

This Week in Torah *Shalach L'cha*

Our friend and teacher, Natalie Margolis z"l, used to say that the only one who likes change is a wet baby. That theorem is put to the test in this week's *parasha*; how does a people who are wandering thru the wilderness deal with change? The simple answer is – they *kvetch*! They yearn to go back, they doubt, they rebel. They even cry-- but the sages teach us that in those tears are opportunity for our people's redemption.

Let's set the scene. Moses selects spies to scout out the land of Canaan. 10 came back with good reports but with crippling reservations. Sure the land was full of great potential but there is no way this group of former slaves can conquer it since the people are giants and they live in walled/fortified cities. Their negativity is contagious and there are a group of people in the camp who spread the gossip and foster feelings of insecurity and doubt. The midrashists asked the question that might have been in the Israelites' minds eye: Has God abandoned us? Did God bring us this far so that we might be slaughtered?"

The 13th Century sage Nachmonides, who was born and lived most of his life in the Iberian Peninsula, saw this as a hippocrene, a source of spiritual inspiration. The RaMBaN was a mystic who saw the potential for a renewal of messianism to emerge and lead the people back to Israel. In the wilderness, there was doubt as people had to rely on the self as well as the vulnerability of their adversaries. It wasn't a lack of faith in God, but in themselves to fulfill God's destiny. He compared these Israelite emotions to what the people felt in Jerusalem on the 9th day of Av in the year 70 when the Temple was destroyed. Then the main vehicle to connect with God was in shambles. But faith is synonymous with hope—and the conquest of Canaan was successful, the post Temple era yielded to the rabbinic authority era... and we survived!

The Chasidic master Simcha Bunim of Peshischa taught that the cries of the Israelites had to have tears that came along with it. If it was cries or shrieks, then there was real doubt in God's ability to deliver on Divine promises. But if there were tears, then these cries were yearning for God's grace to descend upon them as inspiration to move forward. That is why grammarian Ibn Ezra wrote that the voices were lifted AND tear-felt cries upward toward God! And this moment was traumatizing as well as

inspiring—19th Century Turkish rabbi Elijah Benamozegh wrote that the memories of these cries were with the people as they conquered Canaan as a way for them to realize how wrong they were to doubt or better yet—how powerful God was to turn their tears of fear into tears of success and joy!

For us, this is an important lesson to remember. Many of us don't embrace the ability to change. We overthink. We create doubt within ourselves that can cripple us. But as our friend Natalie Margolis used to teach, creative tension between where we are and where we want to be is the catalyst to strategize how to overcome fears and obstacles to achieve success. In that way, our faith in the future is synonymous with hope!