



Building Unity, One Step at a Time: A Special Series for the Three Weeks

Part IV: Finding the Right Perspective

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

This series is dedicated in memory of Hallel Ariel Hy'd and Rabbi Miki Mark Hy'd; two precious neshamos (souls) who gave so much and had so much more to give. May their memories bring us closer to one another.

From the moment Avraham Avinu agreed to be the father of our nation, we were guided by two words: *Lecha Lecha, Go for yourself*. Our national narrative began with the journey to the Land of Israel. The journey began with individuals and was now occurring for the nation. But we wanted to send spies. The word of God, the word of Moshe was not enough – we had to see for ourselves. The results were tragic. The spies returned and told the people that the Land and its inhabitants were simply “unconquerable.” These demoralizing words sent the people into a downward spiral. They cried. And it is here that the Talmud records a dramatic statement: *“God said, ‘You have cried unnecessary tears, I will cause you to cry for many generations to come (Taanis 31).’”* When did this report and Divine response occur? On the 9th of Av. It is the sin of the spies that created the tragic foundation for this difficult day. A foundation, which has seen layer after layer of tragedy added to it over the last two thousand years.

But did the punishment fit the crime? I understand that we were ungrateful and lacked faithfulness. But to condemn every Jew (over the age of 20) to death in the desert; to mark this day for ongoing tragedy – seems a bit disproportionate? Furthermore, the people tried to do teshuva (repent). The very next morning the Torah relates that the people arose early in the morning and ascended to the mountain top, saying, *“We are ready to go up to the place of which the Lord spoke, for we have sinned.”* Moses said, *“Why do you transgress the word of the Lord? It will not succeed. Do not go up, for the Lord is not among you, [so that] you will not be beaten by your enemies (Bamidbar 14:39-41).”* They acknowledged their mistake and they tried to right the wrong, yet the punishment was still severe and swift. How are we to understand the nature of their mistake and the Divine reaction?

The Dubno Maggid (Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, 1740-1804) explains this dynamic with a mashal (parable). There was a fine young man who was known to be a Torah scholar with sterling *middos* (character traits) who was engaged to marry a young woman from a very wealthy family. One day the fathers were sitting down to discuss the financial arrangements for the upcoming wedding. The father of the bride told the father of the groom, *“I am so happy our children are getting married, we will be happy to pay for the wedding. My only request is that you take care of outfitting your son for the wedding. But it is important that you buy him a suit of the finest materials.”* To which the father of the groom responded, *“My dear friend, I, too, share your excitement for the upcoming wedding of our children and I have much appreciation for your generosity. I am a man of virtually no means and while I can certainly afford a basic wardrobe for my son, I can’t purchase the type of clothing you are suggesting.”* *“Well if you can’t provide this one small part, then the wedding is off!”* replied the father of the bride. And so the beautiful match ended. A few months went by and the father of the bride regretted his hasty decision. The groom was such a fine young man with such sterling character, how could he justify breaking off the nuptials over a suit. He contacted the father of the groom and voiced his desire to have their children marry. *“My dear friend, replied the father of the groom, my son is a very special young man who has much potential. Yet, you were willing to cast him aside because of a suit. Any family that would treat my son this way doesn’t truly appreciate who my son is. I no longer wish for my son to be a part of your family.”*

The Dubno Maggid explains, when the spies maligned the Land of Israel, it highlighted a fundamental lack of love and appreciation for the Land. This wasn’t simply a lack of proper judgment; this sin represented a fundamental lack of understanding of the preciousness and holiness of the Land. A mistake of this magnitude could not simply be remedied by attempting to march on the Land the next day, nor could it be remedied by simply apologizing. It



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would take another forty years of nomadic existence to cultivate an appreciation for a home, for a land, for a destiny. The real sin of the spies was that all they saw were the problems; they didn't see the beauty and good. There is nothing in life that is perfect, everything and everyone has their strengths and weaknesses but if all I see is what is broken and wrong – I end up appreciating nothing. Many of us have struggles that we contend with every day but we must be careful that the struggles don't obscure or eclipse our blessings. It is easy to lose one's self in the sadness and despair of difficult circumstances. We must always maintain a healthy disposition and recognize all of the beautiful *berachos* and bounty we possess as well.

This lesson has an important interpersonal ramification as well. There is an amazing Gemara.

Rabbi Chiya's wife was a difficult person. Yet, whenever he would come across a nice item he would purchase it, wrap it and give it to his wife (as a gift). Rav (Rabbi Chiya's student) observed this and said, 'Rebbe, why are you doing this? We see how she often mistreats you. To which Rabbi Chiya responded, 'It is enough (I have gratitude) that she raises the children (she is a wonderful mother) and saves me from sin' (Yevamos 63am)."

Apparently Rabbi Chiya didn't have a story book marriage. There were complications. Yet, Rabbi Chiya chose to see the beautiful parts of his wife's personality. Rabbi Chiya realized that in life nothing and no one is perfect – and you have to choose through which lens you will view others and the world. People wrong us, people hurt us, but we must learn how to see the positive aspects in the other. This is not just in marriage. The Rabbi Chiya standard must guide and inform all of our interpersonal relationships.

This coming Motzai Shabbos and Sunday, we will observe what is undoubtedly the saddest day in our year, the 9th of Av. It is a day when we remember 2,000 years of tragedy, loss and sadness. It is a day when we will remember the sin of the spies, the more than 1,000,000 who died when Yerushalayim fell to the Romans, the 6,000,000 Kedoshim, those who have been murdered in acts of terror, and every tragedy in between. There are many things that are broken in the world and so many things that are broken within each of us. Perhaps, it is on this day when we can begin to find the strength to see that which is beautiful. Yes, we will cry on Tisha B'Av for all that has been lost. But let us also take some time to appreciate each other and what we have in this world.