

The Sin of Not Dreaming
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After Hashem tells the Benei Yisrael that they will not enter the land of Canaan on account of their sin with the *meraglim*, a group of people defiantly did not listen to this decree. This group of people are known as the *Maapilim*—the defiant ones who tried to enter Canaan despite the harsh decree.

When Moses repeated these words to all the Israelites, the people were overcome by grief. Early next morning they set out toward the crest of the hill country, saying, "We are prepared to go up to the place that the LORD has spoken of, for we were wrong." But Moses said, "Why do you transgress the LORD's command? This will not succeed. Do not go up, lest you be routed by your enemies, for the LORD is not in your midst. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there to face you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned from following the LORD and the LORD will not be with you." Yet defiantly (vayaapilu) they marched toward the crest of the hill country, though neither the LORD's Ark of the Covenant nor Moses stirred from the camp. And the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that hill country came down and dealt them a shattering blow at Hormah (14:39-45).

The *Maapilim* are indeed struck down and died on the mountain top. Yet they lived on in the imagination of Zionist poetry. Chaim Nachman Bialik in a 1902 poem, and then two decades later, Levin Kipnis, both composed powerful and influential poems about the *Maapilim*, and the spiritual power of continuing to dream a future dream even in the face of certain defeat in the present.

A similar approach can be seen in the writings of Rav Tzadok Hakohen who, in 1848, sees in the *Maapilim*, the chutzpah necessary to bring about the messiah.

Rav Tzadok writes:

Concerning this, earlier authorities interpreted the statement (Pesachim 86b) "What is the reason that when they told you to sit on the couch you did sit? Said he to them: 'Whatever your host tells you, do, except if he tells you to go (and one is to presume that he is not really being serious).'" And not for no reason did the Torah write about the Ma'apilim in Parashat Shelach, where it would appear that they had already accepted the words of Moshe and they repented for their sin (of listening to the spies and adopting a negative view of the land of Israel.) So why didn't they listen to him when he said to them, "Do not go up to the land"? Because they thought that this would be an example of the host telling you to go. And this is the reason that they presumed to go up to the land even though this was against the will of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, as our Rabbis have said (Sanhedrin 105a) "Arrogance is rulership without the

crowns.” And they did not succeed in this because they ate “Paga” (lit. an unripe date; fig. they did something before its time.) And as the Rabbi have said, (Sota 49b) “In the footsteps of the Messiah, insolence will increase” because that is the time for this. For this reason, Moshe said to them: (BaMidbar 14:41) “VeHih Lo Titzlach” (and it will not be successful). In all places, the Rabbis interpret “VeHih”— (an exclusionary word, i.e., the directive applies only to this case, but not to another), i.e., that there will be another time where this will succeed, which is in our time, which is in the footsteps of the Messiah (Tzidkat Tzedek, #46, cited by Rabbi Benny Lau, and then by Rabbi Yaakov Bieler, <https://yaakovbieler.wordpress.com/2016/07/01/the-maapilim/>).

The *Maapilim* were dreamers. Even in the face of the impossible they continued to dream.

There is much our society can learn today from the example of the *Maapilim*.

Peter Thiel in his book, *Zero to One: Notes on Start-Ups, Or How to Build the Future*, laments the fact that bold and dynamic dreams for the future are hard to find. In this context he writes how as recently as the 1950s it was different.

Bold plans were not reserved just for political leaders or government scientists. In the late 1940's a Californian named John Reber set out to reinvent the physical geography of the whole San Francisco Bay Area. Reber was a schoolteacher, an amateur theater producer, and a self-taught engineer. Undaunted by his lack of credentials, he publicly proposed to build two huge dams in the Bay, construct massive freshwater lakes for drinking water and irrigation, and reclaim 20,000 acres of land for redevelopment. Even though he had no personal authority, people took the Reber plan seriously. It was endorsed by newspaper boards across California. The US Congress held hearings on its feasibility. The Army Corps of Engineers even constructed a 1.5-acre scale model of the Bay in a cavernous Sausalito warehouse to simulate it. The tests revealed technical shortcomings, so the plan wasn't executed.

But would anybody today take such a vision seriously in the first place? In the 1950s, people welcomed big plans, and asked whether they would work. Today a grand plan coming from a school teacher would be dismissed as crankery, and a long-range vision coming from anyone more powerful would be derided as hubris. You can still visit the Bay Model in that Sausalito warehouse, but today it's just a tourist attraction: big plans for the future have become archaic curiosities (Thiel, 66).

Thiel's critique of our current society's hesitancy to go all in and dream big relates to the sin of the Israelites in parashat Shelach.

After all, what exactly was the sin of the Israelites?

It can't be that the sin was sending people to scout out the land, since the verse explicitly commands this: “Hashem spoke to Moses. Send men to scout the land of Canaan, which I am

giving to the Israelite people; send one man from each of their ancestral tribes, each one a chieftain among them” (13:1-2).

It must be that their sin was in not believing in the possibility of a better future; i.e. of not believing in the possibility of a redeemed world. The sin of refusing to dream.

At the end of forty days they returned from scouting the land. They went straight to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, and they made their report to them and to the whole community, as they showed them the fruit of the land. This is what they told him: “We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw the Anakites there” (13-25-28).

Rather than follow their dream and try to enter into the Land of Canaan, the people preferred to say that their dream was impossible.

Caleb hushed the people before Moses and said, “Let us by all means go up, and we shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.” But the men who had gone up with him said, “We cannot attack that people, for it is stronger than we.” Thus they spread calumnies among the Israelites about the land they had scouted, saying, “The country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers. All the people that we saw in it are men of great size; we saw the Nephilim there—the Anakites are part of the Nephilim—and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them.” The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night (13:30-14:1).

The people preferred woe is me weeping to dreaming big and building the future.

Contrast the actions of the Israelites with those of Rachav in the Haftorah for Shelach (Joshua, chapter 2:1-18).

Rachav protects the two Israelites who have come to scout out the land. When she senses that they are in danger, she hides them on her roof: “Now she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under some stalks of flax which she had lying on the roof (*al hagag*)” (Joshua 2:4).

The word roof (*gag*) is a word that appears in Tanach to connote dreams of building a better world (see also, Shabbat 88a).

For example, when Saul the first King of Israel is anointed, it all takes place on a rooftop. It is on the *gag*, with Saul and Samuel, that we see a concrete action taken towards building a utopian kingdom--the perfect society that the Torah commands of us.

They then descended from the shrine to the town, and [Samuel] talked with Saul on the roof. Early, at the break of day, Samuel called to Saul on the roof. He said, “Get up, and I will send you off.” Saul arose, and the two of them, Samuel and he, went outside. As they were walking

toward the end of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to walk ahead of us"—and he walked ahead—"but you stop here a moment and I will make known to you the word of God." Samuel took a flask of oil and poured some on Saul's head and kissed him, and said, "Hashem herewith anoints you ruler over His own people (I Samuel 9:25-10:1).

It is therefore significant that Rachav also sends the two men up to the roof. She too was a visionary and a dreamer who understood that the future of the Land of Canaan lay with the incoming Israelites and not the Canaanite Kings.

The spies sent by Joshua instruct Rachav to place a sign outside her home as a signal to the invading Israelites not to harm her or her family. This sign is a crimson thread that she must hang from her window.

When we invade the country, you tie this length of crimson cord (tikvat chut hashani) to the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your family together in your house (2:18).

In Hebrew the hanging thread is called, "*tikvat chut hashani.*" *Chut hashani* means a "crimson thread." What does the word *tikvat* mean in this context? Most commentators understand that this word is related to the word *kav*, or a plumbline. Rashi says: "The word *kav*, means a line or rope." In other words, Rachav was supposed to hang the thread down like a line, for all to see.

But there is another meaning to the word *tikvat* in Tanach. It can also mean, "hope" (see Job, 7:6).

The Talmud understands that the word *tikvah* is more than just a hanging thread, and that it is central to Rachav's character. Rachav and her dreams represent hope for the future. In the Talmud, Tikvah is another name for Rachav. She is hope and she gives birth to a total of nine prophets! She is hope and she gives birth to hope.

Eight prophets, who were also priests, descended from Rahab the prostitute, and they are: Neriah; his son Baruch; Seraiah; Mahseiah; Jeremiah; his father, Hilkiah; Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel; and Hanamel's father, Shallum. Rabbi Yehuda said: So too, Huldah the prophetess was a descendant of Rahab the prostitute, as it is written here with regard to Huldah: "The son of Tikvah," and it is written elsewhere in reference to Rahab's escape from the destruction of Jericho: "This cord of [tikvat] scarlet thread" (Megillah, 14b).

Rachav is the contrast with the Israelites in the wilderness. They represent people who only cry about the future, whereas she represents hope in the future.

In the Talmudic tradition, the biblical crimson thread symbolizes hope and purification. It figures prominently in three distinct acts of purification: the Red Heifer which purifies someone who has touched a corpse; the purification of a metzora; and the scapegoat that atones for the

sins of the Jewish people on Yom Kippur (Yoma, 41b). Of these three rituals, it is only about the first two that there is explicit command in the Torah to use a crimson thread. Regarding the scapegoat on Yom Kippur, it is a Mishnaic instruction to tie a crimson thread on the head of the scapegoat (Yoma, 41b). The Talmud teaches that during the 40-year tenure of Shimon Hatzaddik as Kohen Gadol this crimson thread always turned from red to white, thereby indicating that the Jewish people were forgiven for their sins (Yoma, 39b). But after Shimon Hatzaddik died the Jewish people sinned and the crimson thread stopped turning white.

The Sages taught: At first they would tie this strip of crimson to the opening of the Entrance Hall of the Temple on the outside. If the strip turned white they would rejoice, as this indicated that their sins had been atoned for. If it did not turn white they would be sad and ashamed. When the Sages saw that people were overly distressed on Yom Kippur, they established that they should tie the strip of crimson to the opening of the Entrance Hall on the inside, since only a few could actually go in to see it. And they would still peek and see: If it turned white, they would rejoice, and if it did not turn white they would be sad. Therefore, the Sages established that they should tie half of the strip to the rock and half of it between the goat's horns, so that the people would not know what happened to the strip until after the conclusion of Yom Kippur (Yoma, 67a).

The rabbis hid the crimson thread because they understood that a person cannot survive without the possibility of hope.

A core value of our faith is the commandment to dream for a brighter future. This is what our rabbis mean when they say that one who doesn't believe in the mashiach has no share in the World to Come. To be a Jew means to always dream about how to build a better tomorrow.

You can now watch a Youtube recording of Rabbi Herzfeld's D'var Torah:

<https://youtu.be/KIBcTYPbM24>