

When you cave in to your fears, You don't get into the promised land

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God comes to a new realization. God had taken the Hebrews out of slavery. But God was not able to take slavery out of the Hebrews. The Hebrews still operated out of a slave mentality. They did not possess the self-respect or the self-confidence or the self-esteem that would be needed to inherit the land of Israel.

We say the Torah is an *etz chayyim*, a tree of life.

I think the famous story of the twelve scouts shows just how inspiring the Torah can be as a guidebook to life. Let's quickly review the narrative.

The Hebrews are poised on the banks of the Jordan river about to enter the land of Israel. Moses sends out 12 scouts – one man from each of the 12 tribes – to check out the land of Israel and bring back a report. In today's parlance, we would say that Moses sent out an advance reconnaissance team.

So the scouts move north from the wilderness of Paran, they see the Negev region and climb the Judean hills. Forty days and nights later they return to Moses with their report. As you might expect, they say: Well, we have good news and we have bad news. Let's read the good news (Numbers 13:27). The scouts report that the land of Israel is a beautiful land. The metaphor "flowing with milk and honey" means the land is lush and fertile, capable of producing much food.

Now let's read the bad news (Numbers 13:32-33). The scouts report that the peoples already living in the land of Israel are huge and powerful, and the Hebrews are not strong enough to defeat them. In comparing themselves to the Anakites, the scouts think of themselves as little grasshoppers. I think all of us can relate. No matter what our age, haven't we all had moments – at school, at work -- where we compared ourselves to someone else and felt very small?

How do the Hebrews react to this news? They are frightened. They panic. They are so freaked out that they say in Numbers 14:3-4, "let's go back to Egypt. Let's go back to slavery." What do you think would drive people to prefer slavery rather than freedom?

It is the fear of the unknown. Of course, freedom is better than slavery. But going forward is less familiar than going backward. Slavery is familiar!

God hears all this and is understandably very disappointed. God is disappointed that the Hebrews don't trust that God will help them. God is even more disappointed that the Hebrews don't trust

and believe in themselves. God comes to a new realization. God took the Hebrews out of slavery. But God was not able to take slavery out of the Hebrews.

What do I mean by that? The Hebrews operated from a slave mentality. They did not possess the self-respect or the self-confidence or the self-esteem that would be needed to inherit the land of Israel. So God realizes that the current Hebrew generation is unworthy and incapable of going up to the land of Israel. God decides that the plan to give the land of Israel to the Hebrews will have to wait for 40 years – until the children of the current generation grow up.

Why wait? God reasons that the children, having been born into freedom, will possess as adults the courage and self-confidence to inherit the land of Israel. And this is the reason why the Hebrews wait 40 years. Not because it took 40 years to travel from the desert to the land of Israel. And not because Moses, being a typical male, refused to ask for directions!

Now what do you think is the primary message of this narrative?

When you cave in to your fears, you don't get to enter the Promised Land. None of that generation got to go. This narrative teaches us: you have to believe in yourself, if you want to get into your promised land. If we want to hit that homerun, score the touchdown, sink the three point shot – we have to believe we can do it or we're lost. Then we defeat ourselves. If we want to achieve our goals in life, we have to believe in ourselves, we have to be willing to take a risk, we have to be willing to face the unknown.

There's a reason why we call the Torah an *etz chayyim*, a tree of life. No matter what our age, that's a message all of us need to hear.