

The Eidah that Wouldn't Give Up

92NY - 061226

So Wednesday night, New York witnessed a miracle. If you were watching, you know what happened in the first half. The Knicks, up 2-1, we know, in the series.

(0:21 - 0:50)

At home, having lost game three, we thought they'd come out, guns a-blazing, play the worst half of playoff basketball in history. MSG was full, rocking. How many thousands of fans in how many thousands of square feet who had paid serious money to be there, we know.

(0:52 - 1:18)

And so many millions who were watching it in real time and were watching a train wreck. And something remarkable, to me personally, you know, I was so tired at halftime already from a day of driving. I had driven four and a half hours back and forth to go visit somebody, and I came home like a schmata.

(1:21 - 1:33)

And I couldn't believe what was happening, and I was just falling asleep during the whole first half. And every time I opened my eyes, it was still the same nightmare. And so I just said to my wife, I'm going to go to bed.

(1:34 - 2:09)

10:30, walked into the room, and I said out loud as I went in, now watch the greatest comeback of all time as I'm sleeping is about to happen. And I couldn't keep my eyes open. But I'll tell you, who didn't go to sleep and who not only remained alert and awake, but energetically invested were the thousands of fans that were in shock but were there at MSG and watching everywhere.

(2:10 - 2:47)

They didn't go anywhere. They didn't leave. They didn't fold.

They didn't go quiet. They held on. So I want to start there tonight because the Torah portion in this week's reading, the sacred reading, is exactly the inverse story about a crowd who didn't hold, a crowd that surrendered their belief, a crowd that had every reason to believe that odds would be overcome but nonetheless were seduced and gave up that moment.

(2:48 - 3:29)

But let me first talk about the specific crowd on Wednesday night, the sound of energy being directed and infused into a defeated and deflated group, the sound of thousands of people beginning to rouse their team from their slumber, applauding each and every moment in spite of the odds that they faced. That was remarkable. The Eidah, and we're going to call that group the Eidah, E-I-D-A-H, Eidah, that Eidah, that is what didn't give up.

(3:31 - 3:50)

And the Torah has something to tell us about that group. First, let's go to the Torah before we come back to MSG. In the beginning of the Torah portion, God commands the Israelites, shlach l'cha anashim, send for yourselves, send for you, men, not just any men, but men of great renown, men of great importance.

(3:52 - 4:09)

Send leaders, 12 of them, all of them Nessim, all of them princes, all of them with great resumes, all of them reputable, credible individuals, one from each tribe. Men, send the best that the nation has. The mission is called Latur.

(4:10 - 4:21)

They're sent on a mission called Latur t'aretz. Sounds a lot like touring, right? Latur, to tour. They are to reconnoiter, they are to get information and bring it back, to scout it.

(4:22 - 4:34)

It has the same root as seeking something out, searching for something. These men are sent not just to gather intelligence, they're sent to look with their whole selves. And so they go, 40 days.

(4:34 - 5:09)

40 days, that's a really big number, 40 days. 40 days, Moses is on Mount Sinai, 40 days, right, are the floodwaters raging. 40 days is a sacred number.

They go for 40 days, they walk every valley, they climb every ridge, they see every fortified city, and they come back carrying fruits so heavy that a single cluster of grapes requires two men to carry it on a pole. We know that image from various wine and vintage from Israel, right? There's a group of Chernobyl-esque grapes. There are these grapes that are huge grapes.

(5:10 - 5:28)

The land is practically inviting images of abundance. They bring back grapes that will satisfy even the hungriest appetite. And then the 10 of the 12 spies do what we all know they do.

(5:28 - 5:51) They begin to talk, they open their mouths, the same mouths that tasted the grapes, the same mouths that know abundance, the same mouths that know the power of what you put into it and what you take out, and they speak. We were in our own eyes, they begin to talk about how big the people who live in the land are. They're called anakim, they're giants.

(5:53 - 6:02)

And people live in cities that are fortified, and they're strong. They're really, really strong. And then they make this pronouncement.

(6:04 - 6:16)

We were in our own eyes like grasshoppers. We were like grasshoppers. And we imagined... They didn't say we imagined, they said, and so we were in their eyes.

(6:16 - 6:28)

We saw ourselves as grasshoppers, and so did they. Two distortions in one utterance, in one verse, two distortions. First they think of themselves as grasshoppers.

(6:28 - 6:38)

They shrink themselves. And then they project that shrinking onto the Canaanites' perception of them. They don't actually know how the Canaanites see them.

(6:40 - 6:50)

How can they? They can't. But the inner smallness is so total it fills their entire world. Their self-perception collapses into a hall of mirrors.

(6:51 - 7:08)

And the rabbinic tradition notices this. God says to them in the Midrash, the rabbis imagine that God is saying to them, I can forgive you for your fear, because fear is human. What I can't forgive you for is that you presume to know how they saw you.

(7:09 - 7:43)

And God says, do you know what I made you look like in their eyes? You look like angels. How often does this happen in life, just parenthetically? Any coach here, or anybody who's ever been coached by a business coach or someone who works with you in the context of family, whatever it is, how frequently we're in our own narrative about a situation, and then a coach will say, that's not the way everyone else is seeing it. In your own mind, they're treating you disrespectfully, whatever it might be. That's your story. But here's their story. It's a different story.

(7:44 - 7:57)

How frequently that's happened for me, that I've been coached where I'm seeing a situation as if it were mapped exactly onto something that I'm already familiar with. And my coach will say, let me tell you what they're saying. I'm guaranteeing this is what they're saying.

(7:57 - 8:16)

Now, you could say the coach doesn't know either. Maybe not. But when the coach tried to imagine this scenario without the overlay of my own ego and my own story and my own ruminations and my own past, and my own traumas, it was completely different.

(8:17 - 8:27)

I needed those eyes to see and show me what I wasn't seeing. That my overlay was my overlay. It wasn't what really was happening.

(8:27 - 8:52)

And the midrash says, God says to them, you look like angels to them. And they were terrified of you. You have no idea.

You just assumed because you felt that way, that's the way you were seen. And that moment, that moment is vital because the spies are not defeated by the Canaanites. They are defeated by their own inner image.

(8:53 - 9:04)

They are not defeated by the Canaanites. They are not defeated by the foe they imagined to be so strong, but by their own inner perception. The land doesn't change.

(9:04 - 9:12)

The promise that God made didn't change. The giants didn't grow to be much taller. It was all about something that was happening.

(9:12 - 9:44)

It was an inside job. So what happens? This is what happens. Notice this.

In the very next part of the text, after the 10 spies give their evil report, their perceptual distorted report, the Torah tells us all of the congregation, the entire community lifted up their voice and began to weep. They start crying. And the people wept the whole night. (9:45 - 9:58)

The Torah goes out of its way to say that it was an entire night of weeping. Just one bad report. One bad 360.

One bad Facebook post. One bad comment. And they were gone.

(9:59 - 10:08)

They're crying the whole night. In fact, the Rabbis even say that they cried the whole night and that whole night of crying would one day become the Tisha B'Av crying in the night. The night of the destruction of the Temple.

(10:09 - 10:18)

That there was a crying here that was crocodile tears. They have been sold a misinformation campaign and they are terrified. They watch the news.

(10:18 - 10:29)

The 10 amazing broadcasters were just there saying it's not going to go well. There's no way we can do it. The crowd caught the fear.

(10:29 - 10:42)

Because fear is the most contagious emotion. 10 men, 10 leaders, 10 people whom their neighbors trusted come back and say we can't do it. The whole congregation collapses with them.

(10:42 - 10:55)

And then we go back to Madison Square Garden. The Knicks are playing like crap. I don't want to say anything about the refs.

(10:55 - 11:00)

It's being live broadcast. The refs, it looked funny to me. Let's just put it that way.

(11:01 - 11:08)

The crowd could see the deflation. Everybody was sitting in their seats. 29 points.

(11:09 - 11:18)

The analysts had already pivoted to talking about how San Antonio might go back. Tied up. It was a fait accompli. (11:19 - 11:28)

The narrative had moved on. And the crowd at MSG, that crowd in that specific building did something different than the desert crowd. Our ancestors did.

(11:29 - 11:34)

They held on. They got louder. They drew on something.

(11:34 - 11:40)

They were drawing on something. Maybe they were drawing on memory. The Knicks had been there before.

(11:42 - 11:50)

This city has come back before. We've known crises here before. Maybe this particular team, they'd been down before in other games.

(11:50 - 12:03)

Maybe it was each person, it was one of the players, something in the crowd. The crowd knew that they were 29 points down. But as soon as the Knicks came out in the third quarter and hit their first shot, you could hear the roars.

(12:03 - 12:12)

And they weren't the crowd giving them the old, you know, way to go guys. They said, we believe in you.

(12:12 - 12:18)

We trust you. We're going to give you our vision even if you lack it. Now, we know that they had vision.

(12:19 - 12:32)

They had leaders in the locker room. I guarantee you there were leaders in the locker room.

Maybe some of them were thinking, you know, just like on Hakim, just like there were big giants in Eretz Canaan, Wemba Yama, he's a giant.

(12:33 - 12:48)

Maybe they were thinking, you know, San Antonio's walls are real. The crowd, though, and those in the locker room were thinking to themselves, you know, something, we have a different story.

The players drew from that crowd. (12:48 - 12:57)

The crowd drew from the players, and it caught on. It was something remarkable. They had caught what the Torah calls a ruach acheret.

(12:58 - 13:24)

You know, there were two leaders that weren't brought in to the ten spies, Joshua and Caleb.

And Caleb, God says about Caleb, ruach acheret bo, he has a completely different spirit. He had a spirit that looked at obstacles and didn't deny them but refused to let the obstacle write the final sentence.

(13:24 - 13:42)

That was Caleb. That was the crowd. It's amazing, because within a couple of moments in the actual text in the Torah now, we're weaving back to the Torah, Joshua and Caleb stand up and they push back against the ten men, and they say these words, these amazing words.

(13:46 - 13:52)

We can go up. We can, we are able. Yes, we can.

(13:53 - 13:58)

They didn't say I can do it. They didn't say we too can do it. They said we, all of us.

(13:59 - 14:10)

We can do it. The same we that the ten just broke apart, Caleb and Joshua, are weaving. They are weaving.

(14:10 - 14:24)

The collective, even as the collective is unraveling before them, they refuse to give up on their community. By the way, notice that this is before there was Obama, there was this, yes, we can.

This is the original, yes, we can.

(14:27 - 14:35)

We were in our own eyes like grasshoppers. That was the we of the ten. Yes, we can.

(14:35 - 14:48)

Alonallah is the we of the two, Caleb and Joshua, who believed. The ten didn't just speak, they

seeded a field of pessimism, and the crowd grew what was planted. And Caleb and Joshua are trying to plant something different.(14:48 - 15:09)

They're trying to seed a different account of what Eidah means, what a community can do if they come together. That holy we, the Eidah that weaves rather than unravels, the crowd that draws from memory and covenant rather than from fear. That, to me, what was happening on Wednesday night.

(15:10 - 15:25)

Now, last thing. We talked about this in Hyman Brown this past Thursday. Something amazing about this group of ten prognosticators, this group of ten seeders of pessimism.

(15:26 - 15:47)

The Torah calls them faceless spies, an Eidah, a community, an Eidah. And the Talmud, in Tractate Megillah, the Talmud says something amazing. The word Eidah, which means a group, that word Eidah, that group of ten becomes the source for another group of ten.

(15:47 - 16:18)

Do you know what other group of ten? That evil group of ten becomes a source for the obligation to only pray certain parts of the prayers when we have a minyan, ten people. The ten pessimists, the ten rabble-rousers, the ten no-we-can't becomes the ten of every morning, afternoon, and evening prayer community that ever emerged. Those ten have their mirror in the ten that get together to pray.

(16:20 - 16:33)

The rabbis didn't pick another number. They didn't try to distance themselves from that trauma. They took the number that first broke the people and said, every minyan is a tikkun of the spies.

(16:34 - 17:04)

Every single time a group gets together, every time we gather in song, we are saying, yes, we can. Every single time we are out looking for that tenth person, hey, we've got nine, can we get one more? We could, of course, do everything with nine people. Come on.

You could do it with two people. The Talmud says if one person is sitting in a room, God's presence is available. Why do we need ten? Where do they get that from? It's the ten spies.

(17:05 - 17:18)

Every Friday night service that starts with ten, the spies are with us, and we're saying, no. Every time a group gets together for a minyan, for a shiva, we said we're waiting for the tenths. The spies are there, and we're saying, no.(17:20 - 17:52)

Every single time we Jews gather in prayer, we're saying, yes, we can imagine a world that is different than the past, that draws not from the pain and the trauma of we didn't, we didn't, but instead focuses on what's possible. Who knows? I was talking to a friend today, and she said she was going to be speaking about this tonight. And then she said, you know, it reminds me, and she said she was going to talk about this in her sermon, she said it reminds me of the movie The Big Short.

(17:53 - 18:08)

And in The Big Short, if some have seen it, about the collapse of the housing market, there was one guy that was betting on the collapse of the housing market. And the movie's all about him. He was shorting the housing market.

(18:09 - 18:27)

And in order to do that, he was still investing money until the housing market would collapse. He still had to keep investing money, and his partner was watching him invest money. And he said, you keep investing money and telling me that eventually this thing is going to collapse, and then we're going to make a lot of money.

(18:28 - 18:45)

But we're losing money every day. We keep investing money. What are you doing? He says, are you telling me that we're investing money, we're losing millions of dollars because we're betting on something that never happened before happening, and then we'll make it all back? And he looked at him and said, exactly.

(18:48 - 19:04)

Something that never happened before happening. The spies couldn't imagine something that never happened before happening. And there's Jalen Bronson, and there's the rest of the Knicks, and there's their coaches, and there's the entire Garden saying to them, it's never happened before.

(19:05 - 19:40)

Is that what you're telling me? That this one 3-pointer, that this one basket, that this one moment, and then apply it across the board? Are you telling me that that which never happened is going to happen? He's saying, yes. Is there a better story than that right now? Is there a better story for me, for all of us here, to think that that which never happened in the good way is going to happen? So plug and play, or plug and pray, whatever you like. Plug and pray that teaching.(19:41 - 19:53)

Whatever we're waiting for to happen, yes it can. Whatever we're hoping will happen, yes it can.

Whatever we want most in the world that still hasn't appeared on the scene, yes it can.

(19:54 - 20:15)

Relationships, partnerships, possibility. It springs eternal in our people and in the human heart.

May God bless all of us with being able to say wherever we are, no matter what is happening, I'm holding on for hope.
(20:17 - 20:21)
Knicks in five. Go Knicks. Let's rise.