

Shlach

Spiritual Leadership Requires Reaching Out

The question is asked, why is it that of the two spies who came back with a good report, Joshua and Kolaiv Ben Yefuna, were rewarded differently? Joshua was given the leadership of the Jewish people, and Kolaiv was given the city of Hebron. In other words, Kolaiv was given a material reward, special property in the land of Israel, and Joshua was given a spiritual reward. Why did Joshua get a spiritual reward and Kolaiv a material reward?

According to the rabbis, the reason is because when the twelve spies went into the land of Israel, Kolaiv separated himself from the other spies and went to Hebron to pray on the grave of the forefathers. He then kept his distance from the other spies. Joshua, on the other hand, stayed with the other spies and tried to convince them of the error of their ways. He risked being influenced by them in order to try to influence them. He was worthy of spiritual leadership because he was willing to extend himself to help his brethren change their minds and leave the misguided path they were trodding. Kolaiv, on the other hand, kept his distance. He made sure that he would not succumb to the view of the ten spies. As a result, he only received a material reward because he kept himself distant from this brethren. In order to be worthy of spiritual leadership, we have to be willing to reach out to our brethren, even if there is risk involved.

Fear, Joy, and the Enhancement of Life

Fear is one of the great twisters of the human soul. Fear can overturn everything. Fear can cause good people to do bad things, and fear can cause people to lose all sorts of opportunities and cause them to become paralyzed in front of real dangers and not do what is necessary in order to save themselves, their families, or their country. We should never let fear rule our lives. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, "There is nothing to fear except fear itself." He actually, without knowing it, was paraphrasing one of Judaism's prime teachings and that is that a person who lives by fear alone cannot be a whole person, cannot be religious, and cannot even be moral.

In the *Torah* portion *Shlach Lecha* we learn how ten of the twelve spies came back from the land of Israel with an evil report. They said that the land was good but that the people who dwelled in the land were fierce, that their cities were fortified, and that they were giants. In other words, they purposely tried to stir up fear among the Jewish people. They made them feel that they were not up to the challenge, that the enemy was too formidable, and the people fell for it. Whether these ten spies really believed that the Jewish people could not overcome the Canaanites physically, or whether they believed that the Jewish people would be overwhelmed spiritually by the Canaanite religion and, therefore, it would be better for them to stay in the desert, it does not matter. They, themselves, were overcome with fear, and they tried to instill fear among the Jewish people. They played on the Jewish people's slave mentality. They tried to convince the Jewish people that they were inferior, that they had no hope, that they were not as good as the Canaanites. These spies tried to instill fear, and they succeeded. The *Torah* tells us "the people lifted up their voices, and they cried all night, and they complained against Moshe and Aaron, and they said, 'Would that we had died in Egypt or in the desert rather than that we should fall by the sword'." They even went so far as to say, "Let's choose a new captain, and we will return to Egypt." It was this great fear which made them unworthy to enter the land of Israel and which caused them to have to wander in the desert for forty years. By their own actions they showed, in a certain way, that the spies were right. They became an inferior people because they did not have the inner strength to overcome their fear. There is nothing wrong with being fearful. If we would not be fearful, we would not take the precautions necessary in all situations to prevent ourselves from being harmed needlessly. To take precautions is one thing, but to back away from life's challenges is another. If we give way to fear, we will lead terrible, debilitating lives. People who are filled with phobias have a terrible life. They have to shut out so much of the world because they are afraid. Some are afraid to leave their house. Some are afraid to talk to people. Some are afraid to go where there are people. Some are afraid of all relationships. All these people have cut themselves off from most of life and have condemned themselves to live a life so circumscribed that their lives are worse than most prisoners in the high-

est security penitentiary.

It is interesting to note that the rabbis learn from the ten spies that the number ten constitutes a *minyan*. These ten spies are referred to as an *Ayda*, a congregation. The rabbis explain that this is to teach us all that we can conquer fear. These ten spies who were so convinced of their own inferiority and the Jewish people's inferiority did not have to feel this way. They did not have to be overcome with fear. They chose to be overcome. They had the potential to be hopeful and optimistic but they chose not to be so. In the *Torah* portion *Emor* where we learn about a *minyan* from the verse, "And I will be made holy amongst the Jewish people," we learn that this applies even to people like these ten spies who, by their fearfulness, in effect said that G-d cannot help us, that G-d cannot be made holy in this world, but this is not true. If they wanted to, they could have proclaimed G-d's holiness, too. They could have been joyful and optimistic, but they chose not to be. The rabbis teach that G-d's presence can only be felt where there is joy. We must continually be optimistic and joyful and hopeful. We can never be overcome with fear. If we are, then we cannot come into contact with G-d's presence, and we cannot become uplifted and lead spiritual lives.

This lesson is also stressed by the holiday of *Shavuot*. We are to count 49 days from the second night of *Pesach* until the 50th day, which is *Shavuot*. The Jewish people were commanded to count from the morrow of the *Shabbat* of *Pesach* 49 days, the 50th day being *Shavuot*, the day upon which we got the *Torah*. In the days of the second temple, there was a major argument between the rabbis and the Saducees as to when we should start counting the *Omer*. The rabbis said that we should start counting from the second night of *Pesach*. The Saducees said that "No," we should start counting, as the Bible says, the night after *Shabbat* whenever *Shabbat* comes on *Pesach*. This year the second night of *Pesach* was also the night after *Shabbat*. However, in most years, this is not so. *Shabbat* usually comes in the middle of *Pesach*. At first glance it seems that the Saducees are right. It says "on the morrow of the *Shabbat*." However, the word "*Shabbat*" in Hebrew has four meanings. It means the weekly *Shabbat*; it also means any Jewish Biblical holiday; it also can mean the Sabbatical Year; and finally, it can mean the Jubilee Year. So we see that the rabbis had good

reason to say that this word *Shabbat* here refers to the first day of *Pesach*, but then the question can be asked, why does the *Torah* use this ambiguous term *Shabbat*? It should have just said that we should count from the second night of *Pesach*. The rabbis answer this by saying that *Shabbat* is different from all the other holidays. *Shabbat* commemorates G-d's awesome power. It speaks about G-d the Creator. The other holidays stress G-d's encounter with man. They stress G-d the revealer and redeemer. That's why on all the other holidays, it is the Jewish people who determine when they can occur. We are empowered to play with the calendar so *Yom Kippur* can never come out on a Friday or a Sunday by manipulating which lunar month has 29 days and which has 30 days. We can add a whole leap month to make *Pesach* come out a month later if it had been an exceptionally hard winter. The Jewish holidays stress the concept of G-d the revealer, G-d Who wants to have a relationship with man and G-d the redeemer, G-d Who wants us to help Him redeem the world.

The concept of *Shabbat*, of G-d the creator, which stresses G-d's awesome power, can invoke great fear in people. After all, G-d has the power to wreak havoc in our lives and to cause great destruction. We believe that G-d ultimately only uses His power for good and against those who act immorally, even though many times it is hard to see this in the world. We believe, though, that at the end of days we will be able to see this in the world. Paganism, on the other hand, was based only upon the belief in the gods' arbitrary awesome power. It was based only on fear. The pagans conceived of religion as nothing more than a payoff. Their gods were nothing more than Mafia dons, heads of protection rackets. If you gave them certain gifts, they would protect you. If you did not, they would take away your home or your land or your children or your wife, etc. Fear was the main emotion in paganism. All paganism was based on fear with very few other emotions involved. Fear could even cause the pagans to sacrifice their children.

To Judaism this type of belief is anathema. It is true that we believe that G-d has great power and that many times we cannot understand how he has used His power, although ultimately we have faith that we will understand how He has used His power at the end of days, but our religion is not based primarily on fear. It is based on the reality that only by living a

religious life can we find joy, meaning, purpose, and optimism in life. Our religion is meant to enhance life, not to contract it, not to make us all fearful, groveling human beings. The episode of the spies taught the Jewish people that they should never be groveling, fearful human beings. This lesson the Jewish people learned well. Even in the midst of terrible persecutions we have, by and large, maintained our self respect and known in our heart of hearts that we were as good as anybody else. We were proud to be Jews in spite of everything because we knew that we had a wonderful inner life which gave us hope and joy and optimism, even when everything else was dark around us. We never gave in to fear. We, of course, took adequate provisions to shield ourselves as much as possible from outside persecution, but we never gave up hope, and we never feared that G-d would abandon us totally or that the Jewish cause would be lost forever. We faced the future with optimism and enthusiasm, never letting fear paralyze or destroy us. The legacy that that wicked congregation of ten spies gave us was that no Jewish congregation ever had to be fearful anymore. By wandering in the desert for forty years, we learned that fear only ends in cutting us off from life. It diminishes life and adds nothing. True, we have to take adequate precautions, but we should never let fear dominate our lives or let fear ever dominate our relationships.

We celebrate *Shabbat* every week to remind us of G-d's power, but we have to go beyond that. On the morrow of the *Shabbat*, we began counting to receive the *Torah*. The Jewish people in Egypt had been influenced by the pagan religion of Egypt and by their slavery. They had to cast off fear before they could receive the *Torah*. They had to go beyond *Shabbat* to the holiday of *Shavuot* upon which we received the *Torah*, a *Torah* which stresses how G-d wants us to live lives of joy and optimism. The *Torah* even teaches us that *Shabbat* is a day of joy and happiness and that even when we celebrate G-d's power, we should not do it only with fear but we must do it with joy, love, optimism, singing, and hope. Let none of us ever succumb to fear. Let us always realize that our religion enhances our life and adds so much joy and happiness to our lives because it has always stressed not just the fear of G-d but the love of G-d. May the love of G-d always cause us to overcome our fear so we can live good and decent lives, and may none of our individual or community decisions ever be

based on fear alone, but rather be based primarily on hope and joy.