

## **They awoke early in the morning and ascended toward the mountain top saying, “We are ready, and we shall ascend to the place of which Hashem has spoken.” (14:40)**

The other night, the entire nation had been trembling with fright, weeping incessantly (and unnecessarily) with bitter tears, demonstrating abject fear that they would be forced to ascend to *Eretz Yisrael* and conquer its inhabitants. Suddenly, their attitude changed. Not only were they now prepared to go into battle – they went. We all know the outcome of that ill-fated trip, but what prompted them to go? What happened to the trembling, the fear? How did it dissipate overnight?

*Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, addresses this question, but first, he describes the scenario (based on *Chazal*) which so captivated *Klal Yisrael*, turning them against Hashem and His chosen leaders. The *meraglim*, spies, returned. Each spy entered his personal family tent, did not say a word, but rather than lay down on a bed, lowered himself to the ground and began to tear out his hair. Next, he rent his garments. Seeing this frightening scene, his family asked, “What happened to you? Why are you doing this?” He did not respond, because he was too “preoccupied” with grief.

Now that the individual had his family’s undivided attention, he began to recount the details of the trip to the Holy Land – the land that was “supposedly” so good that the land would one day (if they survived the war) become their home. He told his family about the massive giants, men of such size and girth that they were human bulldozers. Nothing could stand in their way. How could anyone attempt to battle such giants?

The spies’ plan was beginning to pay off, as the members of each individual family slowly began to weep. They, too, were now gripped with pain and fear. This was supposed to have been an easy trip, a walk in the park. The way the spies described the upcoming battle for *Eretz Yisrael*, it appeared that the Jewish People were about to become fodder.

Word was spreading. When crying and screaming emanate from a single tent in a “gated” community, others hear and want to know the source of the grief. Soon everyone is weeping as fear grips the members of each individual *shevet*, tribe. This was the plan. The *meraglim* knew that returning to the nation and attempting to convince them all at once was futile. Just as one builds a fire for a barbeque, moving a few coals wrapped in paper to the side, until the fire becomes strong in one place and is now ready for more coals to be added. They did not have a chance for success by addressing the entire nation at one time. They would have to communicate in a piecemeal, tent-to-tent, tribe-to-tribe manner until the conflagration of fear gripped the entire nation.

Hashem saw all of this, and He said, “If you are so afraid of entering the Holy Land – no problem. You will just remain in the wilderness for another forty years. You will perish here, and the wilderness will become your burial grounds. Your corpses will wither in the hot sand. That is your alternative to entering *Eretz Yisrael*.”

Immediately upon hearing this, the very next day, a group of hardy individuals packed up their gear and left for *Eretz Yisrael*. “We will do it!” they called out. “We will overcome and vanquish the pagans. We realize that we were wrong. We have sinned, and now we are going to make it right.” Well – they did not make it. What had transpired overnight? The previous night, they had been trembling with fear, and today they were prepared to battle, regardless of the odds. What changed? As soon as Hashem said, “Stay,” they were ready to “move”. Why?

*Rav Reuven* relates that he presented this question to *Horav Reuven Fine, zl* (*Rosh Yeshivah* of Torah Vodaath), on the night before he (the *Rosh Yeshivah*) passed away. Apparently, the *Maggid* (*Rav Reuven Karlinstein*) was the last person to speak with the *Rosh Yeshivah*, since, once he issued his reply to the question, he spoke no more.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* replied, “You are questioning the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. When it is necessary – there is fear. When it is not necessary – there is no fear.” What did the *Rosh Yeshivah* impart with this enigmatic lesson? What was his answer to the question?

The *Maggid* explains: The *yetzer hora* is likened to the *se’or she’b’issah*, yeast within the dough. Dough is comprised of flour and water. As long as it is left in its pure (flour and water/unadulterated) state, it is fine. Once yeast is added to the equation (mixture), the dough begins to rise almost out of control. When the *yetzer hora* hears the word “*mitzvah*” (Hashem has commanded us to go to *Eretz Yisrael*), it immediately shifts into “gear”, into *yetzer hora* mode, to prevent the *mitzvah* from achieving fruition: “No way can we make it”; “We will not have a chance for success”; “We will all be viciously killed”. The *se’or she’b’issah* was taking hold, beginning to do its work, planting fear in the hearts and minds of every Jew. Anything to prevent the performance of a *mitzvah*.

Once the “*mitzvah*” was removed, once Hashem had declared that they no longer were going to *Eretz Yisrael*, the *yetzer hora* had no reason to imbue the nation with fear. There were no “challenges” (such as Hashem’s command) to overcome. The evil inclination kick starts his evil only when there is something to “achieve,” something holy to obviate. This is why one who is a *metzuveh v’oseh* – commanded to perform a *mitzvah* – and carries it out, is on a higher spiritual plane (and garners greater reward) than one who acts out of the goodness of his heart. The *metzuveh* has to overcome the challenge of the *yetzer hora*, which is difficult, since the “evil” mode kicks in whenever one attempts to do good. Apparently, the *yetzer hora* sees no enduring challenge from the individual who goes beyond the strictures of command. It is when one executes the *mitzvah* in accordance with Hashem’s will that the *yetzer hora* feels threatened enough to act. In order for the good of the one who performs the *mitzvah* to triumph over the evil of the *yetzer hora*, the good must be sincere. Evil founded on the shoulders of falsehood cannot succeed against good that stands on the shoulders of sincerity.