

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parshios Matos-Masei

“AND THEY [THE SPIES] SAW THE LAND, AND THEY LED YOUR HEARTS ASTRAY ...” (BAMIDBAR 32:9)

**Why were those tears so tragically powerful?**

IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN three thousand years since the Jews cried in the desert due to the spies' negative report. Why were those tears so tragically powerful that they are still affecting us now, three millennia later? The Nesivos HaMishpat in his commentary on Eicha – Palgei Mayim, answers this question using the verse in Eicha (1:2), “Her tears are on her cheek.” The tears described, says the Nesivos, are those that were wrongfully cried on the night of the first Tisha B'av when the spies returned with their discouraging report. The prophet Yirmiyahu is telling us, the Nesivos explains, that those tears of the Jews in the desert are still on the cheeks of the Jews of a later generation – that of the destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash. These tears represent sin, and the generation of the destruction is also guilty of the same sin as the generation of the spies: They both chose to run away from *kedusha* – holiness – and to run towards the impurity of idol worship.

How can the Nesivos say that the generation of the desert cried because they lacked a drive for holiness? We know that they cried because they were afraid of the giants living in Canaan! They were surrounded by purity and holiness in the desert. They had just built the Mishkan and no one was afraid or fleeing from its holiness. Their only fear was of bloody wartime defeat at the hands of the Canaanite nations. What connection does that fear have with running away from *kedusha*?

**These reserves can remain buried inside**

A person can have deep reserves of strength, confidence and trust in Hashem. However these reserves can remain buried inside unless he has the spiritual motivation to bring them to the fore. The proper inspiration can enable him to access these subterranean reservoirs and summon the powerful forces of *emunah* and *bitachon*. The Nesivos is telling us that the generation of the desert had an almost imperceptible desire to run from holiness and to chase after impurity. This tiny fault is what ultimately caused them to fear the nations of Canaan. The Jews had within them the ability to pass the test of the spies. They could have shrugged off the concerns of the Canaanite nations by tapping into the *bitachon* within them. Unfortunately, that missing level of desire for holiness served as a blockage to that *bitachon* and left them susceptible to the *loshon hara* of the spies. Had they truly yearned for the *kedusha* of Eretz Yisrael – at the appropriately high level – they would have passed the test and three millennia of tears would have been avoided.

**Do we truly seek holiness and closeness to Hashem?**

As we mourn the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, and we try to develop our own yearning for the redemption and return to Eretz Yisrael, we must ask ourselves: Do we truly seek holiness and closeness to Hashem? Do we want the *geula* for the correct reasons – to serve Hashem in the *kedusha* of Eretz Yisrael? Are the tears of the *meraglim* still on our cheeks, and is that attachment to the impurities of our society and lack of desire for *kedusha* also keeping us in *galus*? As we approach the Nine Days, let us shake off the impurities of our environment and reach for that closeness to Hashem, and thereby discover new strength and *bitachon* within ourselves to overcome the challenges we face in bringing ourselves back onto the path of *teshuva*, *geula*, and the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash, speedily in our days.