

"And Yisrael sent messengers to Sichon . . . let me pass through your land we will not turn aside into field or into vineyard, we will not drink of the water of the wells, by the kings highway we will go until we have passed your border." (21:21,22) - "And Sichon would not permit Yisrael to pass through his border, and Sichon gathered together all his people and went against Yisrael into the wilderness." (21:23)

In this narrative, the *Torah* relates how Moshe requested Sichon's permission for *Am Yisrael* to pass through his land. He promised Sichon that nothing would be touched and no one would be harmed. Sichon's response was swift and emphatic. He not only prohibited their entry, but he subsequently waged war against them. This reaction is puzzling! What fear gripped Sichon that caused such terrifying concern, catalyzing his immediate attack on the Jews? They were not his enemies. It was not their desire to ravage his country. They were basically peace loving people who wanted access to their promised land.

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, z.l., suggests that Sichon's fear was of a sub-conscious nature. He feared the spiritual influence the Jewish people would have upon his nation. In short, Sichon feared the truth. To expose his barbarian people to the refinement, nobility, and *middos tovos*, good character traits, which are paradigmatic to *Torah* Jews, was a "dangerous" gamble to take. Therefore, Sichon painted a gruesome picture of *Bnei Yisrael*. They were slaves who had rebelled against their masters, the Egyptians. This "ungrateful" people went on to destroy and pilfer their host nation, destroying anyone who crossed their path. Were he to allow *Bnei Yisrael* to enter his country, his people would come face to face with reality. Perhaps man's greatest apprehension is the fear of the truth.

Sichon was gripped by the fear that his people would be "trespassed" by *Bnei Yisrael*. The jealousy and consequent self-depreciation were more than he could handle. His people's self-esteem would suffer irreparable damage, confronting the truth that *Bnei Yisrael* were not as he had represented them. The false propaganda with which he attempted to indoctrinate his people was to be exposed by *Bnei Yisrael*. This was Sichon's greatest fear. He must stop *Bnei Yisrael's* entry into his land at all costs.

It is not at all surprising that a similar situation exists in our own times. There is an amazing rate of return to the *Torah* way of life. Many people are finally acknowledging the reality of their misguided perceptions. After years of alienation from *Torah*, they are embracing the true Jewish way of life with increased fervor and deepened commitment. Some people embrace the same misperceptions which have been responsible for so much of our suffering. They advocate these be used as the panacea to the Jews' problem in today's complex society. It must be our goal to adopt the truth of

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the *Torah* in every aspect of our lives, as individuals and as a society. Indeed, there is no substitute for the truth.