

The Sources of Courage¹

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*Courage: mental or moral strength to **venture**, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty*²

According to the definition above, there is little doubt that Calev and Yehoshua demonstrated courage in *venturing* forth to the land of Israel, and *persevering* in their faith that God would deliver them from the *fearsome* warrior kingdoms of Canaan. And yet, as we read this week's sedra, we cannot help but wonder as to what, precisely, was the source of said courage. Yehoshua and Calev were not, by any account³, the greatest of the spies, who were all properly described as men of significance, "the leaders of the Jewish people." What, then, differentiated Yehoshua and Calev?

In Yehoshua's case, we may surmise that it was the closeness of his relationship with Moshe that stood him in good stead in the decisive hour. As stated in the Torah, it was Moshe who had originally given young Hoshea bin Nun of the tribe of Ephraim the name Yehoshua⁴, a non-verbal prayer that God would protect, bless, and keep his young protege from all harm⁵. The very fact that the Torah reminds of this name change just before the spies venture forth⁶ may be interpreted as an allusion to the fact that it was the visage of his great mentor, Moshe, that fortified Yehoshua.

Calev's case, however, remains far more elusive. Calev had no special relationship with Moshe, over and above the ten wicked spies. Calev, as a matter of fact, has not appeared in the Torah in any context before this fateful chapter. From where did he draw his strength?

Before answering this question, it should be noted that while both Yehoshua and Calev eventually publically resist the other ten spies, Calev does so prior to Yehoshua⁷, and is the only one of the spies, including Yehoshua, who is singled out for praise by the Almighty in the aftermath of this

¹ In memory of my Zedi, Dr. Joel Dennis, Yosef Baruch b. Avraham Yitzchak, on the occasion of his third yearzeit last week, whose personal example remains a profound source of strength for his family.

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/courage>.

³ See Ramban BeMidbar 13:4, who suggests that there were two spies greater than Calev, and four greater than Yehoshua.

⁴ BeMidbar 13:16.

⁵ See Talmud Bavli, Sotah 34b, as well as Rashi, BeMidbar 13:16, who maintain that the addition of the letter 'yud' was made specially with the incident of the spies in mind. See, however, Seforno and Netiz (ad loc.) whose understanding is that the change in name was made with more than merely the sin of the spies in mind. Netziv, in particular, argues that the name change was made just in advance of Yehoshua's battle with Amalek after the crossing of the Red Sea.

⁶ See Rashbam ad loc. It is striking that the very same verse which tells of Moshe sending forth the spies references Moshe's previous alteration of Yehoahua's name.

⁷ BeMidbar 13:30.

catastrophic incident⁸. In plain terms, Calev surpassed Yehoshua in his capacity to challenge the defeatist spies⁹.

Our Sages were keenly aware of this point. Responding to a grammatical inconsistency in the text which seems to indicate that only a single one of the spies went to the ancient city of Hebron¹⁰, our Sages argue that Calev actually went to pray at *ma'arat ha-machpelah*¹¹, at the burial site of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, to appeal to the Almighty for the fortitude to remain loyal to that very promise which the Almighty had made to those buried there¹². While one may be tempted to relate to this rabbinic interpretation as homiletical in nature, it is broadly supported in the text of the Chumash itself¹³, as well as in Sefer Yehoshua, in which Calev is awarded the city of Chevron as his portion in the land of Israel in accordance with a Divine promise to grant him that land where he tread¹⁴.

What emerges, in summation, from both the examples Yehoshua and Calev, is that the source of courage is less likely fealty to an abstract sense of justice, but a deep, visceral, and personal connection to someone whom one relates to as a paragon of courage, be it Moshe, or the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. This approach is entirely consistent with the rabbinic view¹⁵ that Yosef was able to find the fortitude to resist the advances of Potiphar's wife through this internalization of his father Yaakov's very image, and all it represented to him, with respect to integrity and standards.

In our own lives, we are indeed blessed if we are able to point to members of our families or mentors whose virtue enables us to discover previously unknown reservoirs of courage, as both Yehoshua and Yosef did. And, if that is not the case, we may follow the example of Calev, who reached back to the foundation of our people, to those singular individuals through whose courage our very nation was conceived.

⁸ BeMidbar 14:24. The appellation of the term 'avdi', my servant, to Calev, is highly significant, as it used but a handful of times in all of Tanach to describe a singularly faithful servant of God. Yehoshua himself does not merit such a title until the end of his work, see Sefer Yehoshua 24:29.

⁹ As a matter of fact, when the Almighty first notes that the entire generation would die in the desert, except Calev, there is every reason to believe that Yehoshua will be included in this group. It is only further on in the text that Yehoshua merits survival and entry into the Land of Israel as well.

¹⁰ See BeMidbar 13:22.

¹¹ Talmud Bavli, Sotah, 34b. See Rashi BeMidbar 13:22.

¹² See Chizkuni, *ibid*, who argues that Calev went to Chevron to pray specifically because he did not have the same relationship with Moshe which Yehoshua enjoyed.

¹³ In this connection, it is certainly noteworthy that Rashbam, a textual literalist, gives special accord to this rabbinic interpretation, noting, הגדה נראית פשט שעל כלב דבר הכתוב. In fairness, Rashbam, true to form, does note that the literal meaning of the text supports a view that each of the spies came to Chevron. Nonetheless, the other great literalist, Ibn Ezra, cites only the rabbinic view that Calev alone went to Chevron. See Netziv's Ha-Emek Davar for a fascinating and original interpretation of this verse.

¹⁴ See BeMidbar 14:24 and Yehoshua 14:12-15.

¹⁵ Talmud Bavli, Sotah, 36b.