

FEAR OF INDEPENDENCE, LONGING TO BELONG

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Moshe, at the behest and request of the Jewish people, chooses twelve outstanding leaders and orders them to embark on a mission of spying regarding the Land of Israel and its current Canaanite population. Moshe is confident that this mission will reinforce the enthusiasm and commitment of the Jewish people to settle and build their national homeland, promised to them by God through their ancestors.

God Himself, so to speak, appears to be almost aloof and passive about this spying mission. In the words of Rashi in this week's commentary to the parsha, the Lord leaves the choice of executing such a mission solely in the hands of Moshe. It is his option to proceed with the mission or to declare to the people that God's promises regarding the Holy Land are in themselves sufficient and need no human confirmation or empirical proof.

Moshe, the great leader, prophet and visionary of the Jewish people, is confident that the spies will confirm his positive view of the Land of Israel and thus dispel any remaining hesitation or doubts that the Jewish people may have regarding their old - new homeland. Once the spies returned and issue their glowing report, Moshe is convinced that he will no longer hear the nagging refrain of "let us return to Egypt."

He is therefore personally crushed by the betrayal of the ten spies, who not only do not issue a positive report but rather proclaim to the people that a Jewish homeland and national entity in the Land of Israel is an impossibility. And in a final statement of heresy, these ten spies state that even God Almighty cannot overcome the difficulties of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel.

Moshe apparently miscalculated the depth of fear and hesitation that lay within the Jewish people regarding the Land of Israel. This fear and hesitation was evident throughout the narrative of the wanderings of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai. It resonates throughout the centuries of later Jewish history, even unto our day and in our current situation.

In a strange and almost irrational manner, the Jewish people favored being under foreign rule and its "protection" over true national independence and reliance upon their own abilities and God's protective hand, so to speak. Egypt was no picnic for the Jews, but it allowed them the luxury of not having to make hard choices and not having to become self-reliant.

Even the sojourn in the desert of Sinai appealed to them for they were free from the everyday challenges of toil, tilling the land, building communities and constantly defending themselves from

the enemies that would always surround them. To a great extent it was this deep fear of independence and all of the challenges that independence would bring with it that motivated the Jewish people to accept the negative report that the ten spies presented and to long for foreign domination over personal and national independence.

Much of the ambivalence that is present today in the Jewish world regarding the State of Israel stems from this fear of independence and longing to belong to a foreign nation that will somehow alleviate our problems and make us less special. The millennia of Jewish history reflect this inner psychological struggle, which exists within us. As is often the case in human affairs, it is the minority report of Calev and Yehoshua that proves to be correct and beneficial.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com