

וְיָחִי וְיָחִי וְיָחִי THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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DON'T TRUST IN YOURSELF UNTIL THE DAY YOU DIE (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

The incident of the spies calls for clarification from several points of view. I will first enumerate the questions, then shed light on them one by one in order to demonstrate the unity underlying them all.

In his book entitled *Sichot Mussar*, the Gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz Zatzal asks how we can say that the spies sinned, since we know that they were righteous and upright when Moses chose them.

In my humble opinion, we may add several other questions:

1. Since Moses knew that in the end the spies would fail, why in fact did he send them? Proof of this is that he added a yud to the name of Joshua and prayed that he be protected from the influence of the spies (Sotah 34b). Now if he had not sent them, he would have saved the Children of Israel from having to spend 40 years in the desert, and he would have also prevented the destruction of both Temples!

2. As we know, Caleb son of Jephunneh feared being influenced by the spies, which is why he went to pray by the tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron (Sotah *ibid.*). Why did he not instead flee from them by returning to the desert? That way he wouldn't have needed to go to the tomb of the Patriarchs. Why did he need to go to Hebron and stay with the spies?

3. The greatest difficulty is that it is written, "They were all distinguished men" (Numbers 13:3), for at that moment in time they were clean of all sin. How can we understand that immediately afterwards they became fundamentally bad?

We will attempt to explain all of these points. The Sages have said, "Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die" (Perkei Avoth 2:4), for Yochanan the High Priest was a priest for 80 years, and in the end he became a Sadducee and killed several thousand Jews (Yoma 9a). This demonstrates just how much we must pay attention to not becoming a victim of the evil inclination and the forces of darkness, even if someone is a great individual. Concerning this it is said, "It is better for man not to have been created than to have been created" (Eruvin 13b), for a man can stumble into sin at any moment if he doesn't pay serious attention to not letting himself succumb to his evil instincts, and he should do everything to correct them.

Consequently, we may say that the spies were in reality wicked at their very core. We may assert that they only became righteous when they were surrounded by Tzaddikim such as Moses, Aaron, and the Sanhedrin, as well as when they saw the manifestation

of the Shechinah, since all these things influenced them for the good. The fact remains that they did not rectify the foundation of their heart and that their words did not correspond to their primary intentions.

This teaches us that each and everyone should wage a battle against his flaws, even if he often comes into contact with the righteous. He should benefit from every moment that he is in their presence in order to better himself, until it becomes impossible to say that his interior does not correspond to his exterior behavior (see Berachot 28b), as it is written, "Their heart was not constant with Him" (Psalms 78:37). It should not be that only their exterior resembles the righteous while their interior – their heart – remains spiritually poor and doubtful. Everyone mistook the spies for Tzaddikim, for this was really the outward image they projected when they approached Moses.

This is why Moses sent them to explore the land. It was precisely because he was aware of their weaknesses and knew that their interior was different than their exterior. He feared letting them enter the land at the same time as all the Jewish people, for he knew perfectly well that they had wicked intentions (Sotah 35a). This constituted a grave danger for the rest of the people who risked allowing themselves to be influenced by them. Moses therefore sent them in order to separate them from the presence of the righteous. The evil that was in them would then reveal itself on that great day, and thus everyone would understand that it is not enough to be like the righteous on the outside, but that the inside should also be pure before G-d. The result was that the Children of Israel remained in the desert for 40 years and all that wicked generation died there, leaving only the righteous whose interior was like their exterior. The others did not enter into Eretz Israel, but rather perished in the desert.

This is also why Moses added a yud to the name of Joshua and prayed for him, for Moses had to send Joshua with the spies, yet he feared that Joshua might allow himself to be influenced by them. Hence Moses added the yud, and thus his new name (Yehoshua) included 3 of the 4 letters of the Tetragrammaton. As for Caleb son of Jephunneh, he already had these 3 letters in the name of his father Jephunneh, and so he didn't need a change of name. It was enough for him to go to Hebron to pray by the tomb of the Patriarchs, for the interior of his heart was as pure as his exterior, and furthermore he had to go with the

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spies. He therefore prayed by the tomb of the Patriarchs and succeeded in not being influenced by them.

However, let us return to the spies themselves. When they returned from Eretz Israel after 40 days, they began by saying good things about the land and showed the people the size of the fruits that grew there. This is amazing, for far from being righteous, they were evil! Yet as soon as they came near some of the Tzaddikim, all of a sudden they began to say good things and once again acted as if their interior was similar to their exterior. Only afterwards did they begin to slander the land. Why did they do so? It was because of self-interest, for they knew that if they only spoke well of the land, the Children of Israel would enter it and they – who wanted to remain leaders of the people – would lose their positions.

This is what caused them to lose their senses. Instead of sanctifying the Name of G-d by going into the land and assuring that all the Jewish community entered into it – resulting in them not having to stay in the desert for 40 years and that both future Temples would not be destroyed – they preferred to satisfy their desire for honor and moved the people to tears during the night (Numbers 14:1). The result was that tears have marked this night for the generations since (Taanith 29a). They also brought hatred and jealousy between themselves and Moses, and between themselves and the Children of Israel, causing them to wander in the desert for 40 years. During that time they learned Torah, which is acquired by 48 qualities (Perkei Avoth 6:5[6]). All this was due to their love of honor, as it is said, “Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world” (ibid 4:21). They left the world and died in the desert.

Such was the wickedness of the spies, who deformed the truth and renounced the kindnesses of G-d (Bamidbar Rabba 16:9). In fact the spies didn't disguise themselves when they went to explore the land, and when the giants saw them, none of them attacked the spies. Since they didn't recognize G-d's beneficence, they couldn't see that the Canaanites' protective shade had left them. It is thus certain that they renounced all the kindnesses that G-d bestowed upon them from the time that they left Egypt. Instead of saying that the Eternal had done all this in order to make things easier for them (since at that time the Canaanites were burying their dead – Sotah 35a), they disregarded this heavenly help and said, “[It] is a land that devours its inhabitants!” (Numbers 13:32). The spies hurt themselves in so doing, for they wanted the Children of Israel to return to Egypt where they could remain leaders. All this occurred because during the times that they were in contact with the righteous, they did not take advantage of the opportunity to eliminate their faults.

We can draw a great lesson from this. A man should never trust himself until the day of his death. Even if he is righteous, he should fear that deep inside he has flaws that have not yet been fixed, and he should know that there's good reason to be very careful. This also teaches us that trials assail a man after he has left the proximity of his teacher and study environment. It is then that we clearly see if he is the same on the inside as on the outside, and at that point he can correct himself. If he is not able to do so, he should hurry to get back to his teacher, and there he will correct everything and elevate himself in Torah and the fear of Heaven.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

THE WONDROUS SEFER TORAH

In the Algerian city of Annaba (formerly Bône), there was a Sefer Torah known for being particularly holy, and which the Jewish community preciously safeguarded. The following story is told concerning how it arrived there.

A very long time ago, in what was then known at Bône, an Arab left for Arabia and make a pilgrimage to Mecca (where the Muslim sacred stone is located) and to visit cites holy to Islam. Once his voyage was finished he took a boat that was headed for Alexandria in Egypt, and there onboard he encountered a Jew who was also from Bône. This Jew was coming back from Jerusalem with a Sefer Torah that he had received from the Chief Rabbi of the holy city. He kept this precious scroll in a metal trunk.

A violent storm erupted as they were nearing port, and the boat was damaged and sunk. The only one who survived was the Muslim pilgrim, who after this disaster managed to make it back to his hometown of Bône without further mishap. There he related everything that had happened to him, and he also mentioned the death of the Jew, his fellow citizen.

The incident had almost been forgotten until one fine day, a Turk who guarded the port of Bône saw something strange that was floating on the water. He approached from the shore and saw that a small trunk was floating along the shoreline. He immediately brought the matter of this suspicious object to the attention of the city governor, who in turn sent policemen to see what it was. Yet when the police tried to grab hold of the trunk, it slipped by them and floated towards open water. All their attempts to retrieve it proved hopeless.

Everyone was astonished at this turn of events, and then all of a sudden someone remembered the Muslim pilgrim's story about the Jew who possessed a Sefer Torah. Some Jews were then called upon to capture the trunk, and wonder of wonders it floated towards them and arrived right into the hands of the Rav! He opened it and took out the holy Sefer from Jerusalem.

Very much impressed by this extraordinary event, the Muslim pilgrim who had traveled with the poor Jew constructed, at his own expense, a building to house the Sefer.

It was in this way that the synagogue of Bône was built.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI YITZHAK TAIEB

Rabbi Yitzhak Taieb had incredible talents that expressed themselves on each page of his written works.

The son of the Gaon Rabbi Haim Faladji recounts that while Rabbi Yitzhak Taieb sat on the rabbinic court and was listening to everyone's arguments, at the same time he also taught and responded to questions that slipped through to him. He also acted in this way while writing decisions themselves, without even having to stop giving responses to questions that he was being asked.

Some people objected to him, asking themselves how a man could be capable of doing two things at once. However, when they saw his judicial verdicts along with the responses he gave at the same time to diverse questions addressed to him, people could see that both were perfectly relevant. His genius, scholarship, and sharpness of mind could be felt in the responses he gave. And the Halachic decisions that he rendered at exactly the same time were clear and worthy of appearing in the Shulchan Aruch.

One of the greats of his generation applied the following verse to him: "The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice" (Psalms 37:30). He merits that at the moment his tongue speaks of justice, his mouth expresses the wisdom of Halachah to respond appropriately.

Rabbi Yitzhak Taieb was great not just in the eyes of his community, but also in the eyes of non-Jews.

The following story confirms this fact more than 100 witnesses ever could. Two Arab neighbors had plots of land that bordered one another, separated only by a row of fruit trees. Once, one of the two men left town to deal with some business matter, not returning for several weeks. When he did come back, he discovered to his great surprise that during his absence the fruit

trees had been uprooted and that his neighbor had encroached upon a large part of his land. When he asked him the meaning of this, the other man denied everything, saying that he knew nothing of any uprooted trees. And as for the land in question, according to his neighbor it had always belonged to him!

A violent conflict erupted between the two men, until finally they presented their grievances to a judge. The judge himself, not knowing what verdict to render, sent the case to a higher court, which itself was not able to reach a verdict. In the end, the case was presented before the king. Yet he too was perplexed, deciding that only the great Rav of the Jews, Rabbi Yitzhak Taieb, could resolve such a complicated matter.

The king summoned him and explained the situation. The Rav asked the neighbor who had been wronged if he had in his possession ... a mule.

He responded in the affirmative.

Rav Yitzhak Taieb took the mule and went into the field with the Arab, and there he made the mule run freely. As we know, this type of animal does not go into a field that it doesn't recognize or that doesn't belong to its master. Now the mule, to the shame of the second Arab, began to run about in the field that he claimed as his own. The roots of the trees (which had been there before being ripped out of the ground, and which formed the neighbors' border) were found as well. The first Arab (who was then given back everything that had been stolen from him) was very impressed, and on that very day he presented himself to the Rav and brought him a particularly impressive gift.

Rav Yitzhak Taieb told him, "If I accept gifts from a man, I will no longer be able to arrive at verdicts that are the very essence of the truth."

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice” (Numbers 14:1).

The Midrash states: “The verse says, ‘You slandered in your tents’ [Deuteronomy 1:27], you sought to complain about the land that Hashem called ‘a good land.’”

What is the meaning of this Midrash?

Let us explain by using a parable.

An extremely pious man lived far removed from the pleasures of this world. When it came time to marry off his oldest son, he told the person who had proposed the match, “I have but this one son, and I will not allow him to get married before I have personally seen the young woman and her father and drawn my own conclusions!” Both of them went to see the father of the young woman, and the match was soon agreed upon. When he returned home, this man threw a large party in honor of the engaged couple. During the meal, he was asked some details about the soon-to-be father-in-law, and he related everything that he had seen of his good habits and uprightness. He was also asked about the man’s wife, and he mentioned the qualities that he had seen in her. Next, he was asked to speak about the main thing: What about the young woman? When the man’s wife heard that he was going to speak about his son’s fiancée, she approached the table in order to better listen. He then said, “Know that I can’t find words strong enough to praise my son’s fiancée. In short, my eyes have never before seen such perfection. She is truly a precious pearl.” When the young man heard his father’s words and his great praise for his fiancée, he broke out into tears.

“What’s the matter?” his mother asked him. “Listen to what your father said, and to everything he mentioned about your fiancée!”

“You know perfectly well,” he replied, “that my father is very pious and completely removed from the pleasures of this world. When I heard him say that there’s no other young girl in the world like her, I know that if he saw characteristics in her that the world considers as virtues, he would certainly view them as flaws, for he detests beauty, skill, and other traits that the world admires! He wishes that she neglect herself completely, that she be far from the world and immersed all day long in grief and fasting.”

From Hashem, the Children of Israel only experienced complete separation from the pleasures of the world, as it is written in the Mishnah: “This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground” (Perkei Avoth 6:4). Consequently, if Hashem spoke so well of the land, it was obviously because it was only appropriate for a life a seclusion and asceticism, for Hashem detests what appears to us as pleasant. This is why “you slandered in your tents”: You sought to complain about the land that Hashem called “a good land,” your complaint being for the very same reason that He spoke well of it.

THE PATH OF THE JUST SHAME - PART VI

In the same way, certain people are ashamed to perform precepts that the majority of people ignore. Be that as it may, they should nevertheless tolerate this shame and perform their duty. Actually, there’s no reason to neglect the least of the commandments because of the shame we feel before others. Rather, we must feel shame before our Creator Who ordained these precepts. It is obvious that the king’s servant will not disregard the order of his master even if the people shame him for it.

The man who refuses to humble himself in order to perform a commandment and who, because of this, abandons the right path demonstrates that he has a very weak capacity for shame. Similarly, being ashamed of recognizing truth is very grave, as is being ashamed of reprimanding others and encouraging them to do good. It is also not proper to be ashamed of asking one’s instructor to teach something that one doesn’t understand, be it a complex or simple subject. Concerning this, the book of Proverbs discourages us from acting foolishly by boasting or by keeping quiet as a ruse (see Proverbs 30:32), and our Sages have said, “A timid person cannot learn” (Perkei Avoth 2:5). The proper attitude consists of not being ashamed to ask what one doesn’t understand, be it an important or minor topic. King David said, “I will speak of Your testimonies before Kings, and I will not be ashamed” (Psalms 119:46).

The pious man, the chassid, is called such because he has a sense of shame. Actually, the word chassid is related to the word “white”, since the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew word chassidah (“stork”) is chivarta, which means “whiteness”. We see this in Leviticus 11:19 and in the following passage: “His face will not pale [from shame]” (Isaiah 29:22). In addition, the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew word cherpah (“shame”) is chissuda, as in the word chassid. Why is this so? It is because a pious man should endure shame to perform the Torah. He should spurn his shame when it comes to performing a mitzvah. He may even, in this way, make it to the level of prophecy, as it is written, “Then You spoke in a vision la-chassidecha [to Your devout]” (Psalms 89:20). His feelings of shame will bring him to a fear of Heaven, as it is written, “So that fear of Him shall be upon your faces, so that you shall not sin” (Exodus 20:17). And what is this fear that is written on the face? It is shame (Nedarim 20a).