



## GEULAS YISRAEL

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RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION  
MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

# The Voices of Faith

It is difficult to stand against a crowd. It is even more difficult when that crowd is led by respected and influential figures. Yehoshua faced both challenges. He rejected the slanderous report of ten distinguished nesi'im or tribal leaders and refused to be swept along by the panic they created. Where did he draw that inner strength from?

### ROLE MODELS

The Torah records a private encounter between Yehoshua and his mentor, Moshe Rabbeinu, just before the mission began. Yehoshua was Moshe's trusted and loyal talmid. He had led the Jewish army in battle against Amalek. He had waited patiently at the foot of Har Sinai while our nation descended into the frenzy of the egel hazahav. He had zealously defended Moshe's honor, urging action against Eldad and Meidad when they prophesied in a manner that appeared to challenge Moshe's authority.

On the eve of the mission to Israel, Moshe renamed his talmid Yehoshua, changing his name from Hoshea. The new name was meant to empower him. Moshe believed in his talmid and in his ability to stand for truth in the face of falsehood and slander.

According to Chazal, the name change was not merely a vote of confidence; it was also a tefillah. Moshe sensed that this mission was

perilous and could end in disaster. He prayed, "Kah yoshiacha mei'atzat meraglim," asking that Hashem protect Yehoshua from the counsel of the spies. By embedding that prayer within Yehoshua's name, Moshe hoped to give him the strength to withstand the conspiracy and remain faithful to the truth. Moshe was doing more than offering a prayer. He was reinforcing a relationship that had shaped Yehoshua's character and faith.

Religious virtues are often learned more effectively through people than through abstract ideas. Most of us can distinguish right from wrong in the tranquility of our own thoughts. Yet in the heat of the moment, when emotions surge and pressures mount, that clarity can become clouded, and we succumb to lesser instincts.

My rebbe, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, once remarked that when facing a moral challenge or a test of character, we should not begin by asking what the correct choice is. Instead, we should identify a moral role model whose integrity and moral judgment we deeply admire and ask ourselves how that person would respond in these circumstances. Moral wisdom is often learned more powerfully through personal example than through abstract principles.

The same is true of faith. We can study faith as an abstract idea, but our deepest source of faith is often the people we encounter who embody it in real time. In a landmark essay entitled "*The Source of Faith Is Faith Itself*," Rav Aharon Lichtenstein described the impact of the role models who shaped his religious

life:

“What I received from all my mentors, at home or in yeshiva, was the key to confronting life, particularly modern life, in all its complexity: the recognition that it was not so necessary to have all the answers as to learn to live with the questions. Regardless of what issues—moral, theological, textual or historical—vexed me, I was confident that they had been raised by masters far sharper and wiser than myself; and if they had remained impregnably steadfast in their commitment, so should and could I.”

Faith is not sustained solely by arguments and ideas. It is strengthened by witnessing people of conviction confront uncertainty, wrestle with difficult questions, and remain steadfast in their commitment. In moments of crisis, we do not draw strength only from ideas we believe. We draw strength from people who maintained belief, and believed in us.

### MASORAH AND JEWISH HISTORY

What about the second hero of the meraglim debacle? What about Calev, who also opposed the conspiracy and refused to allow the propaganda campaign to distort his judgment? He emerges from the story as something of an unknown figure. Although Chazal suggest that he married Miriam, the Torah itself records no special relationship between him and Moshe Rabbeinu. How did he find the faith to withstand this campaign of slander and fear? Where did he draw his inner strength from?

The Gemara in Sotah provides the answer. As the spies made their way through the Land of Israel, the Torah describes their journey southward: “Vaya’alu baNegev.” The continuation of the verse then records a solitary detour to Chevron—“Vayavou ad Chevron.” All the spies traveled through the south, but

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only one visited Chevron. Chazal explain that Calev separated from the group and journeyed to the graves of the Avot in Me’arat Hamachpeilah.

Our forefathers sacrificed so much for the future of the Jewish people and for the Land of Israel. Now, all that they had invested seemed to be in jeopardy. Standing at their graves, Calev prayed for the strength to defend their legacy and remain loyal to their mission. Though he lacked the personal mentorship that Yehoshua enjoyed, he found inspiration in a different source. If Yehoshua drew courage from his rebbe, Calev drew it from the sweep of Jewish history. The past gave Calev the courage to defend the future. Standing among the graves of the Avot, he remembered that he was part of a story far larger than himself. Sometimes the strength to face an uncertain future comes from remembering the generations who entrusted that future to us.

### THE BALANCE

These two portraits of Yehoshua and Calev present very different sources of strength and faith. We draw inspiration from the extraordinary people we encounter in our own lives. At the same time, we draw strength from the past, from towering figures whom we never met but whose lives left an indelible imprint upon Jewish history.

It is important to balance these two sources of inspiration. We need living role models who can help us navigate contemporary questions and modern challenges. It is risky to speculate about what figures who lived hundreds of years ago would have said about issues they never confronted in a world so different from their own. It is easy to become a ventriloquist for voices that are no longer here to speak for themselves. Too often, sweeping claims are made about what the Rambam would have thought about a particular issue, when in truth there is little way of knowing. Faith is transmitted through a mesorah, but every generation requires people who can apply that mesorah to new realities.

However, there is also a danger that we become too locked into the present and lose sight of the broader sweep of the past. Contemporary trends and hashkafic currents can appear so powerful and all-consuming that they seem to define the only legitimate path of avodat Hashem. At times, it is healthy to step back and remember that previous generations cultivated different models of religious life, some of which may resonate with us more deeply than contemporary approaches.

A healthy religious life requires perspective. We must distinguish between enduring values that have guided Jews across the generations and assumptions that arise from a particular moment in history. A broader awareness of the rich diversity of avodat Hashem throughout our mesorah helps us avoid mistaking current fashions for timeless truths.

### MODERN ISRAEL

Life in modern Israel makes this calibration even more crucial, but also more challenging. We often feel that we have entered an entirely new chapter of Jewish history. Many of the questions we face have not confronted the

Jewish people for nearly two thousand years. More broadly, modernity has reshaped our world so dramatically that it often feels disconnected from anything that came before. It is easy to become absorbed in the contemporary moment, with its unprecedented challenges and its remarkable opportunities. Yet it is essential that we continue to view ourselves as the heirs to a tradition and a story that stretches back more than 3,300 years.

Equally challenging is our ability to relate to the two thousand years of Jewish life in exile. With our return to Israel, the biblical era of Jewish sovereignty has assumed greater resonance and immediacy. We live with a connection to the world of Tanach that Jews in exile could scarcely have imagined. Yet for many Israelis, the long centuries of galut can feel less relevant. At times, those two millennia are viewed as an interruption of Jewish history rather than as an integral part of it. We must resist that temptation. A healthy historical consciousness traces an unbroken line through every stage of our past, identifying deeply with each chapter of the Jewish story. Yet historical consciousness alone is not enough. We must also remain attentive to the challenges of the present and to the people who help us confront them.■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: [mtaraginbooks.com](http://mtaraginbooks.com).

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