

June 10, 2007
Eli Filosov's Bar Mitzvah Drash at IKar

If you feel small, that's who you will be.

A few months ago when I was watching a movie with my friend, I thought it was such a great movie. "That movie was terrible!" he said shortly after it ended. Isn't it interesting how two people can see exactly the same thing, but have two completely different points of view on it? My portion is called Sh'lach l'kha, and it is about the Israelite people finally arriving at the land of Canaan. When they got there, Moses sent twelve spies into the land of Canaan to scope it out. When they came back, ten of them told the Israelites that the land was awesome, with very big and tasty fruit, but also with very big and strong citizens who would most likely kill the Israelites if they tried to fight. Caleb and Joshua, the other two spies, came back with a different point of view. They remembered G-d's promise to bring the Israelites into the land and help them defeat the Canaanites, so they told the people that it was okay to enter the land.

What was different from Caleb and Joshua and the other ten spies? They both saw the same land, but came back with very different points of view.

Caleb and Joshua had a lot of faith. When they were scoping out the land of Canaan and they saw the huge, muscular inhabitants, they had faith that the Israelites could win even though the guys were big because they had faith in themselves that they could defeat the Canaanites, and even though the circumstances were bad, they still believed in themselves. They believed in G-d's promise to bring them to this land. It takes a lot of guts to stand up to three million stubborn Israelites and tell them to go into the land and fight the guys who are three times their size and five times stronger than them. Caleb and Joshua could have easily been killed on the spot by all the angry Israelites, but that didn't stop them from stating their opinion.

The others in contrast, did not have that kind of faith. "We appear to ourselves as grasshoppers, and so we appear to them", said the ten spies. What does that mean? If you feel small to yourself, then you will appear small in the eyes of others. When the ten spies saw the big muscular men, they probably felt very afraid and self-conscious.

What makes some people have faith in themselves and others not? For me, faith in myself comes from my family. Faith comes from family because family will give you compliments and constructive criticism on how you can improve what you are doing. Family also gives you a home and shelter, which makes you feel secure. Family gives you opportunities, like my trip to New Orleans.

In New Orleans, I helped tear down moldy buildings and rebuild them for people whose homes were destroyed in Hurricane Katrina. This was a very meaningful experience because I actually got to see what the people in New Orleans had to go through during the hurricane. It really made me think how lucky I am to have a family and a safe and comforting home. But there are also other things that can give you faith in yourself.

For my mitzvah project, I am buying complete skateboards for a skate park in Watts because I want to help kids learn how to believe in themselves by learning a new skill. I heard about this skate park from the Tony Hawk Foundation, which is building a skate park in Watts in an area called the Watts Labor Community Action Committee, which is an area that was totally destroyed in the aftermath of the “not guilty” verdict of the police handling of Rodney King. This area was rebuilt so that kids could have a safe place to play in a dangerous area. This entire seven-acre area is fenced so it’s safe. There are kids that go there at eight in the morning and leave at nine at night on non school days.

Every week since I was born my parents have been taking out a portion of all the money I have received over time from allowances and gifts specifically for my mitzvah project. I had a little bit over eighteen hundred dollars and spent it on buying complete skateboards for the kids in Watts that do not have enough money to buy themselves a skateboard of their own.

When I am skateboarding and focusing on doing a trick, I put everything out of my mind until I land that trick, and I also gain confidence and start to see myself as someone who can do amazing things, that is a gift that I want to give to other kids.

What I learned from the ten spies is if you feel small, then you will be small. But if you can be like Caleb and Joshua and see yourself as strong, capable, and free, than that’s what you will be. Shabbat Shalom!