

And they pursued you as do the bees. (1:44)

Chazal teach (*Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar*), “We tell the *tzirah* (bee), *Lo miduvshach v’lo mei uktzach*, “(We want) neither your honey nor your sting.” **Horav Moshe Yechiel Epstein, zl**, the *Ozrover Rebbe, zl*, applies this *Midrash* to explain the Torah’s analogy to bees. “And they pursued you as do the bees.” At first, *Lo avisam laalos*, “You did not want to go up.” You were under the influence of the initial slander against *Eretz Yisrael*. Suddenly, when you saw the error of your ways, your attitude vis-à-vis the Holy Land quickly changed. Now, you were prepared to go. You insisted on going. In fact, nothing was holding you back. “We sinned; we were wrong; we now want to go to *Eretz Yisrael*,” you declared.

It was too late. Moshe *Rabbeinu* told them, “Do not go up. Do not wage war. You will not triumph. Hashem is not supportive of your efforts. Without Hashem you have no chance whatsoever.” The reason for this reaction is the similarity of *Klal Yisrael* to the bee. The bee is an insect which provides us with much wanted and appreciated honey. With this wonderful gift comes a negative aspect: the bee’s sting. One cancels out the other. We need neither your honey, nor your sting. Since one rarely comes without the other, we will do without both.

Hashem wants neither their dissent nor their belated willingness to enter the Land. One does not serve Hashem on his own terms, but rather, on Hashem’s terms. In the beginning, your reaction was like the bee’s sting – painful. It “hurt” to have a nation that should be rooted in *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, for liberating them from the oppression of Egypt. A “No, we will not go,” followed by a night of unwarranted weeping, was a painful sting. Now, they were exhibiting the honey which they were capable of. They expressed their willingness to risk life and limb, to fight for the Land, but, alas, it was too late. *Lo mi’duvshach v’lo mei uktzach*.

There are always those who either wake up too late or feign sleep long enough that it is too late to make a difference. When it comes to serving Hashem, we require “first responders,” not “Johnnie-come-latelies.”