“Of One Mind”

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Our young man who celebrated his bar mitzvah with us last week, Aaron Weinberg, closed his teaching with the famous verse from his haftarah: “Not by might or by power, but by spirit.” *Lo v’chayil v’lo v’choach, ki im b’ruchi.* He argued that might and power might play a positive role in human affairs, but only insofar as they are governed by spirit.

Today is Juneteenth, which by its very origin speaks of the reluctance of human beings to give up their exercise of brutal might and power over other human beings. It commemorates not the end of slavery in the United States, but the day when white authorities got around to telling their black population that slavery had been revoked over two years prior.

Slavery is nothing if it is not might and power trying to quash spirit. Think about that idea as we look at Rashi’s one-word explanation of the opening verse of our parashah.

The parashah begins “The Eternal spoke to Moses saying, send forth men to scout out the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Children of Israel.” *Sh’lach l’cha anashim v’yaturu et eretz k’na’an asher ani noten liv’ney yisrael.*

Why is the word *l’cha*, “for you,” pinned to the imperative verb *sh’lach*, “send?” Rashi explains it by adding the word *l’da’atcha*, meaning something like “with your knowledge.” In other words, “Moses, send forth men *l’da’at’cha*, with your knowledge. With your own consent.”

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, in his *Minchat Elimelech*, riffs on the Rashi as follows:
“This reminds us those individuals who are of the opinion that the conquest of the Land of Israel can only be accomplished by force of arms. And this is why the Blessed Holy One says to Moses, ‘Send forth men *l’da’at’cha*, with your *da’at*, with your frame of mind. Send forth men like those who are of one mind with you, those who – like you - believe it is possible to conquer the Land *only* because I, God, am giving it to the Children of Israel, by the force of my promise, [and not by force of arms].’”

Our friend and fellow congregant Rabbi Jonathan Slater, in his beautiful volume on Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, *A Partner in Holiness*, tells us something similar. Says Levi Yitzhak, the scouts erroneously believed that they were being sent to look at the *physical* Land of Israel, and to determine the level of might and power it would take to conquer it. On the contrary, they were supposed to go *latur* *et ha’aretz*, not to “tour” it, but (and here comes a pun) to “Torah” it, i.e, to bring the consciousness and worldview of Torah to what would become the Land of Israel.

Without Torah – the overarching spiritual approach to the world – no employment of arms could secure it. But Torah – the performance of holy acts and the refinement of the human spirit – could succeed where power and might could not.

Slaves were always humans, filled with the spirit of the divine image, and they certainly knew it all along. Now – yes, *even* now, at this pathetically late date in history – it falls to the rest of us to recognize and celebrate that spirit, that *da’at*, that commandment to “Torah” the world and let the human *ruach* reign free.