

## Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan. (13:2)

In a *shmuess*, ethical discourse, he gave in memory of his father, *Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl*, attempts to show how generations decline spiritually. His father survived World War I, during which Jewish life drastically changed. Entire communities were obliterated. Extreme hunger became a way of life. People were compelled to eat grass just to have some nutrients in their bodies. He studied in *Kollel Slabodka* until the material pressures were too much to handle. The next step was to move to America, which in and of itself was a spiritual challenge of immense proportion. Nonetheless, he lived in this country for over half a century and raised a son who became one of this generation's premier Torah giants. The *Rosh Yeshivah* observes that, considering all this, the chasm between generations is truly mind-boggling. How did his father maintain his extraordinary spiritual commitment? The *Rosh Yeshivah* attributes it to his father's ability to maintain *d'mus d'yukno shel rabbo*, a mental image of his mentors: *Horav Meir Simchah, zl, of Dvinsk*; and the *Rogathshover Gaon, zl*, two Torah giants of the previous generation. Their mental images were seared into his father's mind, to the point that he never lost contact with them. When one is fortunate to carry the "weight" of such *gedolim* on his shoulders, he becomes imbued with a purpose to achieve Torah distinction.

Having said this, we are presented with a question. The *chet meraglim*, sin of the spies, did not occur in a vacuum. The generation that was liberated from Egypt was under the leadership of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. He was the quintessential spiritual leader and mentor of *Klal Yisrael*. The members of this generation did not require a mental image of their *Rebbe*. He was present! Yet, they sinned. These were not spiritual weaklings. They were the *dor deah*, generation of knowledge, who experienced the Splitting of the Red Sea and the Giving of the Torah. Yet, they sinned.

We must say that one must look – open his eyes – to see the greatness of his *Rebbe* in order to be impacted. If one's eyes are sealed shut for various reasons or he does not appreciate what he sees, his vision is either impaired or the interface between his eyes and mind is not properly connected. When a person cannot see from far, but his vision up close remains acute, it is an indication that he suffers from myopia, nearsightedness. Such a condition applies to the spiritual dimension as well. When one suffers from spiritual myopia, he does not realize what he is missing. He sees what is up close – himself, which is what he wants to see. That which is at a distance, however, which takes some effort to see, he does not see. Everything which is outside his immediate circle of self remains an undiscernible blur. The *meraglim* saw themselves and were concerned that upon entering *Eretz Yisrael*, their positions of leadership would be compromised. They could not see beyond that. Thus, everything else, which would have cleared up this misconception, became a fog.

We see what we want to see. A popular tale concerns a thief whose ability to steal at will plagued the residents of a small Jewish community in Eastern Europe. Regrettably, the thief was one of

“ours,” so he knew everyone’s schedule, when they would be home and when they would be out and about. He would invariably wait until late at night, when his victims were asleep. No lock or security device was able to protect the residents from this wily thief. He was able to bypass any device. One night, he decided to pilfer the home of the community’s *Rav*. He waited until very late, when he was sure that everyone was asleep, to make his entry. He underestimated the *Rav*’s diligence in learning. He would stay up until the wee hours of the morning learning Torah before he would retire to bed. How shocked the thief was when, after effectively breaking into the home, he found the *Rav* poring over various tomes of Torah literature.

The two men – the thief and the *Rav* -- looked at one another, with the *Rav* being the first one to speak, “I am certain that you must have a pressing *halachic* question that requires immediate resolution that could not wait until morning.” The thief maintained his composure (since, after all, he did this for a living) and said, “Yes, I have a pressing question.” “Please ask,” the *Rav* said. “My question is,” replied the thief, “how do I get out of here?”

We have no record of the *Rav*’s reply to the thief’s query. If the thief was in a listening mode and the *Rav* had the time to reply, however, he would have rebutted with a question of his own, “The question is not how do you get out of here, but rather, how did you get in here in the first place?” We all go through situations whereby at the end we are in a predicament from which we do not know how to extricate ourselves. Do we ever stop to think how we got here initially? What missteps did we make that led us down this course? Once again, when one suffers spiritual myopia, he sees the here and now and only himself. The larger picture, which includes errors of the past and the ramifications of the future, elude him; they are a blur. His only choice is to change his “glasses” to allow him to see further and clearer