

All of you approached me and said, “Let us send men ahead of us, and let them spy out the land.” (1:22)

The *chet ha'meraglim*, sin of the spies, is recorded in the annals of our nation's history as one of its most egregious sins. It was the precursor of what became our national day of mourning, *Tishah B'Av*. The ring leaders received their due punishment immediately. The rest of the nation, which capitulated to their self-imposed anxiety, saw their punishment carried out over the next thirty-eight years as they perished in the wilderness. What aggravates the sin most is that the spies were all men of repute, distinguished Torah leaders and princes of their individual tribes. How did such spiritual giants fall so low, from a spiritual zenith to such a nadir of depravity, that they lost their portion in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come?

Horav Mordechai Schwab, zl, quotes *Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl*, who quoted his *Rebbe*, the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, that any question concerning taking action, undertaking an endeavor, attempting to understand what is taking place in his life, whether it is a question that is spiritual or physical/material in nature, one should turn to the Heavenly Throne and listen to what Hashem has to say. Understandably, this is a metaphor for the Torah, for Hashem and the Torah are one. In other words: the answer/explanation to all one's issues and questions are to be found in the Torah. To put it in every-day terms: consult a *tzaddik*, righteous person, who is well versed in the Torah and seek his guidance. Everyone should have a *rebbe*, for a *rebbe* is one's connection to Heaven. His *rebbe* is the conduit for Hashem's Heavenly guidance on earth.

Rav Schwab sums it up succinctly. One who seeks to follow the will of Hashem, to serve the Almighty with a complete and perfect heart, must first determine the *ratzon*, will, of Hashem. The individual who first decides to act on his own, without turning to and asking for rabbinic/Torah guidance, is no longer able to listen properly with a captive ear, since his personal, vested interests stand in the way. It is similar to seeking guidance once one's mind is already made up. He does not want advice. He wants a blessing that will coincide with his preconceived decision. A Jew's goal must be to live *chaim birtzonon*, life in accordance to Hashem's will. One who lives according to Hashem's will never suffers from life's ambiguities, because his trust in Hashem enables him to rise above them with the knowledge that this is what Hashem wants; this is what He asks of us. We abide by His will.

A young *ben Torah* was growing spiritually, both in his erudition and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. He was on his way to achieving an enviable level of spiritual integrity. He married a wonderful, young, like-minded woman, and together they set their minds towards establishing and building a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*, a home true to Hashem and His dictates. Then tragedy struck when their oldest child, a sweet girl of three years old, became terminally ill. Back and forth went the rollercoaster of hope and depression. Treatment, remission, treatment. *Tzedakah*, charity; *tefillah*, prayer; *teshuvah*, repentance; visiting *tzaddikim*, holy men, to petition their blessings, torrents of tears storming the Heavens – all were heard; the answer, however, was “no.” The

young child returned her pure soul to its Source.

During the *shivah*, seven-day-period of mourning, the young parents stoically sat on the ground and spoke with the many visitors who had come to comfort them. One *rav*, who was exceptionally close with the father, asked, “How were you able to maintain your emotional stability, as well as your spiritual devotion amid the rollercoaster of pain, then hope, just to have it shattered by fear and resignation?” The father replied, “I had one very low moment during which I was about to throw in the towel and give up on everything, when I met a Jew leaving the hospital who took one look at my face and asked, ‘What is wrong?’ I told him. He said, ‘Let me share my story with you.’

“One of my sons was gravitating away from religious observance. I turned to a *Rosh Yeshivah* who is very successful in bringing back these lost souls. He spent much time and expended even more energy to convince my son finally to return to the *Yiddishkeit* in which he was raised. He saw the light and became a firm, committed *maamin*, believer in Hashem. He married a young woman who was also a *baalas teshuvah*, penitent, and they moved to *Tzfas*. Within a few years, they became the parents of two healthy children. When their third child was born, the little boy displayed physical signs that all was not right. The doctors placed the infant into the neonatal intensive care unit and attempted to save his life with all the tools of modern science.

“The parents poured out their hearts to Hashem, Who, on the seventh day of the infant’s life, brought him Home to Him. The *halachah* states that, for a Jew to arise from *Techiyas Ha’Meisim*, Resurrection of the Dead, he must have a *bris*, be circumcised. Thus, prior to the infant’s burial, he had to have a *bris*. The *mohel*, circumciser, performed the ritual at the cemetery, after which my son was asked, ‘What name are you giving your son?’ He thought for a moment, and, with tears streaming down his face, declared, ‘I want to name him *Ratzon Hashem*.’ This is the name that symbolizes one’s willingness to accept Hashem’s decree regardless of its difficulty to understand. If this is the will of Hashem, I accept it with love!’ That man’s story guided us through our travail.”

Now that we have digressed and talked about a *rebbe*’s guidance, and the Jew’s willingness to accept what he is served throughout life as being the will of Hashem, we return to our original question, “Where did the *meraglim*, spies, go wrong?”

Rav Schwab explains that despite the spiritual plane which each of the *meraglim* achieved, *Moshe Rabbeinu* was still the *gadol hador*, the Torah giant of the generation. They should have consulted with him; they should have asked him, “What is the *ratzon Hashem*?” He was their quintessential *Rebbe*. They should have turned to him for guidance and inspiration. They did not, and, as a result, we observe *Tishah B’Av*. One added note: One may have a *rebbe* from whom he derives knowledge, but if the *rebbe* is nothing more than the fountain from which the student’s knowledge is derived – but otherwise, there is no relationship – he is not a student. If a *rebbe*/student relationship exists without such a bond, the student will go off on his own whenever the opportunity presents itself – as it did when the *meraglim* buckled under pressure.

Ri Mikorvil (quoted by *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*) rules that while one must interrupt his Torah study for the sake of burying the dead, he may not do so if it means interrupting his study with his *rebbe*. If he does so, it is considered as if he shed *blood*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that while one may attain knowledge through his own learning, he has no path to grow and develop if he is not in communion with his *rebbe*. Therefore, the time he takes from the *rebbe/talmid* relationship is time of spiritual growth and development, thus precluding the student from achieving his true nature and magnitude. This is similar to shedding blood.

In order for a *talmid* to develop this relationship and benefit from it, he must have a profound perception of who his *rebbe* is – as a person in his own right and vis-à-vis his *talmid*. He must see his *rebbe* as a mentor who guides him in this world, affording him an opportunity to merit a place in the World to Come. In other words, he must appreciate his *rebbe*. I may add that this bond is reciprocal. Just as a pupil cannot really survive without his *rebbe*, so too, would the *rebbe* be hard-pressed to exist without his student. They are each indispensable to one another.

Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl, a *Rosh Yeshivah* who excelled as a *rebbe*, would say, “The most honest gauge of a *talmid*’s success is not how much he has learned or how he behaves; it is the *amitus*, authenticity, of his relationship with his *rebbe*.” He understood that the *rebbe/talmid* relationship is sacrosanct; without a *rebbe*, one is not connected to the *mesorah*, tradition, chain of transmission of the Torah from generation to generation, from *rebbe* to *talmid*. The following vignette underscores this idea.

A new *bachur*, student, arrived at the *yeshivah* (Shaar Yashuv), and *Rav Shlomo* began to learn with him privately. Every morning following *Shacharis*, the morning service, they would learn *Mishnayos Meseches Zevachim* which deals with the intricacies of the ritual sacrifices offered in the *Bais Hamikdash*. After a few months, the student had become proficient in the *Mishnayos*. Nonetheless, *Rav Shlomo* continued to learn. This troubled the *bachur*, because he felt the *Rosh Yeshivah*’s time was valuable and could be put to better use by his learning with a student whose background was deficient. He asked *Rav Shlomo*, “Why does *Rebbe* not spend his personal time with those *bachurim* who could use a bit more instruction in their lessons?”

Rav Shlomo’s response is classic. “I have high hopes for you, but until we have a personal relationship, you are not my *talmid* – and if you are not a *talmid*, you will not grow!”

Another classic, which every *rebbe* should savor. A secular Jew once visited and found the *Rosh Yeshivah* surrounded by *talmidim* (which was common). “Are they your students?” he asked. “No” was his reply, “they are my partners.”

Chazal (*Moed Kattan* 17a) quotes a criterion as the barometer for determining a *talmid*’s appreciation of his *rebbe*: “If (in your eyes) the *rebbe* is like a Ministering Angel, then learn Torah from him.” Simply, this means the student must be in awe of his *rebbe*. *Horav Shmuel Rosenberg, zl*, *Rav* of Undsdorf, explained this practically. *Chazal* teach that a *malach*, angel, does not perform

more than one mission at a time, so that he be completely focused on and committed to his Heavenly mission (so to speak). Likewise, the *rebbe* who wants to reach his students, who wants to see them achieve *shleimus*, perfection, cannot be busy with other things. His focus should be entirely on his students.

Horav Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa explains this practically. Is anyone able to even begin fathoming the spiritual plane of a *malach*? An angel is so far beyond us that, as mortals, we do not begin to understand anything about them. This is how a student should view his *rebbe* – as an individual who is spiritually distant from him. There is one caveat: a *rebbe* can bring himself close to his *talmid*, and thereby close the gap, in order to enhance the relationship – when necessary/appropriate.