



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT DEVARIM

The Solution to Exile That No One is Talking About

In this week's Parsha, Moshe recounts many episodes that transpired throughout the nation's journey in the desert, including that of the spies. Ironically, this segment is read in the week leading up to Tisha b'Av – the saddest day in the Jewish calendar, when both Temples were destroyed, countless Jews were killed, and many calamities had befallen us. It is also the same day in which the spies had returned from Israel/Canaan and had given their negative report, casting doubts and complaints about G-d's Promised Land and leading the nation into mournful tears. That evening would become one in which Jews would continue to sit on the floor in mourning and tears every year, on the 9th of Av.

Although the spies acted unjustly and the nation wept tears of vain, it would seem that the consequence was out of proportion. Granted, their outlook was wrong and ungrateful, but did that truly deserve to be met with an anniversary of bad luck that would live on for thousands of years?

To truly understand, let us analyze a story that took place long before the sin of the spies. After years of following G-d's command wherever it took him, into the unknown, time and again, and having been promised special and abundant offspring, Avraham Avinu asked G-d a simple question: "How do I know that I will inherit this?" Decades had passed; he was already an old man with no children. G-d's response was swift and harsh: "You shall surely know that your children will be foreigners in a land not their own..."

Here, too, was the response not too rough? Why was a simple question answered with the doomsday prediction of what history would prove to be a bitter enslavement of the Jewish people in the hands of a cruel Egypt?

I once saw a profound explanation from R' Nissim Yagen. Hashem wasn't really punishing Avraham. After all, he had merely asked a simple question. Yet, that question was telling of a deeper reality: that as strong as Avraham's character was, and as deep as his connection with G-d was felt, there still existed a *tiny glimpse* of a lack of *emuna*. To be clear, Avraham had one of the strongest levels of *emuna* in the history of mankind – to the point where he almost slaughtered his own son at G-d's request. However, people on the loftiest statures are always examined and judged more thoroughly, being of higher expectations, and his "simple question" revealed that the level of *emuna* was only at 99% - which, albeit unparalleled and exalted, was nonetheless slightly deficient and thus incomplete. Therefore, as a remedy, G-d decreed Avraham's children would be sentenced to Egyptian exile – not as retribution, but as a way to perfect that quality and fill in the gap of whatever

emuna was lacking. Through countless open miracles in the exodus and seeing unmatched Divine Providence sustain them in the scorching desert, the ultimate goal was to repair and restore full *emuna* in the Creator.

As the old saying goes, history has a way of repeating itself. The reason why the very night that the spies returned and the nation wept – Tisha b'Av – became the night that we would later be exiled again and again was because of the very same concept that got us exiled in the first place. R' Natan of Breslov pointed out that the Land of Israel, being a miraculous existence infused with Godliness and predicated on *emuna*, was meant to have been bequeathed to the Jewish Nation under such conditions. Yet, the Jews chose not to rely fully on Hashem or trust Him with the hindsight of all the wondrous and awe-inspiring miracles that He had performed for them thus far; instead, they sent spies to see everything for themselves. And when they heard a negative report, they didn't fall back on the reassurance that their loving Father, Who performed nothing but kindness for them, will undoubtedly take care of them; they instead questioned and complained and cried.

G-d had put them to the test once again, and they had failed. They sowed seeds of doubt rather than belief and trust. They magnified Avraham's perceived deficiency, though, unbeknownst to them, G-d had woven together generations of history to place them in the precise position to rectify it. Once again, exile would result from that episode – this time spanning many more centuries, reverberating even today. Not as a direct *punishment* for the reaction, but because the purpose of exile is to cultivate complete, firm, and robust *emuna*, which had still been lacking.

Only through internalizing the true cause and psychology behind exile is it possible to achieve redemption. As we approach Tisha b'Av and mark another year sitting on the floor, let us take the steps of cultivating our own *emuna*, on both an individual and collective level. Reflect on the countless times Hashem has revealed His hand – through the miracles He has performed for our nation throughout history and through the quiet acts of providence He has woven into your own life. Remember how He has carried us, and how He has carried you, and trust that our loving Father will continue to hold our hand. In doing so, may we finally rectify what exile was meant to accomplish this entire time, and finally greet Mashiach in the entrance of the newly rebuilt Bet Hamikdash speedily in our days.

"Fear kills more dreams than failure ever will."