



Shlach: Yes, You Can

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

The drama unfolded quickly. The spies returned from their reconnaissance mission to the Land of Israel and delivered a disastrous report.

They told him (Moshe) and said, "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the land are mighty, and the cities are extremely huge and fortified, and there we saw even the offspring of the giant. The Amalekites dwell in the south land, while the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountainous region. The Canaanites dwell on the coast and alongside the Jordan We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we (Bamidbar 13:27-31)."

With just a few words, a few short sentences, the *meraglim* (spies) created a storm of panic, anxiety, and fear amongst the nation. With this negative report, the dream that had guided our people since the times of Avraham was in peril of collapsing. One man, *Kalev*, tried to control the damage and steady the people. "*Caleb silenced ... and he said, "We can surely go up and take possession of it, for we can indeed overcome it, Ki Yachol Nuchal Lah (Bamidbar 13:30)."* We can do this, we can overcome this struggle, we can take our land and assume our destiny.

How are we to understand *Kalev's* response to the claims of the spies? The spies advanced valid points. There are mighty nations who outnumber and can outfight us. Yes, the land is wonderful, it flows with milk and honey, but how will we be able to overcome these challenges? And *Kalev's* response is simply – we can do it. He does not respond materially to the claims of his fellow tribal leaders. How did he expect to shift the tide and convince the people that indeed they could and should enter the Land of Israel?

Rav Kalonymous Kalmish Shapira (1889–1943), was the Grand Rabbi of Piacezna, Poland. The Rebbe spent three years (1939-1942) in the Warsaw Ghetto. On Shabbos, he would deliver rousing *Divrei Torah* and lift the spirits of his broken brethren. These *Divrei Torah* were written on scraps of paper and buried in a canister inside the Ghetto. On Shabbos, June 22, 1940, *Parshas Shlach*, the Rebbe addressed this very question. "*If the spies spoke with reason, saying, "the people are aggressive, and the cities are large and well-fortified," why did Kalev not enter into a debate with them, trying to demolish their argument and reasoning? Why did he limit himself to the simple statement "We must go forth?"* The Rebbe explains that *Kalev* was teaching us an important lesson. Sometimes, you have to believe you can succeed even if you can't immediately see the path to success. God could have made this entire process much easier. God could have easily struck fear into the hearts of the inhabitants of the land, cause them to run away, and let the Jewish people enter an uninhabited and peaceful Land of Israel. God could have easily driven out the Amalekites and the Hittites. He could have caused the giants to kneel before the Jewish people, but He didn't because God wanted us to see the challenges and believe in ourselves. God wanted us to see the challenges and believe that we could and would overcome them. This was to be an exercise in national development. *Kalev* does not argue with the spies because he agrees with their concerns, comments, and observations. There are mighty nations, significant odds, and factors working against us. But always remember, *Ki Yachol Nuchal Lah*, we can do it. How? I don't know yet. What is our strategy? We have to discuss. But we must approach this situation with one clear and indisputable reality - if we put our minds to it, if we believe in ourselves, our God, and one another – we will be successful. The sin of the spies is that they were unable to conjure up a vision of national salvation; they were unable to see beyond their current realities and were only able to see what was right in front of their eyes. They were unable to create and retain a hopeful and optimistic outlook and were unable to see with their heart and soul.

Too often, we give up on meaningful, personal goals and aspirations because their actualization is fraught with challenge and adversity. There are giants that stand between us and the realization of our dreams. We can't see a way around the difficulties and feel that we may be better served going back to our personal Egypt, the land of mediocrity and under-performance. *Kalev's* words are a rallying cry for every Jew. *Ki Yachol Nuchal Lah*, we can do it. We must find the strength and the courage to create a vision of success and accomplishment. When we embark on a life initiative, we must begin by visualizing what success looks like. We must believe in ourselves. We must believe we can rise to the occasion and accomplish what we know we must. Our ancestors chose to ignore *Kalev* and admitted defeat in the face of the giants and challenges that stood in their way. Let us rectify the sins of the past, *Ki Yachol Nuchal Lah*. (Reprinted from 5778)