

Shining the Light of Torah with Pride

ותשא כל העדה ויתנו את קולם ויבכו העם
בלילה ההוא אמר רבה אמר ר' יוחנן תשעה
באב היה אמר להם הקב"ה אתם בכיתם בכיה
של חנם ואני קובע לכם בכיה לדורות.

[And it is further written:] "And all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried and the people wept that night" (Numbers 14:1). Rabba said that Rabbi Yochanan said: That night was the night of the Ninth of Av. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them: You wept needlessly that night, and I will therefore establish for you a true tragedy over which there will be weeping in future generations.

Taanit 29a (Translation: The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud)

When the spies returned from their survey of the land Hashem promised to nation Israel, they reported that the nations who are settled there were too powerful to be conquered. That night, the ninth of Av, the people cried and proposed returning to Egypt. Hashem responded, "You cried for no valid reason, I will therefore designate this date for mourning the destruction of both Temples."

Lack of faith in Hashem's omnipotence and lack of trust in the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu sealed the doom of the generation that Hashem freed from Egyptian bondage. Nobody except Yehoshua and Calev would settle in the Land of Israel.



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The Midrash Rabbah calls attention to a personality flaw that led the spies astray. When the spies offered their report, they said:

וְנָהִי בְעֵינֵינוּ כְּחַגְבִּים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְעֵינֵיהֶם.
We looked like grasshoppers to ourselves,
and so we must have looked to them.

Bamidbar 13:33

The Midrash comments:

אמרו ונהי בעינינו כחגבים אמר הקב"ה
ויתרתי עליהם אלא וכן היינו בעיניהם יודעים
הייתם מה עשיתי אתכם לעיניהם מי יאמר
שלא הייתם בעיניהם כמלאכים.

They said, "We looked like grasshoppers to ourselves," The Holy One, Blessed be He said, "I forgave them for that." Rather [what did they say that was so offensive?] "and so we must have looked to them." [Hashem said] "You knew what I did to you in their eyes? Who is to say that you didn't appear before them like angels?"

Bamidbar Rabbah 16:11

How do you know what they thought of you, of nation Israel that I redeemed from Egyptian bondage and took care of in the desert? Maybe they thought of you as angels of Hashem!

The spies had a fundamental flaw.

They had a perception that they appeared inferior and they didn't believe that Hashem would help overcome that perception. This flaw continues to plague us today. We have a Torah overflowing with wisdom and an ability to bring people closer to Hashem. But we are afraid to promote it. We could see ourselves as angels of Hashem but instead we consider ourselves to be grasshoppers in the eyes of others.

One of the biggest challenges of our times is intermarriage. Recent surveys have shown that among non-Orthodox Jews, 80 percent of those aged 25–54 are either intermarried or not married at all. If nothing is done, we will lose millions of Jews from nation Israel.

We are not grasshoppers. We are the *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh* — a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We have the ability to shine the light of Torah on those who have not yet felt it and we should be confident that our message will have an impact.

In the past, we have been silent. We should have asked the leadership of the broader Jewish community,

“Where are your grandchildren and great-grandchildren headed? We cannot survive as a nation with such a high intermarriage rate.” We were too focused on ourselves and our own communities. We became apathetic and we lacked the confidence to share this message with the Jews of America. We have to find a way for Jews of all walks of life to appreciate the beauty of Torah and its system of laws that greatly enhances our lives.

מי האיש החכם ויבן את זאת ואשר דבר פי ה' אליו ויגדה על מה אבדה הארץ נצתה כמדבר מבלי עבר ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורת אשר נתתי לפניהם ולא שמעו בקולי ולא הלכו בה.

Who is the wise person that can understand this? Who does God speak to that can tell? Why was the land lost, [why has it] become parched like a desert with no passersby? God said, it is because they abandoned My Torah that I gave before them and they didn't listen to My voice and they didn't follow it.

Yirmiyahu 9:11-12

The Talmud has an enigmatic comment on these verses:

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב מאי דכתיב מי האיש החכם ויבן את זאת דבר זה נשאל לחכמים ולנביאים ולא פירושו עד שפירשו הקב"ה בעצמו דכתיב ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורת וגו' היינו לא שמעו בקולי היינו לא הלכו בה אמר רב יהודה אמר רב שאין מברכין בתורה תחלה.

R. Yehuda said in the name of Rav, What is meant by the verse, "Who is the wise person that can understand this?" This question was posed to the scholars and to the prophets and they couldn't give an answer until God himself gave an answer as it states, "God said, it is because they abandoned My Torah etc."

Isn't this the same as "they didn't listen to My voice and they didn't follow it"? R. Yehuda said in the name of Rav, they didn't recite a blessing on the Torah first. Nedarim 81a

Which blessing did they omit? The *Bach, Orach Chaim* no. 47, suggests that it was the beracha that states:

אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו.

He who has chosen us from among the nations and gave us the Torah.

We have to take pride in the fact that we are the chosen nation of Hashem. He chose us to receive His Torah and to be a "light unto the nations of the world." It is our assignment to cry out in the name of Hashem, creator of heaven and earth.

It is the "grasshopper mentality" that causes us to omit this beracha. The social philosophy that dominates current thinking says, "How can you be so discriminatory to think you are the chosen nation?" This mentality contributes to the growing intermarriage rate. People have the attitude that when looking for a spouse, limiting one's options to Jewish spouses is somehow

discriminatory. We have to take pride in the fact that we are the chosen nation of Hashem. He chose us to receive His Torah and to be a "light unto the nations of the world." It is our assignment to cry out in the name of Hashem, creator of heaven and earth.

כי שתיים רעות עשה עמי אתי עזבו מקור מים חיים לחצב להם בארות נשברים אשר לא יכלו המים.

Two evils did My nation commit. They rejected Me, their source of life-giving waters, to dig wells that cannot provide any water.

Yirmiyahu 2:13

We can't allow Torah Judaism to be replaced by the social philosophy of today. The solution to declining membership is not to rethink our position on intermarriage or to erode the appropriate halachic obligations relating to conversion. The Torah is not a social philosophy. It is a set of laws that instructs us how to raise families, establish communities and conduct the affairs of nations.

It is our job to teach that message. We have the ability to shine the light of Torah on our brothers and sisters who struggle to see it. We should be proud of what we have to offer and we should feel confident when sharing it with others.

כי הנה החשך יכסה ארץ וערפל לאמים ועליך יזרח ה' וכבודו עליך יראה

Darkness may cover the earth, and clouds may darken the lives of nations, but the light and glory of Hashem shall shine on nation Israel.

Yeshayahu 60:2



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