from Egypt the Jews had gained a degree of trust in themselves and G-d - but only because of G-d's overt, miraculous, intervention. To inherit and keep the Promised Land the Jews would have to take the lessons of the Exodus (G-d's overt intervention) and find His ever-present benevolence behind the façade of nature. The process of transitioning from G-d's overt intervention to His hidden intervention would challenge the courage and faith of the Jewish people. The Spies feared that the nation was not ready to meet that challenge.

The Spies were afraid that the Jews would not be able to handle the inevitable difficulties of war and occupation. They feared that in the process they would lose faith in G-d and His chosen leaders. They feared that because of all the miraculous interventions that had happened during and after the Exodus G-d would not forgive the people for losing faith and the land of Israel would be taken away from them! At that juncture of history G-d would have every reason to expect that the Jews would fully trust Him and His promise to give them the land of their Forefathers. If at that stage the nation would lose faith in G-d because of the seemingly overwhelming opposition and strength of the seven Canaanite nations, it would prove that they were not deserving of inheriting the land. Instead, the Miraglim decided to deliberately challenge their faith and test its potential weakness.

Rather the deficiency be exposed within the protected confines of the desert than discover the weakness after crossing over the Yarden! Rather confront their faith while G-d was overtly manifest and their faith could be strengthened or rebuilt than hope to strengthen them once G-d slipped back behind the veil of natural law.

However, something went terribly wrong. The Miraglim were not honest about their own weaknesses and deficiencies. They had not confronted their true motives for accepting the mission and their true motives for presenting their report in such a demoralizing way. Once they began their report it became evident that they believed their own report. They truly believed that they were incapable of overcome the challenging odds they had encountered! (13:13) "We felt like tiny grasshoppers!" Their report revealed their own loss of faith if G-d rather than being a mere strategy for exposing the nation's weaknesses and deficiencies.

The greatest tragedy of all is that the Miraglim succeeded in creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Had they returned full of enthusiasm and optimism, (as did Kalev) they would have strengthened the faith of the nation and guaranteed that the Jews would never again suffer exile and persecution. They would have guaranteed the beginning of the messianic era! Instead they demoralized the nation and caused them to loose faith in G-d and themselves. In the end they delayed the messianic era and caused the demise of an entire generation! How terribly tragic!

As we near the month of Tamuz and the confrontation over Gush Katif let us pray for the strength to clearly see G-d's never-ending benevolence and ceaseless protection of our nation and land. We must not be afraid. It is our land and only our land. Let us pray for the strength to have faith in the words of Kalev and Yehoshua, (13: 7-9) "The land through which we passed is a very good land. G-d can give it to us... Do not be afraid of the people of the land! They have lost their protection... G-d is with us, do not be afraid!"

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