

Menachem Persoff

Contending with the Unknown

This week we read about the Meraglim and ask ourselves, yet again, what was their sin? After all, Moshe asked these upright men to assess the Land's strengths and weaknesses, which they did. But the extent to which they told the truth is a matter of interpretation.

Because the spies contended that the land "consumes its inhabitants". But what does that mean? Does that mean, for example, that the wheat in the fields was so parched that there was no produce to harvest?

Perhaps looking at Bnei Yisrael's curriculum vitae, as it were, we can understand the concern of the Meraglim. After all, the Israelites were shepherds, and what would Bnei Yisrael know of agriculture in their new land? True, Hashem comforted the people, saying, "If you hearken diligently unto My commandments... I will give the rain of your land in its season... that you may gather in your corn, wine, and oil."

However, if you have never been a farmer, you might look at that promise with a degree of skepticism. First, you might look to your Canaanite neighbors to figure out

how to manage under the scorching sun. Then you might turn to their gods, whose benevolence "apparently guides the natural forces in your favor."

Indeed, some posit that the spies were actually tzadikim. It would be better to stay in the wilderness where Manna was free-falling, and one did not have to sweat to make a living. Even better, one could learn Torah all day without the challenges of working the land and the spiritual risks involved.

Indeed, this is a worn argument that manifests itself to this day. Why not learn all day, and others will take care of our sustenance? True, there is a place for the Torah elite to spend time in Limud Torah. But, ultimately, the Torah beckons us to live a life embedded in the material facets of our existence. We are to conquer and subdue the world, and we are commanded to do so in Eretz Yisrael, thus to face the trials that the material world presents.

In that way, we sanctify the Land and ourselves; we maintain and strengthen our faith in Hashem. And despite the hardships of adjusting to national life in all its facets, we trust that the Almighty will take care of us and that we will fulfill our ultimate mission on this planet. **MP**