

But the entire assembly said to pelt them with stones. (14:10)

Rashi comments: "Them" refers to Yehoshua and Calev. Is this a rational reaction? We can accept anger and even threatening bodily harm against those who would do us harm. We seek to avenge ourselves from those who have caused us pain and trouble. Yehoshua and Calev, however, had done nothing negative to the Jewish people. They posed no threat. Ten spies disputed them. What power could they hold with which to dissuade the people? Indeed, if the entire assembly was prepared to stone them, it means that everyone was against them. What threat or potential danger did these two harmless individuals present to the future goals of the nation?

According to the *Midrash*, Aharon *HaKohen* and Moshe *Rabbeinu* were the intended victims of the story. Perhaps this vengeance against them could be rationalized as payback for liberating them from Egypt. Had they remained in Egypt, they would not have had to "endure" going into *Eretz Yisrael* and falling victim to the giants of the Land. Calev and Yehoshua, however, were essentially not the problem. Why target them?

Horav Bentzion Firer, zl, explains that, sadly, this is the natural way of the world. No one wants to hear-- and certainly not to concede -- to the truth. People have a habit of running from the truth their entire lives. We have become so accustomed to living a lie that the thought of confronting the truth produces a greater fear than living the lie. Truth enters into one's heart and refuses to leave until it is acknowledged. This, for most of us, is a difficult weight to bear.

Klal Yisrael knew the truth. They were acutely aware that *Eretz Yisrael* was an *eretz tova*, good land. It was conquerable. If Hashem could liberate them from Egypt, first punishing and then destroying their persecutors, He could do the same to the pagans that inhabited *Eretz Yisrael*. Egypt went down in the Red Sea, Amalek was history. Why not the Canaanites? Why should they fare better than the other enemies who had challenged Hashem? The Jewish People knew all of this. In fact, the spies also knew this, but they would rather live a lie than confront the truth. It was so much easier not to rock the boat, to leave well enough alone. So, when the truth presented itself, it was time to shoot the messenger.

No one loves the messenger who brings bad news; no one cares for the messenger who delivers the truth. Who wants to be told that he is living a lie? To be told that the foundation upon which he has built his entire ideology is spiritually infested with falsehood can be devastating. It is so much easier to kill the messenger. That is what *Klal Yisrael* attempted to do by pelting Yehoshua and Calev with stones.

Hashem's response was swift and to the point: "To what point will this people anger Me, and how long will they not have faith in Me?" (Ibid. 11) Their sin was a deficiency of *emunah*, faith. Their problem was *niutz*, provocation. They knew the truth, understood who Hashem was. Yet, they did not care. They wanted to anger Him, to mutiny against the Almighty.

How often do we debate an issue simply because we do not want to confront the truth? We express our disagreement with the position taken by others; do we contend, however, because we truly believe in our position, or is it because we are afraid to confront the truth that we are wrong? We must remember that acceding to the truth is the only alternative to living a lie.

There are those who go along with a specific ideology because they do not want to “rock the boat.” They know the truth, but refuse to take a stand for fear of reprisal, for fear of being shunned, no longer accepted as part of their community. The Torah writes that Calev *ben* Yefuneh was spared from the effect of the *meraglim* because *ruach acheres haysa ito*, “he had a different spirit.” He did not follow the trend; did not abscond to external pressure; did not hide from the truth; stood his ground because he was doing what was right – even though it was an unpopular stance. The popular spirit of the times was to waver from the truth; people were falling prey to the influence of the *meraglim*. Not Calev: He was of a different spirit. He stood against the wave of change, the winds of heresy and malcontent. Firmly rooted in the truth of Torah, Calev truly was of a different spirit.