

The Land of Desire

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Why are things so difficult? Why can't life just be "easy-breezy"? These are normal and essential questions to ask. If we want to be a little more sophisticated, we could add, "if God only wants to make my life better, shouldn't the things I want and desire be so much easier to come by?" Instead, it seems that whenever we want to do the right thing or improve in a certain area, everything is thrown against us at that precise moment.

Before taking us out of Egypt, we were promised that we would be redeemed and brought to the Promised Land, a land "flowing with milk and honey." Gathered near the border of the Land of Israel, moments away from realizing the culmination of our incredible redemptive process, we sent scouts to study the nature of the land and its dwellers.

Initially, they reported back very positive news: "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit." But then things took a turn for the ugly: "However, the people who inhabit the land are mighty, and the cities are extremely huge and fortified, and we even saw the offspring of the giant" (Numbers 13:27-28).

Essentially, they were reporting the truth. On the one hand, the land was exactly as promised; they even brought a large fruit to demonstrate this. But they were also very troubled: If this was the land we were destined to receive, why in the world would God place such tremendous obstacles in our way? For Heaven's sake, there are giants dwelling in the land! How can we ever hope to conquer it? While the scouts' face-value observations were on target, they completely misunderstood the true essence of the Land of Israel.

We refer to Israel as *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, but why? We don't say the Land of America or the Land of Japan. There is a good reason for this. The Hebrew word *eReTz* (land) comes from the same root as *RaTzon* (desire or will). *Eretz Yisrael* is a source for accessing personal will, desire and passion in life. Both *eReTz* and *RaTzon* come from the root *RaTz* (run). When one merits to attach himself to *Eretz Yisrael*, his personal willpower can run wild. The sweet fruit of the land that the Torah so praises represents the spiritual love and desire that can be absorbed in this place. However, God first places great obstacles in the way.

The reason for the obstacles is simple. They challenge us to dig deep within ourselves to discover our inner willpower. They force us to realize just how much we want that end goal. Like a wife who desires that her husband display a vibrant interest in her, God desires an intimate relationship with us. Therefore He gives us various opportunities to demonstrate our profound desire for Him. By cultivating our innermost desire for Him, we nullify ourselves and unite with His Oneness, to the place of the *Raava d'Raavin*, the Will of Wills. Once

there, we are naturally infused with an even greater desire for Him.

The Jews stood gazing at the land in the near distance. This was the moment they could express their deepest yearning to finally realize their dream. The obstacles were meant to push them to turn to God with an awesome, burning hope and desire, so they would become unified with His Will. The land of desire would become the most desired, its spiritual potential fully realized and experienced. But the scouts did not understand this, and were instead overcome by the obstacles.

As we read about this tragedy once more, may we merit to see our own obstacles for what they truly are and express our great yearning that we all return home, to the place of His true desire. Amen!

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