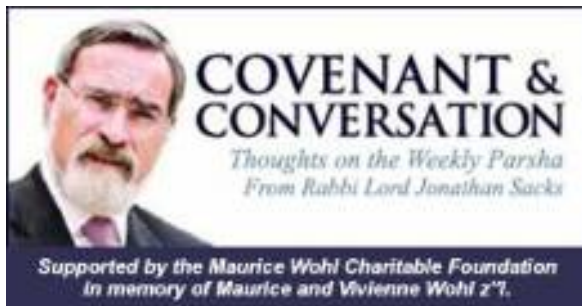


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On Leadership: Confidence

It was perhaps the single greatest collective failure of leadership in the Torah. Ten of the spies whom Moses had sent to spy out the land came back with a report calculated to demoralize the nation.

"We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large ... We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are ... The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height ... We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." (Num. 13:27-33)

This was nonsense, and they should have known it. They had left Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world, after a series of plagues that brought that great country to its knees. They had crossed the seemingly impenetrable barrier of the Red Sea. They had fought and defeated the Amalekites, a ferocious warrior nation. They had even sung, along with their fellow Israelites, a song at the Sea that contained the words:

The peoples have heard; they tremble;
pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.
Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;
trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. (Ex. 15:14-15)

They should have known that the people of the land were afraid of them, not the other way round. And so it was, as Rahab told the spies sent by Joshua forty years later:

I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. (Joshua 2:9-11)

Only Joshua and Caleb among the twelve showed leadership. They told the people that the conquest of the land was eminently achievable because God was with them. The people did not listen. But the two leaders received their reward. They alone of their generation lived to enter the land. More than that: their defiant statement of faith and their refusal to be afraid shines as brightly now as it did thirty-three centuries ago. They are eternal heroes of faith.

One of the fundamental tasks of any leader from president to parent is to give people a sense of confidence: in themselves, in the group of which they are a part, and in the mission itself. A leader must have faith in the people he or she leads, and inspire that faith in them. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter of the Harvard Business School writes in her book *Confidence*, "Leadership is not about the leader, it is about how he or she builds the confidence of everyone else." (1) Confidence, by the way, is Latin for "having faith together."

The truth is that in no small measure a law of self-fulfilling prophecy applies in the human arena. Those who say, "We cannot do it" are probably right, as are those who say, "We can." If you lack confidence you will lose. If you have it - solid, justified confidence based on preparation and past performance - you will win. Not always, but often enough to triumph over setbacks and failures. That, as mentioned in a previous Covenant and Conversation, is what the story of Moses' hands is about, during the battle against the Amalekites. When the Israelites look up, they win. When they look down they start to lose.

That is why the negative definition of Jewish identity that has so often prevailed in modern

times (Jews are the people who are hated, Israel is the nation that is isolated, to be Jewish is to refuse to grant Hitler a posthumous victory) is so misconceived, and why one-in-two Jews who have been brought up on this doctrine choose to marry out and discontinue the Jewish journey.

Harvard economic historian David Landes in his *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* explores the question of why some countries fail to grow economically while others succeed spectacularly. After more than 500 pages of close analysis, he reaches this conclusion:

In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and that is the way of achievement, correction, improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right.(2)

I prefer the word "hope" to "optimism." Optimism is the belief that things will get better; hope is the belief that together we can make things better. No Jew, knowing Jewish history, can be an optimist, but no Jew worthy of the name abandons hope. The most pessimistic of the prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, were still voices of hope. By their defeatism, the spies failed as leaders and as Jews. To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope.

The most remarkable by far of all the commentators on the episode of the spies was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn. He raised the obvious question. The Torah emphasizes that the spies were all leaders, princes, heads of tribes. They knew that God was with them, and that with His

help there was nothing they could not do. They knew that God would not have promised them a land they could not conquer. Why then did they come back with a negative report?

His answer turns the conventional understanding of the spies upside down. They were, he said, not afraid of defeat. They were afraid of victory. What they said to the people was one thing, but what led them to say it was another entirely.

What was their situation now, in the wilderness? They lived in close and continuous proximity to God. They drank water from a rock. They ate manna from heaven. They were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory. Miracles accompanied them along the way.

What would be their situation in the land? They would have to fight wars, plough the land, plant seed, gather harvests, create and sustain an army, an economy and a welfare system. They would have to do what every other nation does: live in the real world of empirical space. What then would happen to their relationship with God? Yes, He would still be present in the rain that made crops grow, in the blessings of field and town, and in the Temple in Jerusalem that they would visit three times a year, but not visibly, intimately, miraculously, as He was in the desert. This is what the spies feared: not failure but success.

This, said the Rebbe, was a noble sin but still a sin. God wants us to live in the real world of nations, economies and armies. God wants us, as he put it, to create "a dwelling place in the lower world." He wants us to bring the *Shekhinah*, the Divine presence, into everyday life. It is easy to find God in total seclusion and escape from responsibility. It is hard to find God

in the office, in business, in farms and fields and factories and finance. But it is that hard challenge to which we are summoned: to create a space for God in the midst of this physical world that He created and seven times pronounced good. That is what ten of the spies failed to understand, and it was a spiritual failure that condemned an entire generation to forty years of futile wandering.

The Rebbe's words ring true today even more loudly than they did when he first spoke them. They are a profound statement of the Jewish task. They are also a fine exposition of a concept that entered psychology only relatively recently - *fear of success*.⁽³⁾ We are all familiar with the idea of fear of failure. It is what keeps many of us from taking risks, preferring instead to stay within our comfort zone.

No less real, though, is fear of success. We want to succeed: so we tell ourselves and others. But often unconsciously we fear what success may bring: new responsibilities, expectations on the part of others that we may find hard to fulfil, and so on. So we fail to become what we might have become had someone given us faith in ourselves.

The antidote to fear, both of failure and success, lies in the passage with which the parsha ends: the command of *tzitzit* (Num. 15: 38-41). We are commanded to place fringes on our garments, with among them a thread of blue. Blue is the colour of the sky and of heaven. Blue is the colour we see when we look up (at least in Israel; in Britain, more often than not we see clouds). When we learn to look up, we overcome our fears. Leaders give people confidence by teaching them to look up. We are not grasshoppers unless we think we are.

1. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Confidence*, Random House, 2005, 325.
2. David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London, Little, Brown, 1998, 524.
3. Sometimes called the "Jonah complex" after the prophet. See Abraham Maslow, *The farther reaches of human nature*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977, 35-40.



Elevating the Physical World

One of the main characters in the Torah portion is Yehoshua. Yehoshua was most significantly influenced by two great people – his righteous ancestor, Yosef, and his great teacher, Moshe.

Yehoshua emulated Yosef in a number of ways. In particular they shared the ability to be involved with and elevate the physical world. In this article, we will examine some of the sources that focus on this aspect of Yosef and Yehoshua and contrast them to Moshe Rabbeinu.¹

One of the main facets of Yosef's greatness was his ability to be involved in the physical world and maintain his lofty spiritual levels despite great challenges. Likewise, his role was clearly very much related to the physical realm. As he himself told his brothers, the whole reason that he was brought down to Egypt was to provide food in the midst of the devastating famine that struck the world. Moreover, he made the Egyptian people undergo circumcision. One of the reasons given for why he did this is that circumcision represents the elevation of the physical aspect of the body. Thus, his goal in

doing this was to elevate the spiritual level of the Egyptian nation.

Moshe, in contrast, was so spiritual that he resembled an angel in many aspects: He attained the highest level of prophecy possible and spent 40 days on Mount Sinai without food or drink. When he came down, his face shone so brightly that no one could even look at him. Moreover, he was on such a level of prophecy that he was forbidden from engaging in regular physical activities.

Yehoshua, the loyal student of Moshe, resembled his ancestor Yosef more than his teacher. We see this both in the Torah and the Prophets. In *Beshalach*, Amalek attacks the Jewish nation. Moshe tells Yehoshua to go out and lead the physical battle, whilst Moshe stays behind praying for the nation's success. Thus, Moshe engaged in the spiritual realm of the battle, whilst Yehoshua's role was more in the physical sphere.

In the Book of the Prophets, this theme continued: The nation suffers its first defeat in the battle of Ai.² When Yehoshua hears about what had happened, he falls to the ground and supplicates in prayer to God over the tragedy. However, God reacts sharply, telling him, "Yehoshua, get up, why do you fall on your face?!"³ He then instructs Yehoshua to take an active role in finding out the cause of the disaster. Upon Yehoshua's taking a more physically active role, God's anger is abated.

The Shem MiShmuel takes the contrast between Moshe and Yehoshua further, saying that God's way of relating to the nation altered drastically with the change of leadership. He brings out this idea in answering a difficult problem. In this week's portion, the nation demonstrates its fear

of entering the land of Israel and the people therefore ask Moshe to send spies to the land. The Shem MiShmuel asks why they were so fearful – they had experienced numerous open miracles and seen how God could destroy Egypt, the most powerful empire in the world.

He explains that the key event which triggered their fears was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad in the desert. They prophesied that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would lead the nation into Eretz Yisrael. The people knew that the open miracles they were experiencing were in the merit of Moshe. They also realized that despite his greatness, Yehoshua could not guide the nation to this level of open Divine Providence. Rather they would be largely restricted to hidden miracles.⁴ This is why they were so fearful of entering the land - they felt that only open miracles would enable them to conquer the mighty nations living there.⁵

Thus, we see that Yehoshua was more grounded in the physical world than Moshe. His greatness was that he could attain great spiritual heights for himself and the nation through his physical efforts. Like Yosef he also led a mass circumcision, thereby elevating the physical nature of the people.⁶ And he led the nation on its difficult transition from living above the laws of nature to living within them and yet maintaining high levels of holiness.

There is a remarkable Midrash which reveals how great Yehoshua's mastery was over the physical world, and how he inherited this power from Yosef: In his war against the Emorites, Yehoshua needed more daylight in order to complete the victory. He commanded the sun and moon to stand still to give him that extra time, and the sun complied.⁷ The Midrash

elaborates on how Yehoshua was able to bring about this remarkable miracle. "Rebbe Yitzchak says, he [Yehoshua] said to it [the sun], 'bad servant, aren't you a servant of my father [Yosef] – didn't he see you in a dream: "And behold, the sun and the moon were bowing." Immediately the sun and moon stood still."⁸

This Midrash teaches us that when Yosef saw the sun and moon bow down to him it was not merely that they represented his father and mother subjugating themselves to him. On a deeper level it meant that the mightiest physical entities were subjugated to Yosef. This power was inherited by Yehoshua and he was also able to make them break their nature.

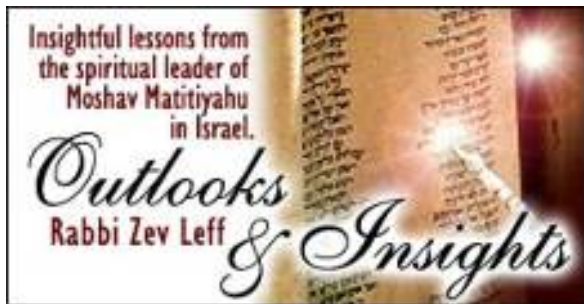
It is important to note that despite his natural connection to Yosef, Yehoshua had to earn this exalted level of controlling the physical world. How did he do this? In the Torah portion of Pinchas, God instructs Moshe to appoint Yehoshua as his successor. The Midrash explains His choice: "He would come early to, and leave late from, your study hall and would arrange the benches and cover the tables."⁹

This teaches us that Yehoshua had an incredible dedication to Torah; he learnt it with great diligence and he even 'lowered' himself to facilitate the Torah of others. Through this dedication, he was able to take his inheritance from Yosef and apply it to guiding the Jewish people in both the spiritual and physical realms.

Obviously, both Moshe and Yehoshua achieved unfathomable levels of greatness, but in some ways, it seems that Yehoshua's strengths are more possible to emulate on some level than those of Moshe, given Yehoshua's greater involvement in the physical world. We learn from him that we can be involved in physicality

and yet strive to elevate it to bring us and others closer to God.

1. There are other areas of comparison between the two, including their shared ability to defeat Esav and his descendants, the Amalekites. This was discussed in the essay 'Beacons of Light'.
2. Yehoshua, 7.
3. Yehoshua, 7:10.
4. He points out that there were some open miracles in Sefer Yehoshua and explains that they were in the merit of Moshe, not Yehoshua.
5. Shem MiShmuel, Bamidbar, p.201.
6. Yehoshua, Ch.5.
7. Yehoshua, 10:12.
8. Bereishit Rabbah, 6:9.
9. Bamidbar Rabbah, 21:14.



Sin of the Spies - Who's in Charge?

"Moses renamed Hoshea son of Nun, 'Joshua.' " (Numbers 13:16)

Prior to the departure of the 12 spies, Moses changed the name of his disciple Hoshea to Joshua. That changed contained within it a prayer that God save Joshua from the plot of the spies. It remains to be explained, however, why Moses agreed to send the spies in the first place if he was aware of a plot to malign the Land of Israel. In addition, why did he pray for Joshua alone and not for Calev and the others?

The Vilna Gaon (in *Emuna VeHashgacha*) explains that there are three ways in which God manifests His Divine Providence. The first is called *hanhaga nissis*, the manifestation of overt

miracles. This was the manner in which God related to us during the 40 years in the desert. A Cloud of Glory accompanied us by day and a pillar of fire by night; we ate the Heaven-sent manna; and our thirst was quenched by water from a well that flowed from a rock, which accompanied us on our journey. When we sinned, Divine retribution followed immediately in an unmistakable fashion.

The second type of Divine Providence is called *hanhagas nissim nistarim*. In this stage, God relates to us through hidden miracles. This describes the manner in which God related to us in the Land of Israel, prior to our exile. At that time, a direct relationship between nature and Torah observance was evident. When we kept the mitzvot and toiled in Torah, the rains fell in their proper times and amounts, health and wealth were our lot; and when we sinned, drought and famine followed.

Since our exile from Israel, we have experienced the third type of Divine Providence, *hester panim*. In this stage, God hides His face from us and our ability to see God's Divine Providence in the world becomes impaired.

The Vilna Gaon explains that the various manifestations of Divine Providence differ only in our perception. In reality, God controls and guides the world equally in a period when we experience Divine miracles as a matter of course, and in a period where all we see is the workings of nature. God merely hides His face in the latter period.

NEW LAND

Our forefathers in the desert were aware that upon entering the Land of Israel, the manner in which God related to us would change from one

of open miracles to one of miracles within nature. Manna would no longer descend from the heavens; rather, we would plow and plant and harvest in order to eat. A well would no longer accompany us; rather, we would depend on rainfall to quench our thirst.

Their mistake, however, was to reason that if their lives were apparently subject to the same natural order as the rest of the world, then their ultimate success or failure depended on their own military prowess. This was a grievous error.

It was this mistaken outlook from which Moses prayed that Joshua would be spared. Moses reasoned that he could better prove to the people their mistake by letting them actually see the Land of Israel. He hoped that they would realize the impossibility of conquering Israel with their own might. And yet God had assured them that they would in fact conquer the land. They should have concluded that God obviously planned to continue aiding them, even if in a less openly miraculous fashion.

Joshua, who was to lead the Jewish people during this new stage of Divine Providence, required a special prayer that he be spared from a distorted perspective on nature. The name Joshua signifies - *Hashem Yoshiah* - May God save you. The Divine name represents the synthesis between the apparent cause and effect of the natural world and God's intimate spiritual link with man - the *yud* represents God's creation of the World to Come, and the *heh* the creation of this world. Moses prayed that Joshua see nature as nothing more than a veil to God's direct Divine Providence. Hence Nature - *HaTevah* - and *Elokim* are numerically equivalent.

RAINFALL AND TEARS

Moses told the spies to bring back the fruits of the Land of Israel precisely to drive home the lesson that they would still be completely dependent on God's beneficence. Without water, fruits cannot grow, and in Israel water depends solely on rainfall, which is obviously not in man's hands. Moses wanted them to recognize that even though there would be more effort required to secure a livelihood in the natural setting of Israel than in the desert, the final result would depend no less on God than when the manna descended directly from Heaven.

Unfortunately, only Calev and Joshua grasped this point. The others saw only that it was beyond their "natural" abilities to conquer the land, and concluded that even God Himself, as it were, could not help them since He had chosen to let them be governed by the natural order. This reasoning led to the purposeless crying on the night of Tisha B'Av when the people wept as a sign of hopelessness.

To correct the purposeless tears of that Tisha B'Av eve in the desert, our Holy Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av and we were thrust into exile where we would come to see clearly our dependence on God. But rather than crying over our helplessness, our tears on Tisha B'Av must proclaim: "God, You promised that we would be redeemed from this exile. We cannot achieve this redemption through our own efforts. Therefore You must redeem us."

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, the great Mirror Mashgiach, explains the Mishnah at the end of Sotah to mean that Moshiach will not come so long as we attribute our successes and failures to "natural" causes. As long as we look for political, economic and sociological

explanations of world events, and excuse ourselves from Torah learning on the grounds that we must earn a livelihood, we will not merit an end to our exile.

Let us strengthen our faith and trust in God so that we can finally dry the tears of Tisha B'Av and celebrate it with jubilation, for a Redeemer will have come to Zion.



The Good of the Land

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

This week's parsha deals with the story of the spies who scouted out the Land of Israel and returned with a negative report. Their unfavorable portrayal of the land caused the entire Jewish people to despair of the possibility of living there and to voice their desire to return to Egypt. God was "angry" at the spies for speaking negatively about the land, and decreed that the entire generation "will die in the desert" (Numbers 14:35).

Apparently, God never forgave the Jewish people for this sin. Even to this day, we bear the consequences for the spies' evil report. The verse, "The people wept that night" (Numbers 14:1) refers to the night of Tisha B'Av. The Talmud (Ta'anit 29a) teaches that as punishment for the people's weeping needlessly over the spies' report, God caused many tragedies to

happen on Tisha B'Av so that, throughout the generations, we would have "good reason to cry."

The severity of this punishment is very unusual. The Jewish people have made many errors and misjudgments over the course of history, yet rarely have the consequences been so severe. Why was the mistake of the spies so unforgivable?

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Jewish people of their complaints in the desert: "You spoke slander in your tents, saying, 'It is because God hates us that He took us out of the land of Egypt'" (Deut. 1:27). Rashi uses a comparison to explain how the Jewish people came to that conclusion. Imagine a king who had two sons and two fields. One field was self-irrigated (*shakya*), while the other relied on rain for irrigation (*ba'al*). The king gave the self-irrigated field to the son he loved, so the son would never have to worry about his crops, while he gave the field dependent on rainwater to the son he hated.

The Jewish people saw that God had taken them out of Egypt - a lush, fertile land, where the Nile River provided a constant source of irrigation - and was taking them to the Land of Israel, which depended on rainfall. They thus concluded that God must hate them. Based on Rashi's parable, this seems like a logical inference. The Torah does not directly address the people's assumption, and the question is left hanging. How is the journey from Egypt to the Land of Israel to be seen as anything other than a punishment?

If we view the Land of Israel only in terms of the physical and material benefits it provides, then there may certainly be more comfortable

places to live. However, if we look beyond the superficial qualities of Israel, and use our inner vision to perceive its spiritual advantages, then it is far better to live in Israel and depend on rainfall than it is to live in Egypt with no worries about water. Why? The very fact of our dependence on rain forces us to develop ourselves spiritually. If there is no rain, we must pray, and turning heavenward compels us to recognize the true Source of sustenance.

This could be one reason that a field that relies on rainwater is called a *ba'al*. The word *ba'al* literally means "owner" or "master." Living in the Land of Israel constantly reminds us that the world has a *ba'al*, and our reliance on Him keeps our relationship strong.

EAR IN ISRAEL

Based on this idea, we can understand why the Jewish people were never forgiven for the sin of the spies. According to Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector, the punishment we received teaches us how stringently God views a negative attitude toward the Land of Israel. If we cut ourselves off from the Land of Israel, we cut ourselves off from the extraordinary spiritual advantages that the land has to offer and all the opportunities for growth that it provides. Severing ourselves from this potential defeats the entire purpose of our existence.

Every year at this time, students who have spent the year studying in Israel go back to the Diaspora to spend the summer with their families. For many, their first Shabbat abroad is parshat Shlach. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the timing works out this way. When everyone gathers together around the Shabbat table and the family begins asking, "How was your year in Israel?", these students literally have the

opportunity to rectify the sin of the spies.

Most of the spies saw only the physical, external aspects of the Land, and many things seemed strange to them. Because they saw only these superficial elements, and failed to see the land's inner spiritual beauty, they concluded that Israel was a bad and dangerous place to live. Visitors to Israel today are the "spies" of this generation. They have the choice of joining forces with the ten spies who viewed the land negatively, or siding with Yehoshua and Calev, who had deeper, inner vision and perceived the land's spiritual richness. Before we open our mouths to share our experiences in the Land of Israel with our family and friends, let us pause for a moment and think about what we are about to say.

May we all be blessed to visit and live in Israel, so that we can focus wisely and deeply on what is truly important in life, and pursue it with a fire that will elevate us to the highest levels.

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