

They said to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael...the land which we traversed ...the land is good, very, very much so...(14:7)

The sin of the *meraglim* is, indeed, difficult to understand. After all, the *meraglim* did not really tell any lies about *Eretz Yisrael*. The testimony that it is a land that "eats up its inhabitants" certainly appeared to be true, considering the many funerals that they had witnessed. Veritably, they even recounted that it was a "land flowing with milk and honey." So, why were they punished to such an extent?

The **Yismach Yisrael** cites his father, who posits that the *meraglim* were aware of the superiority of *Eretz Yisrael*. They felt the *kedushah*, holiness, everywhere they travelled. The *kedushah* permeated the air. The spies conceded that the "land was very good." It would be much easier to reach a sublime level of spirituality in such a land.

The spies' refusal to enter *Eretz Yisrael* was not a product of their fear for their material/physical well-being. They said, "*Efes ki az ha'am.*" "*But the people that dwells in the land is powerful and strong.*" This is a reference to the unusually powerful forces of *tumah*, spiritual impurity, which exist there. A commensurate measure of *tumah* is necessary in order to combat the unequalled forces of *kedushah*. They feared that, while they had the opportunity to attain the summit of *kedushah*, they were also vulnerable to descending to the nadir of *tumah* if they erred. They conjectured that, in the long run, it would be more beneficial for their spiritual well-being to remain in the desert and defer the opportunity for growth rather than risk ultimate failure. In the *midbar*, wilderness, they might not have become such great *tzaddikim*, but they also would not risk turning into *reshaim*.

Were the *meraglim* really inappropriate? Do we not have precedent from *Yaakov Avinu*, who feared the effects of his previous "sin"? Indeed, even after Hashem assuaged his anxiety with His assurance of protection, *Yaakov* still expressed the fear that receiving Hashem's kindness might have diminished his own merit. If *Yaakov's* fear was not viewed as transgression, why were the *meraglim* faulted for their anxiety?

There is, however, a significant distinction between *Yaakov Avinu's* fear and the *meraglim's* anxiety: their response to their individual concerns. *Yaakov Avinu*, despite his overriding concern, continued. He did not halt in his path, refusing to pray, reluctant to continue to *Eretz Yisrael*. He prepared for the eventuality of war. He sought a peaceful reconciliation with *Eisav*. Above all, he prayed. He entreated Hashem to grant him life, to give him a future - despite his past transgression. He did not concede to his fear.

The *meraglim's* reaction is well-known. Not only did they react hysterically, denying Hashem's "ability" to bring them into *Eretz Yisrael*, they also cultivated distress in the hearts and minds of

Bnei Yisrael. Because they feared their later spiritual decline as a result of the increased opportunity and demands in *Eretz Yisrael*, they were willing to sin now. They thought that by sinning now they would preserve their subsequent spirituality. They erred in thinking the end justifies the means. Not going to *Eretz Yisrael* was apparently clearly wrong, whereas the possibility of not being able to succeed in *Eretz Yisrael* was ambiguous. Why would they defer to a dubious situation? We do not sin today just because we might sin tomorrow!

Horav Simcha Bunim, zl, M'Pesicha, applies a similar approach to understanding the sin of eating from the *Eitz Ha'daas*. According to the *Rambam*, the *Eitz Ha'daas* provided the *koach ha'bechirah*, the ability to choose between right and wrong. Now they would develop a *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, which they would have to overcome in order to choose to do good. The serpent encouraged Chavah to eat of the forbidden fruit, so that she could grow spiritually. She would not simply gravitate to doing good because now she would have to contend with her *yetzer hora*. Commensurate to the challenge would be the reward. She would earn her spiritual success. She would work for it. She deferred to the serpent's guileful suggestion. She sinned now so that she might grow in spiritual stature later. She destroyed her present to build an ambiguous future. In the end, she lost her present and arrived ill-prepared for the future. The wise person listens to Hashem and does not attempt to manipulate circumstances according to his limited perspective.