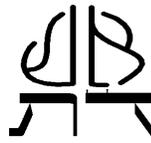


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun "Yehoshua" (Bamidbar 13:16). "He prayed for him, [saying] G-d should save you from the counsel of the scouts" (Rashi). Afraid that Yehoshua would go along with what the others sent to investigate the land would do, Rashi, based on the Talmud (Sotah 34b), tells us that Moshe asked G-d to save him from such. One of the questions the commentators ask is how Moshe could have asked G-d to intervene in order to prevent Yehoshua from sinning, since "everything is in the hands of G-d except fear of G-d" (Berachos 33b), i.e. the choice to choose between good and evil is left to the individual. If G-d allows us to make the choice between right and wrong, why did Moshe ask that He take away Yehoshua's ability to choose to join with the scouts?

The Or Hachayim explains why Moshe had to change Yehoshua's name when making this prayer, rather than just leaving his name as "Hoshea" while still asking G-d to save him from making a poor choice: the extra "yud" added to his name represents the 10 scouts whose influence he needed protection from, as well as the 10 portions in the land that should have belonged to these scouts- and would become Yehoshua's (if he successfully resists them). He equates Yehoshua's getting their portions to the statement in the Talmud (Chagigah 15a) that: "Every person has two portions, one in the Garden of Eden (where the righteous receive their reward in the next world) and one in Gehenom (purgatory, where the wicked are punished). If he is worthy and is righteous he gets his portion and another's portion in the Garden of Eden; if he is wicked he gets his portion and another's portion of Gehenom." Since Yehoshua was righteous, he got his portion in the land plus the 10 portions of the non-righteous scouts.

This raises additional difficulties. For one thing, how does being righteous entitle anyone to more than his share of reward? G-d can be trusted to give whatever is deserved, but justice would demand that no additional, undeserved, reward be given. Similarly, whatever punishment is deserved will be meted out, but not one bit more. How can the wicked receive not only their share of retribution, but what would have been another's (had the other sinned too)? Additionally, there were two righteous scouts, Yehoshua and Kaleiv. Both

successfully resisted joining in the sin of the other 10 scouts. If those portions that are no longer being given to the scouts are to be given to those that were righteous, shouldn't Kaleiv have gotten 5 of them, and Yehoshua the other 5? Sure, Kaleiv got (as a reward) the particular tract of land that he traversed (Chevron, see Yehoshua 14:9 and 13 and Bamidbar Rabbah 16:7). But shouldn't he have split the land forfeited by the other scouts with Yehoshua? Why did Yehoshua get all 10 portions?

Rav Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav me'Eliyahu vol. IV, pg. 118) explains why a righteous person gets the forfeited share of the wicked, and why the wicked are given the punishment avoided by the righteous: "for the free will of one has an effect on the range of another's free will." By choosing to do the right thing, it makes it easier for another to make a comparable choice- and harder to make a wrong choice. Similarly, choosing to do the wrong thing makes it easier for another to make a parallel choice- and harder to choose to do good. Therefore, the righteous person who, had he been in a vacuum, would have only gotten "his" share of the "Garden of Eden," now (because of the wicked) had to work harder to make that same choice- and therefore gets more reward. Likewise, the wicked person that chooses to do bad despite the positive influence that a righteous person should have had on him now deserves a greater punishment.

Applying this to our discussion, had each scout gone out on his own, he would have had to make a choice between trying to portray the Land of Israel in a positive way or in a negative way. Having 10 of the scouts portray it in a negative way made it that much harder to choose to go the other way, and it was therefore deserving of that much more reward.

The Minchas Kenaos (Sotah 34b) explains that Moshe's prayer was that Yehoshua should be protected from the influence of the other scouts. Not that he shouldn't retain the ability to choose (as G-d doesn't take away free will), but that his ability to choose would remain the same as if he was making the choice in a vacuum.

Kaleiv also prayed that he be protected from their influence (which is what the Talmud says he did in Chevron). If he was protected from the effect of their choice(s), then his decision was no more difficult than had it actually been made in a vacuum. In that case, Kaleiv didn't really deserve to get any additional portions in the land. Yehoshua, on the other hand, didn't pray for

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himself (perhaps because he didn't realize the danger). Either he wasn't penalized for the successful prayer of Moshe, or- because he didn't need the extra protection- Moshe's prayer didn't need to be answered, making Yehoshua's choice more difficult and consequently worthy of more reward. We can therefore understand why Yehoshua was given all 10 portions that should have belonged to the other scouts, while Kaleiv was rewarded "only" with his choice of portion.

May G-d protect us from the negative influence of others, and give us the strength to overcome any obstacles that may be in the way of our making those choices that will help us better emulate G-d. © 2004
Rabbi D. Kramer

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

*by Rev Michael Binstock, Senior Education Officer,
United Synagogue Agency for Jewish Education*

The Maftir of this week's Sidra will be very familiar indeed. It is Parashat Tzitzit, the section that forms the third paragraph of the Shema. Significantly, in the order that they are written in the Torah, this third paragraph precedes the first two paragraphs which are to be found in the next and final Book of Devarim. However, Parashat Tzitzit is recited last in our statutory services because the mitzvah to wear tzitzit only applies during the day whereas the other two paragraphs contain laws that apply both during the day and night.

At first glance, the inclusion of Parashat Tzitzit at the end of this Sidra seems to be quite haphazard and unrelated to the main narrative, which recounts the sad episode of the twelve spies. But such a thought would be quite erroneous, as there is nothing haphazard in the Torah. So why is it inserted here?

The great Rabbinic leader of German Jewry, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests the following idea. He draws a parallel between the sin of the spies

and the subsequent mitzvah of tzitzit, with the sin of Adam and Eve who eat of the forbidden fruit, the account of which is followed by G-d providing them with garments. (Bereishit 3:21). We learn from this that when man acts as a "boged", a traitor, G-d offers him a "begged", a garment. This will act as a reminder of his moral weakness and hopefully help him to become a penitent.

Therefore, the mitzvah of tzitzit is a means to an end. It serves to remind us of our obligations as Jews. The great Biblical commentator, Rashi, explains that the gematria (numerical value) of the letters of the word "tzitzit" equals 600. When we add the eight threads and five knots, we have 613, which is the number of commandments in the Torah. Our tzitzit are thus a constant reminder of our duties towards G-d and also highlight the unique relationship that G-d has with us. When we fulfil the directive of *ure'item oto uzechartem et kol mitzvot Hashem* "And you shall look at it and remember all the commandments of Hashem", we have the opportunity of focusing our thoughts towards Heaven and feeling a closeness to G-d. This in turn should spur us on in our duties towards Him. But the crucial point is the way we look at it. We could see nothing more than a plain inanimate object, or we could see something of great spirituality far beyond woollen fringes.

Had the spies used their G-d given powers of perception properly, they would have seen a land truly flowing with milk and honey. Tragically, their vision was impaired and therefore it prevented them from seeing the truth of G-d's promise of blessing and prosperity.

Next time we take our tzitzit in our hands as we recite this familiar paragraph from our Sidra, let us take a fresh look at this special mitzvah that is designed to bring us closer to G-d. © 2004 *Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

How can we understand the "sin of the scouts," of the ten princes of the tribes? Why did they hold back from attempting to conquer the Land of Israel— especially after they had just seen the miracles of the Almighty in freeing them from Egyptian servitude? And what is the lesson that we must derive today from that traumatic transgression in the desert?

Our Torah portion opens: "The Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Send forth for yourselves men to spy out the Land of Canaan which I am giving to the children of Israel, one leading personage, each from his father's tribe...'" (Numbers 13:1,2). The classical commentator Rashi immediately (ad loc) cites the Midrash (Tanhuma 5), "What is the connection between this Biblical segment of the scouts and the Biblical segment of Miriam (at the conclusion of last week's Torah reading)? It is the fact that she was punished for speaking evil

words against her brother Moses, and these wicked 'leaders' saw and did not internalize the lesson." Is then the sin of slander—Miriam's slander against Moses and the scouts' slander against the Land of Israel—the connection point between the Biblical segments and the major transgression of the desert generation? It seems to me that the issue must be a bit deeper!

Let us take a second look at Miriam's slander: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman." (Numbers 12:1). Now Moses had married his Midianite wife Zipporah a long time before; apparently Miriam was not now suddenly criticizing her sister-in-law. And the Biblical text explicitly states that Miriam and Aaron were directing their criticism against Moses, not against Zipporah!

Rashi explains the description Cushite (literally Ethiopian or black) to refer to Zipporah's extraordinary beauty, "teaching us that everyone admired her beauty,"... she being beautiful in looks as well as in deeds. He goes on to comment that his siblings were upset with Moses "because he had married this woman and now divorced her" (Rashi, ad loc). And Miriam and Aaron express their disapproval of the divorce by saying, "Was it then only to Moses that the Lord spoke? Did He not speak to us as well?" (Numbers 12:2) Apparently brother and sister are referring to the Divine commandment immediately following the Revelation at Sinai—since for three days preceding the Divine Revelation, G-d had ordained that no husband have any physical contact with his wife (Exodus 19:15) -- enjoining the resumption of normal marital relations:

"Go say to them, 'Return to your tents'" (Deuteronomy 5:27). Since Moses himself did not return to his wife, they criticize him. Moses obviously retorted that the Almighty had indeed singled him out for special conduct, insisting—immediately after instructing the Israelite men to return to their wives—"But as for you (Moses), stand here with Me and I shall speak to you the entire commandment, and the decrees and the ordinances..." (ibid, 28). You, Moses, shall not return to your family! Apparently his siblings did not accept Moses' response, insisting that G-d spoke to them as well, and Moses was certainly included in the general command to return to the wives. They could not accept the notion that Moses had a unique and *suis generis* relationship with G-d.

From this perspective, the fundamental transgression of Miriam (who seems to have been the instigator of this discussion) was not so much the slander as it was her inability to recognize the unique prophecy of Moses; and if Moses' relationship to G-d was not unique, then the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses' Divine revelation, likewise would lose its unique status. Indeed, the Divine response to the siblings following their criticism is a resounding defense of Moses and his very special position vis a vis G-d: "Not so (as are the other prophets) is My servant Moses; in

My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles..." (Numbers 12:7-9).

The great philosopher-legalist of the twelfth century, Maimonides, uses the very verses with which we are dealing to prove the uniqueness of Moses' prophecy and therefore of his Torah: "When G-d told the Israelites to return to their homes but directed Moses to stand with Him, He was testifying that Moses was in a constant state of prophecy... His mind (active intellect) was bound up with the mind (active intellect) of the Rock of Ages, whose glory did not leave Moses for an instant... Moses was sanctified as one of the Divine messengers (malakhim) (Laws of Torah Fundamentals, 7,6). For an individual such as Moses, who reached the highest level of intellect and spirituality which any human being could ever achieve, it became virtually impossible to return home and bond with wife and children; Moses bonded with the Divine!

Just as the real transgression of Miriam lay in her inability to see the absolute uniqueness of Moses, so did the real transgression of the scouts lay in their inability to see the absolute uniqueness of the Land of Israel for the people of Israel.

The Scouts investigated the Land of Israel as any would-be settlers would investigate any land they hoped to conquer and inhabit; they were blind to the very special relationship which G-d had to this land for His people, and His promise that they would be able to conquer it. Indeed, the portion of Shelach concludes with the commandment of ritual fringes, the blue and white strings appended to our four-cornered garments. Rav Joseph Soloveitchik ztz"l explains this unique command and its relationship to our Torah portions as follows: white represents clarity, logic, rational truth; blue, symbolizing the infinity of the oceans and the heavens, represents longing, infinity, mystery, supra-rational. Torah, the Land of Israel and the people of Israel are a combination of logic and love, natural and super-natural, mathematic reason and miraculous romance. This message had to be taught to both Miriam and the scouts. Our generation must understand that "to live in Israel and to believe in miracles is to be a realist." © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

What is the purpose of wearing tzitzit, the ritual fringes that are attached to the four cornered garment mentioned in our parsha? (Numbers 15:37-41) Several classic answers come to mind.

Some suggest the meaning lies in the tekhelet, the unique blue color found amongst the fringes. This color "is like the sea, the sea is like the sky and the sky like the throne of glory." (Menahot 43b) In other words, wearing tzitzit reminds us of God's presence.

Still others suggest that the tzitzit remind us to commit to God's mitzvot. The numerical value of tzitzit, coupled with the number of knots and strings used to make these fringes, is 613, equal to the number of commandments. Beyond feeling God's presence, one, through the wearing of tzitzit, has a constant awareness of responsibility to God's law.

Yet another thought comes to mind. The tzitzit remind us of the first garment recorded in the Torah, the one made by God for Adam and Eve after they ate from the tree in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, following the temptations of their eyes and heart. (Genesis 3:6) Here, God commands the wearing of fringes in order to avoid being seduced by our own hearts and eyes. (Numbers 15-39)

Note also the use of the verb "tur" (to go after) found in the portion of fringes, (Numbers 15:39) and found when Moshe (Moses) sends the spies out to check out the land at the beginning of our parsha. (Numbers 13:16) Our In the case of the spies, they followed their inner whims and brought back an evil report. Here, in the paragraph of tzitzit, the Torah teaches us not to make the same mistake, not to be led astray.

Ibn Ezra's comments about the prayer shawl worn during services now become clear. He insists that "it is much more necessary...to wear tzitzit during the rest of the day and not merely during prayers, in order to remember not to err and commit a sin, since during prayers [he will be in a holy frame of mind and] in any case, [will] not sin."

In a sense, the prayer shawl serves a different function than that of the fringed garment worn all day. Wrapping ourselves with the prayer shawl helps us to feel God's love, God's protection and God's embrace.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, the tzitzit has impacted upon our national psyche as well. David Wolfsohn records in his memoirs that during the first Zionist Congress, it was unanimously decided that the Israeli flag be blue and white, the same colors as the tzitzit. He writes, "This talit is our coat of arms, our emblem. Let us take out the talit and unfurl it before the eyes of Israel, before the eyes of all the nations."

May it represent for us as individuals and as people the enveloping love from God and, at the same time, the continued need to remind ourselves of our goals and our collective focus. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI ZVI MILLER

Parsha Insights

The Midrash Tanchuma (Bamidbar 14) tells us that when Hashem revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, 24,000 myriads of angels accompanied Him. When Klal Yisrael saw the formations of angels they desired to be as close to Hashem as were the angels.

They said, "Would it only be so, that we had formations so close to Hashem!" The verse (Shir HaShirim 2:4) alludes to this: He brought me into the chamber of Torah delights, and clustered my encampments around Him in love.

Hashem responded: "Since you desired to be like the angels, I will grant your request." Immediately Hashem revealed His love to Klal Yisrael, and He said to Moshe, "Assign them in formations around Me."

The Saba M'Kelm abstracted the secret of growth from this passage. He observed that Hashem granted Klal Yisrael an extra level of spirituality because they desired to be close to him. It was their initiative—their longing to be near Hashem—that opened the gate for a new level of intimacy with Hashem.

The nature of animals and inanimate entities can only change if an outside force acts upon them. Generally, since they lack volition, they follow their inherent nature (and do not initiate change). For instance, iron, will only bend if someone willfully bends it. It is inconceivable for iron to bend on its own determination.

Conversely, Hashem endowed human beings with intelligence. Amongst the many wonders of intelligence is the power of change. Not only do we have the discretion to resist our natural drives when we deem them as counterproductive -- even more—we may choose to better ourselves. Our decision to change is enacted and bears fruit through the application of thought, speech, or deed.

Hence, when Klal Yisrael desired to come close to Hashem as the angels, they essentially initiated a process of change. Hashem recognized their inspiration. In turn, He helped them achieve their worthy goal and assigned them to specific formations around the Mishkan. If we propel ourselves towards the lofty heights of the angels, we will "flourish like a palm tree in the courtyards of HaShem".

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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After the description of the harsh punishment of Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the scouts, the passage appears requiring wine to be poured together with each sacrifice (Bamidbar 15:1-16). The command is meant to take effect when Bnei Yisrael arrive "in the land of your dwelling" [15:2]. Some commentators have noted that the fact that these two passages are close to each other can be viewed as something of a consolation for Bnei Yisrael. "Perhaps this was needed at this point in order to console them and to make them aware of the promise. For they were in despair, saying, who knows what will happen in the long period of forty years, what if our children also sin? The Almighty

therefore decided to console them. By giving them a command about the mitzvot linked to the land He promised them that they would eventually arrive there and take possession of it." [Ramban].

It should be noted that the format of the command in this second passage is quite unusual. The law is really quite straightforward. Together with a sacrifice of a lamb it is necessary to also bring a Mincha sacrifice—one "issaron" of flour and a quarter of a "hin" each of oil and wine. For a ram, an older animal, it is necessary to bring two issronim of flour and a third of a hin of oil and of wine. For a full-grown ox, three issronim of flour are brought, together with half a hin of oil and wine. However, after the Torah gives us these measurements, it emphasizes no less than three times that these are the exact amounts to be used: "This is what should be done for each ox or for each ram or a lamb from the sheep or the goats" [15:11]. "According to this number, do it like this for each one, in accordance with the number" [15:12]. "Every resident should do it in this way, in order to offer a sacrifice, a pleasant scent for G-d" [15:13].

This repetition is evidently not a simple matter. Immediately after this passage, the Torah emphasizes that the law is relevant for a convert. "And if a convert lives among you and he offers a sacrifice as a pleasant scent for G-d, let him do as you do" [15:14]. Once again, the Torah repeats this idea three more times. "Within the community, there will be one law for you and for the stranger that lives with you. This law is for your generations, the same for you and for a convert, before G-d." [15:15]. "Let there be one Torah and one law for you and for the convert who lives with you" [15:16].

What is the reason for these repetitions? Why was it necessary to repeat the word "kacha"—just so—with respect to the sizes of the Mincha sacrifices or to emphasize using the words "law" or "Torah" with respect to a convert? These words mean that the law should be performed exactly as written, with no changes. This is similar to what Rashi wrote on other occasions with respect to these words. "You shall do for Aharon and his sons just like this— The Torah wrote in a special way and repeated its words, to insist on the exact procedure, that if one element is missing from everything written in the passage... the ritual will be unacceptable." [Shemot 29:35]. "Chuka— a law—This is my decree, and you are not permitted to have any doubts about it." [Bamidbar 19:2].

Evidently this emphasis was needed after the sins of the scouts and the subsequent attempt to enter the land in defiance of G-d's command. These sins implied that Bnei Yisrael tended to follow the Almighty only when the observation of the commands seemed to them to correspond with their personal interests. But when there seemed to be a contradiction between their will and that of G-d they gave precedence to their own desires. From this point on it was therefore necessary to emphasize that the mitzvot are to be observed, first and

foremost, as G-d's decree. And if Bnei Yisrael ask why the law is the way it is, the reply is "Kacha!" Only after this feeling is internalized is it possible to also consider reasons and logical explanations for the mitzvot.

Is the Observance of the Mitzvot a Means or an End? by Rabbi Yuval Arzi, Rabbi of Kiryat Eliyahu Community, Raanana

"So that you will remember and observe all my mitzvot [Bamidbar 15:40] -- This can be compared to somebody who has been thrown into water. The captain of the ship throws him a rope and tells him, take hold of this rope and do not let go, for if you release it you will not live." [Bamidbar Rabba 17].

At first glance, this might be taken as a wonderful parable. The strings of the tzitzit are like a rope thrown to us from a ship—that is, the ship of Torah and mitzvot—so that we can take hold of them when we begin to drown in the waves of modern times, and let them bring us to the safety of the shore. This is the reason that we have been commanded to look at the tzitzit in order to remember the other mitzvot.

However, it seems that the intention of the Midrash is different, as becomes clear from the continuation: "Indeed, this is what the Almighty said to Bnei Yisrael. As long as you remain attached to the mitzvot—'You, who cling to your G-d' [Devarim 4:4] -- will remain alive.' And, it is written, 'Remain moral, do not let go; guard it, for it is your life' [Mishlei 4:13]."

Thus, our interpretation of the parable should be corrected in two ways. First, the rope that was thrown to us from the ship of the Almighty, the means for our rescue, is not just tzitzit but rather all the mitzvot. The condition for being saved is to observe everything. Second, the objective is not to save a person from the problems of this world but to increase his attachment to G-d. The highest possible goal, which is achieved by observing the mitzvot, is to cling to G-d. In summary: the objective is not to observe the mitzvot but to become attached to G-d, and the way to achieve this goal is to take hold of the rope of the mitzvot.

There is a great difference between the two interpretations. Some people feel that observing the mitzvot will make a man perfect, and that fulfilling the 613 mitzvot is the ultimate goal. According to this approach, one who observes the mitzvot is the perfect slave of G-d. Examples of proper activities that will lead to perfection are praying in a minyan, special care with respect to kosher food, and giving a tithe to charity. However, the truth is different. The mitzvot are only a means to a closer attachment to G-d. Of course, this does not mean that they should be abandoned or ignored, rather that observing the mitzvot is not enough.

The Torah attempts to teach mankind a way of life. That is the reason for the choice of the verse, "Remain moral... it is your life." It is necessary to understand the principles behind the mitzvot in order to become close to the Almighty. One who takes hold of

the rope might indeed reach the shores of safety, but he will get soaked along the way. Only one who climbs up the rope to its beginning, and thereby clings to the Captain, will arrive at the shore completely dry.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The disaster that befell the Jewish people in the desert and that doomed the generation that had left Egypt and stood at Sinai had many causes. But to me, the most blatant cause was that Moshe somehow picked the wrong men to be the spies that would report on the Land of Israel. They were, in the words of the Torah and Rashi's commentary to those words, great men, leaders of Israel, people of piety and belief. Moshe was supremely confident that they would be enthusiastic about the blessings of living in the land of Israel. Yet, with the exceptions of Calev and Yehoshua, these leaders got the facts right and the conclusions all wrong.

The rabbis of the Midrash indicate that they had a personal agenda that drove them, perhaps existing even only subconsciously within them - that they were afraid of losing their leadership roles to younger people of the next generation when the Jews would enter the Land of Israel. But I feel that one can see a deeper reason and psychological insight as well. The Land of Israel has always been a difficult test for Jews. It is much easier to deal with an imaginary place - a Holy Land - where everything will be perfect and satisfying than to be forced to contend with a real place where life is far from perfect and where ideals are difficult to realize. The spies were disappointed in what they saw, in the reality of the land as compared to their imaginary perfect home and this disparity depressed them and colored their report to the rest of their compatriots. The Jerusalem on this earth never quite matches up with the heavenly Jerusalem of our dreams. And the inability to deal with this truth became a main cause of tragedy for the ten spies and for those who believed in them.

Calev and Yehoshua were not discouraged by the reality of the land as they saw it. They said: "aloh naaleh" - we will go up, we will improve the situation, and we will not forsake our dreams and ideals because of the difficulties that the land poses. We will make it better and be able to succeed. Living in Israel as I do, I often hear, especially from those Jews who still reside in the Diaspora - many of them pious, observant, fine people, comments about the imperfections of our state and of its populace. It almost seems to serve as an excuse to remain in the desert and not to come to Israel because of the difficulties involved. I make no excuses for the failings in Israeli life, be they religious, educational, social or economic. Nevertheless, one need only look at the achievements that have been wrought here over the past century of Jewish life in order to be heartened.

The Land of Israel poses now, as it always has, a severe test of Jewish faith, loyalty and commitment. What is necessary is for all of us to possess the optimism and fortitude of Calev and Yehoshua in viewing the Land of Israel and the Jewish community residing therein. We will certainly go up, we will improve, and we will strive to fulfill our goal and ideal of being a special people living in a special land. In so doing, we will realize the goal of a holy people residing in a holy land. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

This sedra tells of the episode of the Spies that were sent on a mission by Moses. Unfortunately because of their negative report regarding Israel's chances of successfully conquering the Land, the whole generation was punished.

"After the sin of the Spies, Moses intercedes with Hashem to ask forgiveness for the people. And Hashem said 'I have forgiven, as you said.' " (Numbers 14:20)

"As you said"—Rashi: Because of what you (Moses) said 'lest they say: Hashem lacked the ability' (see above 14:16).}

A Question: Isn't the verse's meaning clear enough? God said He will forgive, as Moses had requested. Why the need to comment here?

Another Question: Moses said several things in his plea for forgiveness, (verses 13-19); why does Rashi quote just this one phrase from Moses' plea? What's bothering him?

An Answer: Hashem said that He was forgiving the people. But if this were so, why does He then say (verses 23-28): "If they will see the Land that I have sworn to give to their forefathers, and all who anger Me shall not see it.... Say to them, as I live, by the word of Hashem, if I shall not do to you as you have spoken in My ears. In this wilderness shall your carcasses drop..."

Punishing the people is in direct contradiction to God's saying He forgives them. Can you see how Rashi's comment deals with this problem?

An Answer: Rashi has chosen these particular words in Moses' plea precisely to answer this question. Moses made two main points in his plea to God: If the Israelites are destroyed by God and do not enter the Promised Land, then the gentiles will conclude that Hashem was incapable of fulfilling His promise to the Forefathers regarding the Land of Israel. This would be a chilul Hashem—a desecration of God's name.

Moses appealed to God's mercy, as well, by paraphrasing the special prayer which Hashem had taught Moses after the sin of the Golden Calf (see

Exodus 34:6). On that basis, he asked God to forgive the people their sin.

Rashi is telling us that when God said "I have forgiven," He does not mean a complete forgiveness; He means, rather, a qualified forgiveness, a forgiveness based on and limited to "your words." This means that God forgave only in accordance with that part of Moses' plea that referred to the *chilul Hashem* which would result if God didn't bring the people Israel into the Land of Canaan. God's forgiveness relates to the fact that, in spite of their sin, the nation of Israel—the next generation—will be brought by God into the Promised Land, thus there will be no *chilul Hashem*. On the other hand, this generation will be killed out. For this generation there is to be no forgiveness. Clearly the forgiveness was partial (see *Ohr Hachayim*).

But according to this understanding, we can ask another question of Rashi's interpretation. God said he would forgive "as you (Moses) said." But Moses' plea included other words in addition to the ones Rashi quotes. Why didn't Rashi also consider Moses' words "And now may the power of My Lord etc." (14:17) as what "Moses said" as well?

An Answer: In light of Rashi's sensitive interpretation, we can understand the precision of the Torah's words. As we pointed out, Moses' plea had two parts to it. The second part, the explicit plea for forgiveness, was based on God's own words (in Exodus 34:6). Moses says in verse 14:17: "And now let your strength wax great My Lord, as you spoke saying: 'Hashem, slow to anger etc.'"

Notice that although Moses said these words, they were not his own words—they were a paraphrase of God's words. In light of this we can appreciate that only the original words of Moses' plea were the words that Rashi quotes. It is as if God is saying: "I have forgiven, as YOU said, but not as I said," which, had I done so, would have meant a complete forgiveness! (See *Nachlas Ya'akov*.)

God had accepted Moses' plea for forgiveness, but only to a certain degree. On the one hand, He consented to have the next generation of the People of Israel enter the Land of Canaan, as He had promised the Forefathers. Nevertheless, He exacted punishment from the generation that sinned. We have here neither a sweeping amnesty nor a wholesale punishment.

This is God's "morality."

The Psalmist says (25:8): "Good and upright is God, therefore He guides sinners on the [right] way."

On these words the Midrash adds a pithy insight. "Why is He good? Because He is upright. Why is He upright? Because He is good."

An artfully succinct phrase which teaches us God's balance in judgement. If He were always good, then His goodness would lose all value. It is similar to a person who always has a smile on his face; the smile loses all significance. So the good, in order to retain its quality of kindness, must be tempered, at times, with

righteousness. Likewise, righteousness, for it to remain righteous and not deteriorate into the callous, cold, impersonal implementation of the law, it too must so be tempered at times with a touch of kindness.

God maintains this sensitive balance in rendering judgment. Likewise in our case, while the Spies were punished, there was no collective punishment and the future generations did not suffer for the sins of their fathers.

Rashi's simple, laden-with-meaning, comment highlights the precision of the Torah's words. In so doing he also provides us with a perspective on Divine morality. With a few words, Rashi has treated us to a deeper dimension of understanding. © 2004 Dr. A. Bonchek and Aish Hatorah

RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBURG

Weekly Thoughts

The Rabbi wound up the services one morning by saying, 'Next week I am going to preach on the subject of liars. And in this connection, as a preparation for my discourse, I would like you all to read the fifty-first chapter of Genesis.'

The following week, the Rabbi rose to begin and said, 'Now, then, all of you who have done as I requested and read the fifty-first chapter of Genesis, please raise your hands.'

Nearly every hand in the congregation went up.

Then said the Rabbi, "You are the people I want to talk to. There is no fifty-first chapter in Genesis!"

A familiar story? How often do we find ourselves in similar situations? At such times, we often convince ourselves that we are not really lying, it is not so bad, it is almost true. We find that the 'whole truth' is a valuable commodity and one which it is not always so easy to come by.

In this week's Torah reading, the spies are sent to the land of Israel, then Canaan, to spy out the land. They came back with falsified reports. They began, however, by telling the people that 'We came to the land where you did send us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey...'

The Talmud comments that "Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Meir: Any piece of slander which does not have some truth in the beginning, will not endure in the end." Every lie has a little truth mixed into it. Unfortunately, all too often, the truth has a little falsehood mixed into it too.

Pursuit of truth is a recurring theme in Jewish tradition. The Torah is frequently referred to as 'Torat Emet'—the Torah of truth—and the discernment of truth is seen as an essential requirement for navigating our way through life.

May we all be true to ourselves, to our roots and to G-d. © 2004 Rabbi M. Wallenburg & torah.org

RABBI MORDECAI KAMENETZKY

Lures of Life

Rarely do we find that Hashem's commands assume personal connotations. The commands are meted for the sake of Judaism and the glory of Heaven. Yet, disturbingly, we find the mission of the spies defined with very personal invectives. The Torah begins with Hashem commanding Moshe, "Send for yourself spies to scour the land of Israel." Why is the command tainted with such a personal epithet? Is Moshe sending the spies for himself? In fact, Moshe reviews the entire episode in Deuteronomy, stating how the idea of spies found favor in his eyes. The commentaries are quick to point out that the idea found favor in Moshe's mortal's eyes, but Hashem disapproved. Therefore He told Moshe send the spies for yourself. "As far as I am concerned," Hashem infers, "it is a mistake, but if that is what you desire, then proceed." Thus the words, "send for yourself spies."

Of course, the dire consequences of the mission are well known. The spies returned and maligned the Land of Israel. They were punished along with the entire nation that joined them in their misconceived sorrow, and the next 40 years were spent wandering in the desert.

But we are human, and our intentions are tinged with mortal bias. Isn't every mortal action filled with human bias and mortal partiality.

Adam Parker Glick, President of the Jack Parker Corporation, told me a wonderful story:

A wealthy man decided to take up the sport of fishing. He rented a cottage near a Vermont lake and barreled into the local sport and wildlife shop and demanded to see the manager.

"I want to buy the best of everything: the most expensive rod and tackle, the best hooks, anglers, and even the most exquisite bait!" The store owner, who had seen his share of city-folk, was not impressed. He instructed a young salesman to follow the man around the store and serve as a human shopping cart. The man chose the most exquisite rods and reels; he selected a mahogany tackle box and a refrigerated bait cooler. Money was no object, and the fisherman-to-be selected the finest of all. The enthusiastic young salesman was extremely eager to please and offered him every imaginable fishing item and accessory. The owner, a crusty and seasoned Vermonter just smirked at the naivete of the new-found angler.

As the tycoon approached the checkout counter, he noticed brightly colored, hand-painted fishing lures whose prices were as outlandish as the colors. "Wow!" he exclaimed, as he gathered a bunch into his hand. "These look really wonderful!" Then he turned to the manager and in a voice sounding as well

informed as possible, he asked the owner, "do fish really go for these?"

"Don't know," shrugged the old-timer. "I don't sell to fish."

Moshe reluctantly agreed to the whims and premonitions of a nervous and anxious nation. He agreed to their pleading to allow spies to check the land that they would ultimately inherit. But by no means was it a Divine mission. Hashem told Moshe send spies for yourself. He taught Moshe that missions that are fueled by self-fulfillment are doomed.

Often, we stand at the check-out counter of life and choose the impulse items with the view that they are necessary for our success. We marvel at the brightly-colored lures and find it hard to imagine life without them. We rationalize that they are needed for the sake of family, livelihood, and even spirituality. We think we are purchasing them for lofty reasons and negate the fact that perhaps selfishness and insecurity are the driving forces behind the proverbial sale. We buy them thinking that they are the items that will catch the fish, but ultimately, we are the only ones caught!

Moshe was about to send spies on a seemingly sacred mission. The mission may have been falsely justified in hundreds of different ways: the operation would save lives, it would prepare a young nation for a smooth transition and pave a new level of spirituality for the fledgling folk. But those were not the true objectives. There was selfishness involved. And the mission was doomed. For the road to the lowest of places is paved with disingenuous holy-intent.

Therefore Hashem told Moshe that there is only one motivation behind the mission. They are not sending spies for Hashem. The nation is sending spies for its own ego and insurance. "Send them for yourself." G-d does not need scouts, guides, or pathfinders. He does not sell to fish. He just may yield to those who are selfish. And ultimately they get the hook. © 1998 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

