

## Masses of Glasses

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*“And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.” - Number 14:1*

Upon hearing the negative report of the spies about the Land of Canaan, the Israelites were forlorn. They believed they would have no chance of conquering the land and so they wept. The Talmud tells us in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that the night they wept was the 9th of Av. God told the Israelites that they cried for no reason on 9th of Av in the desert so God would give them a real reason to cry in the future. It seems that our first and second temples were destroyed on the 9th of Av as retribution for the communal sin of the spies and their slander.

The Book of Lamentations wails over the destruction of the first temple. According to the Talmud it also hints at the reasons for the destruction. Each of the first four chapters of the book forms an acrostic with the first letter of each sentence forming the Hebrew alphabet. In the Hebrew alphabet the letter Ayin precedes the letter Peh. However, the verse in Lamentations chapter 1 beginning with the letter Peh precedes the verse beginning with the letter Ayin. This is because the Peh, which can also refer to the mouth, jumped ahead of the Ayin, which can also refer to the eye. The spies spoke about things that their eyes did not see and so the Peh precedes the Ayin in Lamentations to allude to the sin that caused the destruction of the temple.

There is a problem with this interpretation. The problem is that it seems from the Talmud that the sin of the spies related to saying something with their mouths that they did not see. That's a very normal way Lashon Hara, evil speech, is spread. But according to the text of the story, the spies merely reported what they actually did see. They saw a land that swallows its inhabitants. They saw giants. They even brought huge fruits as souvenirs. The spies editorialized a bit, yet we would never say that they

spoke about what they did not see. How does this teaching of the Talmud fit in with the facts of the story from the text of the Book of Numbers?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab offers a beautiful explanation. R' Schwab says that people see things the way that they alone see them. In other words, our personality, attitude, feelings, and experience color what our eyes see. Two people can look at the same thing and one can see spiritual beauty and the other can see physical beauty. Or two people can look at the same thing and one can see something ugly and the other can see something beautiful. It's a matter of perspective and perception.

Take someone who knows nothing about the Jewish people or the history of Israel and show them the Kotel. That person will see rocks. Big rocks. And a wall. But take a person with an appreciation for its holiness and that person will see the grandeur of the Kotel as a place of worship and spirituality. It all depends on the person who is looking.

Similarly, the spies went to the Land of Canaan. They could have seen its inherent spiritual beauty. They could have seen the incredible opportunities for religious life and personal growth present in the land. But their eyes were not tuned into those things. The spies were only able to see the land with material vision. They could only appreciate the physical attributes of the land. They saw death and giants and large produce. They did not see the spiritual value of the land. The spies should have seen the Divine Presence on Mount Moriah. They should have felt the holiness of Hebron. But they did not. Why? Because they were using their eyes that were focused only on material things, not spiritual reality.

This explains why the Peh preceded the Ayin. The mouth spoke what the eyes did not see. The eyes should have seen a land of holiness and spirituality. The mouth spoke what it did not see. The mouth spoke of physical flaws and challenges. The spiritual eyes of the spies were closed and they did not see what they should have seen. This was the cause of their demise.

Every situation in our lives and in the public discourse has at least one way of looking at it. The way one sees something is influenced by their personality, experience, and feelings. Although we may be convinced our way is the correct way there is always another way to look at the same facts and draw different conclusions.

This is an important lesson in a global community. We live in a world where people with varied life experiences and environments, thus we are bound to see the same things through different lenses. Understanding that we can see the same things as another person and arrive at completely different conclusions is necessary in our modern world.

We must take the lesson of the spies and use the right glasses to see things the right way. But we also must understand that when others see things differently than we do, often it is because they are different people with a different pair of glasses. Knowing this, we can take steps to further our understanding and appreciation of others and their ideas bringing us closer to a day of peace among all inhabitants of the earth. Good Shabbos.