



RABBI SHALOM

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The Spies Lacked Jewish Pride

וְשָׁם רָאִינוּ אֶת־הַנְּפִילִים בְּנֵי עֲנָק מִן־הַנְּפִילִים וְנָהָּ
בְּעֵינֵינוּ כְּחַגְבִּים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם: (במדבר יג:לג)

There we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, descended from the giants. In our eyes, we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes. (Bamidbar 13:33).

When the *meraglim* (spies) return from the Land of Israel and relay to the nation what they witnessed, they include a description of the inhabitants of the Land as being giants. The spies then go on to depict how tiny they felt in the presence of these giants, like little grasshoppers. The next phrase is puzzling. They state: “**and so we were in their eyes.**” How can the spies speculate as to how they were perceived by the inhabitants of the land of Israel? Rashi citing a gemara in Sota (25.) suggests that the spies overheard the people telling one another: “There are ants in the vineyard who look like people.”

Rabbi Norman Lamm in his sefer *Drashot L'Dorot* derives a very pertinent lesson from the statement “*we seemed*

like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes.” The Ba'al Haturim citing Chazal, supplies the missing link between the way the spies viewed themselves and the way they felt they were perceived by others. A giant ate a pomegranate and then discarded its shell. The spies then climbed into the shell to seek shelter. What Chazal are seeking to relay through this allegory is that the **spies had no self-respect**. They had the inferiority complex that many Jews have in *galut* (exile). They are willing to accept even a hollow shell emptied and disposed of, with its only value being that it was previously used by a non-Jew.

Throughout the generations Jews often sought to mimic the customs and behaviors of their contemporaries in order to be accepted. Whether it be in the form of dress, speech, names, clubs, the Jew tried to adjust and adapt to the surroundings. They seek an “empty shell” in order to be accepted by their secular neighbors. As Rabbi Lamm so eloquently states: “*If man thinks of himself as no more than an insignificant insect, it is the inviolable law of nature that his fellows think of him as being no more than a mere grasshopper.*”

The Gemara (Shabbat 31b) states that when a person passes away, one of the questions that Hashem will ask of them is: “*Kavata itim laTorah?*” Did you set aside time to study Torah?” But we have, on

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occasion, suggested another interpretation. “Did you adjust the times – the norms and influences of the day – to the precepts of the Torah rather than trying to adjust the Torah to fit with the times?” The influence should be from within the Torah environment to the outside world and not the opposite. Some people try to adapt the Torah to modern times. They suggest that we be “open-minded” about contemporary norms and values. We say that, on the contrary, we need to open our minds to accept the Torah and adapt our lives to it.

We must internalize this lesson and ensure that we retain self-respect and reject the shells of strange ideologies thrown to us. We may be enticed by our non-Jewish fellow citizens who seek to persuade us to assimilate within their

culture and/or religion. We must retain our Jewish pride and rich tradition and pass it wholeheartedly to our future generations. It is something to indeed relish. ■

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