

Last week, we explored the issue of the “Slave Mentality” of the Israelites. They were unable to think for themselves, as we have seen. Further, in switching from the “yoke” of slavery in Egypt to the “Yoke of Torah and Mitzvot”, they are now in a totally new world and they continue to show their inability to think rationally or follow the instructions that they are given.

The beginning of Parasha offers a choice:

יג א וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב שְׁלַח-לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיִּתְרוּ  
אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Send men to scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people.<sup>i</sup>

Sh'lakh L'kha – send the spies **for yourself** –

You don't have to, but if you really want to...

Or – is this a dictum

God told Abraham – Lekh L'kha (same word L'kha – for yourself); but that was not a choice

Our tradition says this was a choice

If you trust God that the Land is good, don't send spies

If you don't trust God, but only yourselves, send spies.

Rashi – God told Moses: I'll give them room to err, so they won't inherit the Land

In other words, God already knew how little trust they had in God.

Pirke Avot 3:15 tells us, "Everything is foreseen, but choice is given." God knew how the Israelites would act, but gave them the chance to choose. So--- Why does God appear to be setting the Israelites up for failure?

**Kahal input here**

They just are not able to comprehend freedom and living in a good place, due to the trauma they experienced in the centuries in Egypt.

The spies report, after seeing the Nephilim, the sons of a giant:

"We were like grasshoppers in OUR eyes, and likewise we were in their eyes"

**Kahal input here** – what does this say about the Israelites?

They are afraid of their own shadows, and we have seen repeatedly that they don't show faith in God. They cannot comprehend any sort of a military victory. They don't have faith in themselves either!

The three way relationship between God, Moses and Israel is always fascinating, and something to note here.

14:3 (Israelites to Moses) Why is H' bringing us to this land to fall by the sword?

14:11 (H' to Moses) how much longer with this people anger me, and not have faith in me?

We saw last week that Moses asked God to relieve him of this burden of Israel.

This three – way dynamic is a frequent issue in Torah. It almost always results in someone being punished severely. In this case – God decrees that the Israelites should wander the wilderness for 40 years, until this entire generation (except for Joshua and Caleb) dies off. Joshua and Caleb are saved, of course, because after the visit to the land, they alone reported the goodness of The Land, and that the Israelites could easily inherit their new Homeland, promised to them by God. God will let the next the next generation enter the land instead.

We then see the Israelites' response to this. After lots of wailing, they say, "okay we'll go up, we really can do it," they get stricken down again. Again they disobeyed Moses AND God.

This whole thing is about choices, and about fitness to choose. God concluded that this generation did not have the ability to choose the correct course, which resulted in their decree.

This issue with the generation that left Egypt and the next generation is not dis-similar to what happens with immigrants and their children. The immigrants may have a hard time dealing with being in a new place, but their children tend to work it out.

**What does this say about free will for these people?**

Free will does not seem to always exist then – people who have been through very traumatic lives may not be able to make the best choices for themselves.

For those of us who are able to choose, consider this, from *The Last Lecture* by Prof. Randy Pausch:

**"Ask yourself: Are you spending your time on the right things?** You may have causes, goals, interests. Are they even worth pursuing?" He goes on to talk about of a pregnant woman

who was protesting jackhammers, because she thought the noise was dangerous to her baby. Yet, the picture of the woman in this story shows her smoking a cigarette!

Many people see the Torah as history, others as a myth or legend. However you see it, the lesson from today is that normal people DO have the ability, God given I believe, to choose the right thing to do. So go out and choose something!

Shabbat shalom.

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<sup>i</sup> Humash Etz Hayim, JPS/RA/USCJ, © 2001. P. 840