

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

It is difficult to comprehend how much could go wrong in such a short period of time with superior people being the main destroyers. After all, Moshe sent the best representatives he could find to become the spies and he certainly was blindsided by their unexpected and unjustified report. So, what really went wrong? The question has been examined for thousands of years by all of the great commentators to Torah. What emerges from all of this scholarly opinion is that there were two basic underlying, subconscious, inherently unrecognizable motivations that created this debacle. In a certain sense, these two motives were not unique to the spies, the leaders of Israel, but were deeply embedded in the hearts of the Jews of that generation. That is why the Jews were so willing to accept the words of the ten spies and ignore the truth that Yehoshua and Calev related to them. The first motivation was a personal one. The leaders in the desert realized that new leaders would take their places once the Jewish people settled in the Promised Land, so they subconsciously chose to scuttle the idea of going to the Land of Israel in favor of remaining in office in the desert. When the rabbis said "One should not trust one's self" they meant that one's judgment is always clouded by self-interest. One has to examine one's own prejudices, experiences, ego and desires before passing judgment on important issues. The prophet stated: "The heart is perverse, who can truly know it?"

The other motivation, the one that the general public of Israel in the desert also feared was the necessity of assuming responsibilities that having a Jewish state in the Land of Israel entailed. That generation came from being slaves in Egypt. Being a slave is no joy but a slave after all has no independence, no decisions to make, no responsibilities to shoulder. After Egypt, they came to a desert where all of their material needs were miraculously met. Manna from heaven, water from the rock and from Miriam's traveling well, dry cleaners from clouds and perfect

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weather were taken for granted. Then, when they would become independent state builders upon coming into the Land of Israel all of those support systems would disappear. They would have to become masters of their own destiny and they shirked from this task. The slave mentality had not been eradicated from their subconscious. They preferred to return to Egypt rather than to advance to the Land of Israel and have to deal with all of the problems of independent nationhood. Our generation is still witness to the difficulties of uprooting the psyche of dependency from Jews and getting them to face the responsibilities of nationhood and homeland. Shirking national responsibilities leads to disastrous consequences for such a generation. Decisions of policy and state founded upon weakness of will and distorted vision always come back to haunt us. Yehoshua and Calev may have been the minority opinion but history has proven them to be the authors of the correct opinion. © 2005 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.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Lure 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

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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 and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's portion, Moshe sends forth spies to search out the land of Israel. This is the first step leading to the conquest of the land.

Maimonides points out that the holiness of that conquest continued for as long as we remain sovereign in the land. Once Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians, the holiness ceased. (Yad, Hilkhot Beit ha-Bekhirah 6:16) Interestingly, Maimonides states that when we re-entered the land with the permission of King Cyrus of Persia seventy years later, the holiness became eternal, continuing even after Israel was destroyed by the Romans. Why was the first holiness finite and the second eternal?

Maimonides suggests that the distinction lies in the methodology of taking the land. Conquering the land through military means lasts for as long as we are the conquerors. Once we are conquered, the holiness comes to an end. Peacefully settling the land as we did in the time of King Cyrus is more powerful, and has the capacity to continue on, even after destruction.

Rav Soloveitchik offers another distinction. In Joshua's conquest, Jerusalem was the last city to be liberated. In the time of Cyrus, it was the first. The holiness of Jerusalem comes from G-d. Being the final area to be liberated in the period of Joshua, Jerusalem had little impact on the rest of the land. In the time of Cyrus, Jerusalem impacts powerfully on the rest of the land for it was the first city to be conquered. Indeed, just as the holiness of Jerusalem comes from G-d and is, therefore, eternal, similarly the holiness of all of the land of Israel lasts forever when impacted by Jerusalem.

One final suggestion: Perhaps the difference lies in understanding the contrast between an event which occurs for the first time, and an event which is repeated. The first time something happens, the happening is as powerful as when it occurred. But once

something is lost and still despite that loss, is restarted, the power of beginning again is so unusual that it is everlasting. It shows that one's involvement is not the function of the enthusiasm of a "first" decision. It is rather a thoughtful constant, ongoing involvement. In Jerusalem's case, it is eternal.

Some think that the most beautiful, the most lasting of experiences, of relationships, is the first. Yet often that is not the case. The real test of one's fortitude is what happens after one has failed. If even then, one can restart. That second start is considered so noble that it has the power to be even stronger than the first and often has the strength to last forever. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The conversation between G-d and Moshe following the slander of the scouts contains several parallels to their conversation following the sin of the "golden calf," yet has some differences as well. In both, G-d threatens to destroy the entire nation and start again from Moshe (Shemos 32:10 and Bamidbar 14:12), followed by Moshe's praying to Him on their behalf. How this threat, if carried out, will be perceived by Egypt is used as a defense in both instances (Shemos 32:12 and Bamidbar 14:13-14). Nevertheless, the perceptions described are different, based on the "golden calf" occurring less than three months after the exodus (hence the perception of His taking them out of Egypt in order to wipe them out in the desert) and the slanderous report of the "scouts" (or "spies") coming more than a year later, as they were (potentially) on the verge of entering the Promised Land (with the resulting perception that He was c'v unable to defeat the nations that occupied it, so He wiped them out instead). A glaring difference, though, is Moshe's not having invoked the merits of our forefathers ("zechus avos") the second time, even though it had played a prominent role in Moshe's prayer the first time.

Some commentators (e.g. Or Hachayim) point out that Moshe's first word of defense the second time (Bamidbar 14:13) was "and," as he began by saying "and Egypt will hear." He could have just said "Egypt will hear," but adds "and" to imply that the following arguments are in addition to the earlier ones made after the "golden calf." Therefore, after G-d made the same threat again, Moshe alluded to his earlier response, and then (since they were closer to Canaan) added onto them.

It would seem, though, that Rashi does not take this approach. Not just because he doesn't comment that the "and" refers to Moshe's previous defense, but also because he tells us that G-d's promise to make Moshe into a "greater and mightier nation" than the current one was pre-emptive, addressing Moshe's potential question of how He could destroy the nation after having promised our forefathers that their

descendants would inherit the land. Since Moshe was also one of their descendants, *his* descendants would automatically also be *theirs*, and the promise would therefore be fulfilled. If G-d had already addressed the issue of fulfilling his promise to Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, there would be no reason for Moshe to refer to it in his second defense. Which still leaves us with the question of how the mention of the promise to our forefathers worked the first time (since Moshe's descendants would also be theirs), and, since it seems that-for whatever reason- it did, why didn't Moshe use it this time?

When Moshe mentioned the promise to the forefathers the first time (Shemos 32:13), Rashi had explained it as referring to "zechus avos," including a counter-argument that if a nation that came from them couldn't survive G-d's wrath, a nation that came from him (Moshe) wouldn't survive it either. I have previously suggested (www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/KiSisa.pdf) that Moshe's intent was that mistakes were inevitable, and in order for *any* nation to survive such scrutiny, there must be a mechanism in place whereby they can repent from mistakes and try again. And since this would be necessary for a nation comprised of only his descendants to survive, it could be used to atone for this current nation's sin of the "golden calf" as well-and there would therefore be no need to destroy them and start from scratch. From this request came the "teshuva" process, including Yom Kippur and one of the prayers we say during that period of repentance.

The "defense" Moshe used was not that G-d's promise to the forefathers wouldn't be fulfilled (as they could be through his descendants too), but that-no matter what-the ability to repent, and have it accepted, was absolutely necessary. This "request" had already been granted, so there was no need to ask for it again! Instead, Moshe needed to put that "teshuva" process into action, which he did by immediately using the prayer that G-d had taught him (Bamidbar 14:17-18) -- a prayer that Moshe was told would always work, even if there was no longer any "zechus avos" (see Rashi on Shemos 33:19).

Was "zechus avos" missing from Moshe's (second) argument against destroying the nation and starting again through him? If the upshot of the argument was that there needs to be a mechanism of repentance-and this had already been instituted-then the best way to save them would not be to make that same request again, but to implement the process.

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DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This parsha tells of the serious sin of the Spies and its fateful consequence- that the nation would wander in the Wilderness for a whole generation, so that none of those who had left Egypt would be privileged to enter Eretz Yisrael.

Understanding the comparison in s'michot parshiyot give us an insight into the Spies' sin.

"Send for yourself men who will search out the Land of Canaan which I am giving to the Children of Israel; one man each from the tribe of his fathers, send each prince among them." (Numbers 13:2)

"Send forth for yourself"-RASHI: "Why was the section of the Spies placed in juxtaposition to the section about Miriam? Because she was stricken on account of slander, which she spoke against her brother, and these sinners witnessed [what happened to her] and yet did not take a lesson from it!" [Note: For a discussion of the concept of s'michos parshiyot, (two sections placed near each other in the Torah) see the Shemot volume of What's Bothering Rashi? page 98.]

On the basis of the idea of s'michos parshiyot, Rashi quotes a Midrash that criticizes the Spies. They should have learned the evils of slander from the fact that Miriam spoke slander against Moses, her brother, and was punished by G-d. But as you think about the comparison between the Spies' behavior and Miriam's slander, you should have some questions. Are they comparable cases?

A Question: Miriam spoke slander against Moses; the Spies gave an evil report about the Land. Since when is saying something bad about an inert object, like land, considered slander? Another point that could be made: Miriam spoke against the "man of G-d," Moses, the master of all prophets. How can the evil report of the Spies begin to be compared to Miriam's audacious act? Considering the differences between the two situations, one wonders why the Spies should have seen the connection and learned a lesson from Miriam's sin. Do you see any comparison between the two parshiyot? An Answer: If we look again at the section about Miriam and we look closely at Rashi's words, we can gain a better understanding.

Miriam and Aaron spoke about the Cushite woman whom Moses took for a wife. A Cushite is, according to simple p'shat, a woman from Cush, a country whose natives are black-skinned. This is the only aspect of this woman mentioned in the Torah. Rashi mentions that Miriam was stricken and her punishment for her slander was "and behold Miriam was afflicted with leprosy like snow" (12:10).

Perhaps by understanding Miriam's punishment we can understand the deeper meaning of her sin. The Torah tells us that Miriam's skin was white as snow when she had leprosy; the Cushite woman's skin was black. A paradoxical situation existed, as the Cushite woman was pure "on the inside" although she was black on the outside. While Miriam, on the other hand, was "pure" (white) on the outside even though she had sinned and was impure on the inside.

The lesson is: Don't judge by appearances. What looks "pure" on the outside may be problematic on a deeper level, and contrariwise, what looks "black"

on the surface may be quite pure and beautiful on the inside.

See that Rashi emphasizes Miriam's punishment, more so than her sin, when he says, "she (Miriam) was stricken on account of slander." Her punishment was the symbolic "white as snow" appearance of leprosy. Do you see how this ties in with the sin of the Spies?

An Answer: The Spies also judged by outward appearances and drew incorrect conclusions from outward appearances. What evidence is there of this?

An Answer: Moses told them to "see the Land... and the cities they dwell in; if they are open (non-walled) or fortified" (Numbers 13:19). On 13:19 Rashi says that Moses gave them a sign: "If they live in open cities, they are strong... but if they live in fortified cities, they are weak." This is the opposite of what we might have thought. We would have thought that based on appearances, a fortified city would be harder to conquer, but Moses told them otherwise. In effect, he said "Don't judge by outward appearances."

With what report did the Spies return? They said, in their most damning sentence: "However, the nation is mighty, the people that dwell in the Land. And the cities are greatly fortified to the utmost" (Numbers 13:28). They drew the exact opposite conclusion than Moses had instructed them. They are strong... because they dwell in greatly fortified cities! They fell into the perceptual trap of judging by outward appearances.

Clearly, they had learned nothing from the experience of Miriam, who was punished for judging by appearances. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The most severe sin of the Bible was the sin of the scouts, the delegation of twelve Princes of the tribes of Israel who returned with a disastrous majority report denying the conquest of Israel and resulting in the death of the desert generation. What is most difficult to understand however is that the suggestion to establish such an ill-fated reconnaissance team came directly from the Almighty Himself at the very outset of this week's Torah reading: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'send for yourselves men who will seek out (Heb. vayaturu) the Land of Canaan which I am giving to the children of Israel each one representing a tribe of their fathers shall you send, each one a Prince from among them'". (Numbers 13:1,2) How can G-d have suggested such a delegation destined for disaster?!

Rav Elchanan Summit, in his excellent study of the weekly Torah portions, suggests an insight which at the same time provides a textual underpinning for a magnificent homiletic interpretation given by Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. The secret to understanding lies in the verb form used in the charge given by the

Almighty, "send for yourselves men who will seek out (heb. vayaturu)", the verb tur appearing no less than twelve times in this very sequence, the very number of the delegation itself. In fact, when Moses himself retells the story in his farewell address (Deut 1:22,24), he has the Israelites all coming to him and saying, "let us send men before us that they may check out (vayahperu) the land....and spy (vayaraglu) it out", using two verb forms very different from the "vayaturu" used by G-d.

A careful search will reveal that in other Biblical contexts G-d does link the verb form "tur" to the Land of Israel, as in, "the Lord G-d who walks before you, He will do battle for you...to seek out (latur) for you a place in which you may settle your encampment". Even the prophet Ezekiel (20:6) declares that "on that day I shall raise my hand for them to bring them out of the Land of Egypt to the land which I have sought out (tarti) for them. A land flowing with milk and honey, a most precious land for them among all the other lands."

The power of the specific verb form tur used by G-d becomes even more clearly expressed when we look to the very conclusion of this week's Torah reading, and discover that very verb form in a different but most revealing context. Almost inexplicably, this Torah portion which mainly deals with the scouts concludes with the commandment to wear ritual fringes on the corners of our four cornered garments: "and (the blue-and-white) shall be for you for a fringe so that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them; and so that you not seek out or lust (taturu) after your heart and after you eyes which lead you to commit acts of harlotry (zonim) after them" (Numbers 15:39). And when punishing the Israelites, G-d once again makes reference to the sin of the scouts as having been an act of harlotry (znut), "and you children shall be shepherds in the desert for forty years, thereby bearing (the sin) of your harlotry (znut)" (Numbers 14:13).

The picture is becoming very clear. The Almighty was not at all interested in a reconnaissance mission to scout out the Land or even in an intelligence delegation to assess the military practicability of engaging in an act of conquest. That was perhaps what the Israelites had in mind when they asked Moses to send men before them to check out the Land, which probably meant to see by which roads it would be best to enter and which cities ought to be attacked first. The Almighty had a very different design in mind. G-d wanted to impress them with the uniqueness, the chosenness of the Land which He Himself had picked for them, the Land that would be their ultimate resting place, the Land which was good and not bad, which produced luscious fruits and full bodied animals, the Land whose produce developed strong and capable men; G-d wanted them to conquer the Land with great anticipation and desire. (Ramban ad loc numbers 13:1)

Rav Soloveitchik goes one step further. The Torah of Israel and the Land of Israel are both biblically

called morasha which means heritage, but which our sages linked to Me'orsha which means betrothed and beloved. G-d understands that the conquest of the Torah of Israel as well as of the Land of Israel by the people of Israel will require strong feelings of love for each of these grand enterprises. And just as the Rabbis of the Talmud command us not to marry a woman unless we first see her and know that we love her, so did G-d ask Moses to send a group who would give the kind of visual description of the Land of Israel to the people of Israel which would inspire them to love the Land and even lust after the Land. G-d understood that such an emotional attachment was absolutely crucial if the Israelites were to overcome all of the obstacles involved in conquering the Land, settling it, and forging within it a holy nation and kingdom of priests.

Alas, the people-and probably even Moses himself-did not understand the Divine command. Their sin was in taking the mission to have been a scouting enterprise rather than an inspirational foretaste of what waited in store for them after their conquest.

Our generation-so similar to the Israelites who went from the darkness of Egypt to the light of freedom and stood at the entrance to the Promised Land-must do whatever is necessary to recapture and strengthen the love of Israel if we are to succeed in properly settling it. © 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah displays the power of perfect faith and its miraculous results. The haftorah begins with Yehoshua sending two special individuals on a secret mission to investigate the land of Israel. The Jewish people were camped directly facing the Promised Land and Yehoshua sought to determine the most strategic point of entry. This mission was extremely dangerous because the land's inhabitants natives were well aware of the pending Jewish invasion of their land.

Yehoshua instructed the spies to survey all of Eretz Yisroel but devote special focus on Yericho. They crossed the Jordan and went directly to Rachav's inn, the first one inside the city's walls. The king discovered them immediately and sent messengers to order Rachav to release the intruders. Out of the goodness of her heart, Rachav engaged herself in an unbelievable act of heroism. She swiftly hid the spies and then persuaded the king's messengers that the spies fled the city. Once the messengers were out of sight she informed the spies that everyone was awestricken by the Jewish nation and its Hashem. She then proclaimed her personal recognition of Hashem as master of the universe and her firm belief that He would easily defeat all in His way.

Chazal reflect upon this most unusual welcome and sharply contrast it with the disheartening

experience of this week's parsha. Therein we read about ten men of distinction who were sent on a similar mission to survey Eretz Yisroel. Yet, their results were devastating and the spies ultimately convinced the nation to reject Eretz Yisroel. Chazal reveal the fundamental difference between the two groups. The spies in Yehoshua's times were totally devoted to their mission. They were prepared to overcome every obstacle in their way and therefore met unbelievable success. Conversely, the spies in Moshe's times were not fully committed to their mission. This apparently tainted their vision and created their distorted impression of the land and its inhabitants. (see Yalkut Shimoni 8)

In truth, Eretz Yisroel presented extraordinary challenges to the Jewish people. Its inhabitants were far from friendly to its intruders and nothing short of an open miracle could secure the nation's safety. Moshe Rabbeinu's spies displayed grave concern over this. They observed the giant's towering stature and took note of their constant preoccupation in eulogies and funerals. The spies sadly succumbed to their well-grounded fears and forfeited their privilege of entering the land. Yehoshua's spies possessed perfect faith and total commitment to their mission. This inner strength dissuaded them from the influence of their frightening experiences and assisted them in their perfect fulfillment of their mission.

This stark contrast serves as a profound lesson in total faith and trust in Hashem. From a practical standpoint, Yehoshua's spies stood no chance and faced guaranteed death. The Jewish nation was camped within earshot of Eretz Yisroel and this secret mission was bound to be discovered. Although, the spies disguised themselves as traveling salesmen it is hard to fathom that such pious men could truly pass as Canaanites. All they had going for themselves was steadfast faith and trust in Hashem. They bravely entered the "lion's den" and lodged in Rachav's inn. Rachav was fondly known throughout the land and enjoyed warm personal association with all the authorities. The results were no different than one would predict and the spies were discovered the moment they entered her inn.

However, with perfect faith in Hashem the events that followed were far from predictable. Chazal reveal a most startling display of Divine Providence and inform us that Rachav had recently embraced the Jewish religion. (see Yalkut Shimoni 9) Hashem had actually directed the spies to the only Jewish soul in the entire land of Canaan. Their faith proved rewarding and instead of delivering the spies to the king, Rachav extended herself in every way to her recently discovered Jewish brethren. She encouraged them with profound statements of faith and was ultimately a catalyst to deliver the Promised Land into Jewish hands. Hashem favorably rewarded her for her heroism and she subsequently merited to marry Yehoshua himself. Her

new life was very fruitful and she became the mother of many Jewish prophets and priests. In retrospect, the spies' perfect faith resulted in securing the deliverance of the land into their Jewish brethren's hands. Instead of immediate death the spies returned with total confidence that Eretz Yisroel would soon be theirs.

These are some of the unbelievable results of perfect faith. Let it be the will of Hashem that we continue our strides in faith and commitment serving as a special merit for us to return to our Homeland in peace and harmony. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Similarly to the sin of the Golden Calf, after the sin of the scouts the Almighty tells Moshe that He intends to destroy Bnei Yisrael because of their sins. Both times, Moshe immediately prays to G-d and asks that the sin be forgiven. However, there are clear differences between the two prayers that can be seen by looking at them in detail. For example, both times Moshe notes that the nation should be forgiven in order to avoid desecrating the holy name, but this is from two different approaches. After the sin of the Calf, Moshe says that it is necessary to prevent the other nations from saying, "G-d took them out for an evil purpose, in order to kill them in the mountains and to eradicate them from the face of the earth" [Shemot 32:12]. This implies that Bnei Yisrael were taken out of Egypt for the sole purpose of killing them in the mountains. After the sin of the scouts, on the other hand, it is a different claim that is to be avoided: "Because G-d did not have the ability to bring this nation to the land that He promised them, he slaughtered them in the desert" [Bamidbar 14:16].

In addition, with respect to the Golden Calf, after Moshe notes the danger of desecrating the holy name, he adds another claim, related to the credit of the forefathers. "Remember your servants, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov..." [Shemot 32:13]. After the sin of the scouts Moshe does not mention the forefathers. What is the reason for these differences?

Evidently, the difference between the two cases stems from the nature of Moshe's request after the sin of the scouts. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe asked that G-d should "reconsider the evil to His nation" [Shemot 32:12]. That is, Moshe requested that G-d should revoke the evil plan, as is indeed what happened in the end-"And G-d changed His mind about the evil that He had planned to do to His nation" [32:14]. With respect to the scouts, on the other hand, Moshe understood that the sin was so serious that it justified refusing to let the people enter the land that they had rejected, a punishment of measure for measure. It was therefore not right to say that killing the people would cause the holy name to be desecrated, because the fact

that the generation which left Egypt would die was justified in itself. What bothered Moshe was the way that the decree would be carried out, "And you will kill this nation as one man-And the nations will say..." [Bamidbar 14:15]. It is this way of punishing the entire nation at once that will cause a desecration of the name of G-d. Moshe does not ask G-d to revoke the punishment itself, rather that the people should be forgiven for the sin. "Please forgive the sin of this nation" [14:19]. And G-d responds to his prayer, "I have forgiven them, as you requested. However, I swear... All of those who reject me will not see it." [14:20-23]. Thus, Bnei Yisrael would not be killed "as one man," and the nation as a whole would continue to exist, but the decree that these specific people would not enter the land remained.

Evidently this explains why Moshe left out one of the traits of the Almighty, "A G-d of mercy and pity," [Shemot 34:6], and said only that G-d is "patient and very kind, forgiving sins and transgressions" [Bamidbar 14:18]. As the Ramban explains, "Perhaps Moshe knew that the judgment had already been passed and that they would never be forgiven. He therefore requested that G-d have patience and not kill them all at once, not slaughtering them like sheep in the desert, by having them die in a plague." Thus, in spite of the similarity between the two situations, the two prayers are different in principle. While the goal of one was to cancel the evil decree completely, the purpose of the other one was to decrease the harsh effect as much as possible.

Kalev

by the late Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neria, Founder and Head of Yeshivat Bnei Akiva

Two people stood up for their principles, social pressure had no influence on them, and they did not join in with the approach of the scouts-Yehoshua and Kalev. It seems that each one followed his own path, and the action of each one was rooted in his own character. Yehoshua's approach stemmed from his attachment to the mentor and teacher whom he followed at the time. The image of Moshe and his leadership, full of miracles, lit up Yehoshua's path. Kalev, on the other hand, based his approach on strengthening his roots and his links to the past, by journeying to the resting place of the forefathers and emphasizing their natural approach.

Kalev went alone to visit the graves of the forefathers. "At the place where the forefathers were, the Shechina was too" [R'eiya Mehemna Shelach 174:1]. The fact that Kalev went to Chevron and paid a special visit to the Machpela Cave, to pay homage to the graves of the forefathers, was not simply an emotional fulfillment of a youthful dream. It was not a case of listening to the stories of his youth about ancient times, which created a yearning to see the city where the ancestors lived and to visit the place where the first members of the nation were at rest. Rather, Kalev had

a holy purpose, in an effort to turn the tide and follow the proper path, following the signs left behind by the forefathers, whose actions were always meant as a pattern for the offspring. He wanted to take note of their virtues and to renew the Divine covenant, to strengthen the link with their spirit and their souls, their faith, and their confidence. He had an internal desire for a fresh contact with the powerful faith of the stalwarts of the world, in order to draw deeply from the wellspring of their eternal lives.

Standing together with our father Avraham, represented by the peaks of the hills, Kalev walked with our first ancestor along the difficult mountainous path, from Ur Kasdim to Mount Moriah, from his own personal sacrifice to the binding of his son Yitzchak. He left his father's house, he was forced to separate himself from Lot, he fought powerful kings, and he progressed from the Covenant of the Pieces to becoming a respected and honored Divine Prince, admired by all the others around him.

Kalev listened to Yitzchak's "discourse" in the field, feeling the emotions of the son who was a spiritual giant. He was able to sense the great influence of the father on one side, together with the unique original path of the son Yitzchak, who had experienced the binding on Mount Moriah but knew how to dig wells over and over again as needed. Yitzchak felt the awe of a blessing by his father, interested in bequeathing to his son the heritage which includes the covenant of the fathers, leading to being strangers in a foreign land, slavery, and oppression, until the final redemption in great wealth.

Accompanying Yaacov, Kalev left the wholesome atmosphere of his tents, passing through the dream of his ladder which reached into heaven, but still holding on to his staff on the ground. He joined Yaacov on the night when he escaped alone across the Jordan River, he was with him during his harsh labor in the fields of Choron and his troubles with Lavan and Eisav, he joined Yaacov for the tortured path of the sale of Yosef which led to moving to live in Egypt, encouraged by the promise, "I will raise you up from there" [Bereishit 46:4]. (Source: "Ner Lamaor")

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Why does the story of the spies follow the story of Miriam? The Midrash, as quoted by Rashi, explains that the spies, who were guilty of speaking lashon hora, should have learned from Miriam that the consequences of this sin of the tongue are quite severe. Is this, then, just a story of lashon hora? Is this the essence and extent of the sin of the ten spies? Wasn't their sin much more serious than mere gossip mongering or slander? Wasn't their sin a clear violation

of faith and trust in the G-d who redeemed the nation from the servitude of Egypt? These spies heretically questioned whether or not to follow G-d into the "promised land" and seemed to actually question His ability to lead them in the conquest of this land. After all the miracles of Egypt, the splitting of the sea, the water from the rock, the manna - after having stood themselves at Mt. Sinai - they still questioned G-d. It is for this terrible sin that an entire nation was sentenced to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Yet, the rabbis attribute this sin, not as much to a breach of faith, but rather as a sin of lashon hora.

If someone would commit a truly grievous sin such as murder or idolatry while speaking lashon hora would we even mention the lashon hora they said? Of course not, because the sin of lashon hora would pale in comparison to the more serious crime. How, then, are we to understand the emphasis of lashon hora in the context of what are clearly much more serious transgressions? Another perplexing point regarding the connection of the sin of the ten spies to lashon hora is that this particular case of lashon hora was uttered against a land, not a person. The Torah states (BaMidbar 14:36, 37) that they uttered a "slandering report against the land". Did the earth of Canaan turn white from embarrassment? Did its mountains blush? Why cite an inanimate victim for the slings and arrows of their tongues?

The key to understanding Chazal's (sages) great wisdom and deep insight in this matter is to first define the essence of the sin of lashon hora. One is tempted to define lashon hora by the damage it causes to an individual or to society. It can do terrible damage to people. It can cause great embarrassment. It can ruin livelihoods, break up friendships, and destroy marriages. It can destroy shuls and schools and tear communities apart. But these terrible consequences, although compounding the severity of the transgression, are not the essence of the sin. The sin of lashon hora goes much deeper within the human soul and represents man's eternal struggle to choose between good and evil, to choose between being a builder or a destroyer.

Unfortunately, there exists a primal need within every human being to destroy what is not his, and, sometimes, even what is his. There is an evil inclination within every human, symbolized by the snake of Eden, to see bad in others and to derive pleasure from such observation. This worst of all middot (attributes), the need to destroy with our tongue, has been the cause of much of mankind's shortcomings. This explains how one can be guilty of lashon hora spoken about an inanimate object such as a land. Since this is primarily a sin of middot, it makes no difference if man's destructive evil tongue is aimed at another human being or at an object, such as a land. The indication of the presence of the snake within the human soul is the same. The reason the rabbis connect the sin of the ten

spies to lashon hora is not as much a description of the sin as it is an explanation of the source of the sin. Chazal have a serious question with which to deal in explaining this Parasha. How is it possible that ten great leaders, who stood at Mt. Sinai and witnessed so many other miracles, can be guilty of such an obvious breach of faith and trust? Do we really understand how people like these can suddenly turn around and question G-d's ability to lead them into the land?

An understanding of lashon hora provides Chazal with both the explanation and the basis for the moral lesson to be learned by all future generations. Sin is the result of bad middot and these men who did achieve greatness in their lifetime, and were most definitely considered tzaddikim, were nonetheless guilty of this primal sin of the bad middah of lashon hora. This middah perverted their objectivity, clouded their perspective, and enabled them to rationalize and justify what is for the objective observer an incomprehensible expression of a lack of faith in the Creator. There can be no other explanation for such blatant heresy on the part of such people if not for their obvious inability to see the good and their disposition for focusing on the bad. Why did Yehoshua and Caleb interpret everything for the good while the others understood those very same observations as something negative? Large fruit was a good sign for the two while it was a bad sign for the ten. The pre-occupation of the people with funerals was seen by the two as G-d's helpful intervention, distracting the Canaanites from noticing the foreigners in their midst, while the ten interpreted these same events as a deficiency within the land. Chazal teach us that it was Yehoshua and Caleb's middah of lashon tov which allowed them to see the good while the others' middah of lashon hora provided them with the bias to see the bad. Their sin was clearly one of breach of faith, but the cause of this breach was their bad attribute of lashon hora.

It is interesting to note that the Rambam's placement of the laws of lashon hora is in Hilchot De'ot (ch. 7), the laws of human attributes, rather than in his section on civil law (Mechira 14:13) where he does include examples of verbal damages.

When the Torah in Beresheit describes the Creator blowing the "living spirit" into Adam, the Targum translates "living spirit" as "spirit of speech". Indeed, it is this ability to speak which separates Man from the animal kingdom and indicates the presence of a holy soul, a neshama. Lashon hora may seem not as serious as other transgressions, but, of all the sins, it is the one which is a direct crime of the spirit, not of the flesh. It is the most direct affront to our neshama because it abuses the power of speech which is a force of the neshama. It may seem minor and trivial to us, but not to our teachers. They saw this sin as the ultimate blemish on one's soul and the cause behind the spiritual downfall of the ten spies. © 2005 National Council of Young Israel