

They ascended toward the mountain-top saying, "We are ready, and we shall ascend to the place which Hashem has spoken, for we have sinned. (14:40)

The people were embarrassed. They sought to compensate for their sin. They finally realized that their reaction to the spies' slander of *Eretz Yisrael* was terribly wrong. They were, however, too late. Their *teshuvah* was long overdue. How many times can a people rebel against Hashem, apologize and proceed with life as planned? They would not accept a negative response, insisting upon going on to *Eretz Yisrael*. They failed; their fate was sealed. They were attacked and thrown back.

Why did Hashem reject their *teshuvah*? They acknowledged, "We have sinned." What more should they have done? The **Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh** attributes Hashem's rejection of their *teshuvah* to two factors. First, the sin was still fresh. Second, their declaration of *teshuvah* was inspired more by regret over defaulting *Eretz Yisrael* than by remorse over the sinful behavior.

The **Baal Shem Tov** responds to this question with an observation on human nature. He punctuates the *pasuk* in such a manner that a different meaning may be applied to it. They were actually saying, "We are ready to go to *Eretz Yisrael*, for Hashem has said that we have sinned." In other words, they did not concede one iota that they had sinned. It was Hashem Who had said they had sinned! Their self-righteous attitude was obvious. They conceded that Hashem was not happy with their behavior, but, they did not necessarily agree with His perspective. Although externally they manifested a contrite image, between the lines, they were still defiant.

We compound our sin by refusing to acknowledge our role in its perpetration. How can one perform *teshuvah* if he refuses to recognize his error? Self-denial usually leads to an obstinacy that controls the individual - and his perspective. *Klal Yisrael* was prepared to fight, to go and attempt to conquer the pagans. They were prepared to do whatever was needed to go up to *Eretz Yisrael* - everything - but be *modeh al ha'emes*, concede to the truth, confess that they had sinned. Are we any different today?