

Semikha Remarks
Rabbi Dov Linzer
June 6, 2010

My Dear Students - Steg, Yehuda, Davidi, Andy, Daniel, Chai, Zach, Akiva, and Shmuly:

Today, as you become rabbis, you set out on your path as religious leaders for the Jewish people. What is the nature of this religious leadership?

Yesterday's parasha, parshat Shelach, tells the story of poor leaders and of good leaders. The poor leaders – 10 of the 12 spies - saw the challenges that confronted them in the land of Canaan and ran from them - **וַיָּחַדּוּ מִן הַיָּמִים אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר לֹא נוּכָל לָבוֹא אֶל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם**. The good leaders – Yehoshua and Calev- saw these challenges and pushed forward - **וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אֲנִי וְכָל-אֶחָיוּנוּ נִלְחָמָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְהָיָה אֲנִי וְכָל-אֶחָיוּנוּ נִלְחָמָה**. What accounts for this difference?

The answer is fear. Why did the spies sin, and why did בני ישראל sin? Did they not see the hand of God in Egypt, at Har Sinai, and in the Wilderness? Their reaction was the same as the people's reaction at Yam Suf, for even with all the miracles, even with all the reasons to believe in God, fear dominates. When you are afraid all you can see is the object of your fear. Fear is irrational. Fear paralyzes.

Because of fear, the people prefer to go back and be slaves. Because of fear, the people prefer to stay in the Wilderness rather than to confront their fears.

The answer to fear is faith. Fear sees only obstacles. Faith sees opportunities- **עֵלָה נִעְלָה וִירִשְׁנוּ**. This is what separates good leadership from bad. A leadership based on fear is no leadership at all. A leadership based on faith takes one into the Promised Land.

A leadership based on faith. Faith and trust. Faith in God, Faith in Torah, Faith in Others, Faith in one's self.

In many ways, this is what distinguishes a modern, open Orthodoxy. We have, by and large, allowed Orthodoxy to become a religion of fear. Fear of the outside world, fear of asking hard questions, fear of delegitimization, fear of being honest with ourselves and our own shortcomings. Would we not be safer – we say to ourselves - to reject the outside world and to be safe in a cloistered environment? What will happen if we confront postmodernism, archeology, science, history, philosophy, academic Talmud, Biblical criticism, feminism, and homosexuality openly and honestly? **לֹא נוּכָל לַעֲלוֹת כִּי-חֹזֵק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ**. What will happen if we let individuals and communities, or even local rabbis think for themselves? No! Let's rather insist that every communal issue has to be decided by a "Gadol" – **הֲלֹא טוֹב לָנוּ שׁוּב מִצְרַיִם**. What will happen if we honestly confront spousal abuse, rabbinic sexual abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse? Or the marginalization of single mothers, converts, the developmentally disabled, those suffering from depression, and children with special needs? Let go back to Egypt! We are safer there! **וְנָתַנָּה רֵאשׁ וְנָשׁוּבָה מִצְרַיִם**.

This type of a Judaism is destined to stay in the Wilderness. To never go into the Promised Land. It is a leadership that lacks faith. Lacks faith in the Torah, lacks faith in the people, and ultimately lacks faith in God.

My dear students:

