

TORAH THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

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This week's parsha contains one of the most famous stories in the Torah, the story of the spies.

But the more I learn it, the more I wonder: what exactly did they do wrong?

On the surface, they seem to have done their job. They entered the land, observed it, brought back fruit, and reported what they saw.

But perhaps that's exactly where the mistake was.

They were never sent as spies.

Hashem had already promised the Jewish people they would enter the land. The mission was not to determine whether conquest was possible. The mission was not to assess the probability of success. The mission was not to decide whether the Jewish people should go.

They were sent as tourists, not spies, and certainly not judges.

Their mission was to see the land, experience it, appreciate its beauty, and bring back a report of what awaited the Jewish people.

Instead, they became judges.

They looked at what they saw and began deciding outcomes. They saw challenges and immediately determined what would happen next. They moved from observation to prediction.

And that's where I see myself in this story.

So often I approach life's challenges the same way.

A situation presents itself and before I've even taken the first step, I've already decided how it ends. I see the obstacles, run the numbers, imagine every possible problem, and come to a conclusion about what is likely to happen. From there, it's easy to fall into fear, victimhood, or the need to control everything.

The spies teach me that this isn't my job.

My job is to be present with reality. To observe honestly. To gather information. To take the next step.

The outcome belongs to Hashem.

Rashi tells us these were righteous men. So how did they go so wrong?

Perhaps they never doubted Hashem's ability. Rather, they doubted the Jewish people.

They believed that once the nation entered the land, the people would no longer be worthy of Hashem's protection. They looked at their fellow Jews and predetermined their future.

And maybe that's the deeper lesson.

How often do I do that with other people?

How often do I decide what someone is capable of based on who they were yesterday? How often do I write their story before they have a chance to write it themselves?

The spies looked at an entire nation and concluded they were not ready.

Yehoshua and Kalev looked at the same nation and believed they could rise to the occasion.

For me, the lesson is to stop judging outcomes, both for myself and for others. To approach life with curiosity instead of conclusions. To stop deciding in advance how a situation or a person will turn out.

If Hashem presents someone with the opportunity for greatness, who am I to decide they won't rise to meet it?

This thought is based on a teaching of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Good Shabbos.
