

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Summarized by Shaul Barth/Translated by Kaeren Fish

The lion's share of our parasha is devoted to the sin of the spies and its effects and ramifications.

However, near the end of the parasha we find a series of halakhic units, including the details of the libation offerings, the separation of challa, and the sin offerings brought in the case of unwitting idolatry. Ramban explains why these units appear specifically here, following the sin of the spies:

Having promised that the younger generation would come to the land, [G-d] conveyed to them the rest of the sacrificial laws, namely, that they should offer libation offerings when they come to the land. Perhaps this was [conveyed to them] at this point to comfort them and to reassure them, for they were despairing, saying: "Who knows what will happen in all that time, until forty years are over? What if the younger generation, too, will sin?" Therefore G-d saw fit to comfort them, for by commanding them as to the commandments that apply in the land [of Israel], He was reassuring them that it was revealed to Him that they would come and possess the land. (15:2)

Ramban explains that Moshe chose to convey these parashot to Bnei Yisrael specifically at this time, in order to comfort and encourage them. Moshe taught them some of the commandments related to the land, in order to reassure them:

You will indeed die in the desert, but your children will enter the land and will merit to offer libation offerings and to separate challa. There is some light at the end of the tunnel; there is a future towards which you can hope and aspire.

At first glance, this would appear to provide only partial comfort. There is no real reassurance here for the older generation; all that is promised to them is that the younger generation will enjoy a better fate. In general, we are concerned not only with the future, but also with the present. It is not sufficient for a religious

person to think about the special existence that awaits him in the World to Come; he must also ask himself every day to what measure he has succeeded that day in coming closer to G-d. A person must aspire to constant progress in his Divine service; he should not nonchalantly rely on the fact that, ultimately, his spiritual achievements will be deemed worthy of reward.

What, then, of Moshe's words of encouragement, which seem to pertain only to the future? Do they perhaps also contain some measure of comfort and consolation to the generation that is doomed to die in the desert?

Every time I reach parashat Shelach, I am struck anew by Moshe's words. Just a moment ago, Moshe announced to Bnei Yisrael that they will die out in the desert-and already he presents them with commandments that are meant to be fulfilled only in the land, as though there is no significance at all to the question of whether his audience will ever actually perform these commandments. Simply learning and internalizing Torah imbues a person with special power-even if the subject of his study is not something that he is ever going to be able to fulfill. The Torah is G-d's word; it consoles man and brings him relief, whether he is able to perform it or not.

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 17a) discusses the special severity of the sin of minut, heresy. It then goes on to assert that if one is excessively devoted to a particular sin, it is like minut. Mori ve-rabbi Harav Yitzchak Hutner zt"l explained that the very fact that a person thinks that he cannot live without a certain experience, and that that is what gives him the power to go on-that itself is heresy. A person is entitled to engage in all kinds of things, and to enjoy his involvement in them, but under no circumstances may he allow himself to cleave to them and to think that it is they that allow him to live. A person must cleave only to G-d. Only G-d should be a person's support and comfort when all appears lost: "Were it not for the Torah in which I delighted, I would have died in my affliction" (Tehillim 119:92).

The parashot that appear after the sin of the spies, then, present a dual comfort. First, there is the promise that the younger generation will enter the land. Second, the very fact that Bnei Yisrael are now engaged in these halakhic issues is itself a consolation and source of encouragement- even if the current

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generation will never merit to fulfill them. Though the current generation would not enter the land, their engagement in Torah was itself ennobling and purifying. *[This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Shelach 5763 (2003).]*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The refusal of the Israelites to conquer the land of Israel as a result of the report of the Scouts is considered by the Sages of the Talmud to have been the worst transgression in the Bible.

And remember that those scouts, who were all princes of their respective tribes, had been part of a bedraggled, besmirched and beaten-down collection of slave laborers who stood up to the mighty empire of Egypt-and emerged victorious! Those leaders of this newly formed and emergent nation had just seen with their eyes the Divine Might unleashed against the Egyptian totalitarian despot and his immoral, slavery-based society, from the Nile River having been turned into blood to the splitting of the Reed Sea resulting in the drowning of the entire Egyptian cavalry. After such an unrivalled military success, how could they have concluded that it would now be impossible to conquer the land?

Furthermore, G-d Himself had told them-back when He had first promised to extricate them from Egypt-that "I shall bring you to the land which I lifted My hand in oath to give to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and which I shall give to you as an everlasting inheritance for your descendants..." (Exodus 6:5). At the very least, the Egyptian experience should have taught them that even the weakest of peoples derives unimaginable strength when its chief Commander is the Almighty Himself! To be alone with G-d is always to be with a majority of one!

The Bibles' unique usage of specific verb forms to create ideational connections provides what I believe to be the solution to our problem regarding the scouts of 4000 years ago, as well as to our national problem today. The unique verb form used in this Biblical context for "to scout" is the Hebrew "tur": "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'send forth for yourself men who will scout out the land of Canaan which I am giving to the children of Israel' (Shelah...anashim vayaturu-

Numbers 12:2)." Generally, the Hebrew verb for reconnaissance or scouting out is hafer or even more often ragol (see for example Deut. 1:22,24 and Gen. 42:9,14,15). Specifically in reference to this story of the Princes do we find the usage of "tur"-and no less than twelve times, paralleling the twelve tribal princes-scouts (see R. Elhanan Samet, Studies on the Weekly Biblical Portions, p.190).

Moreover, our Biblical reading of Shelah concludes with what appears to be a misplaced commandment of the ritual fringes (tzitzit), which seems to have no connection whatsoever to the sin of the scouts. Nevertheless, the same usage of the verb form tur appears: "You shall look at them (the ritual fringes)... and you shall not scout out (taturu, spy out, presumably sinful objects of lust) after (the stirrings of) your heart and your eyes which you whore after, in order that you shall remember and perform all of My commandments (Numbers 16:39,40).

Additionally, the verb form "u'r'eetem", you (plural) shall see or look upon, appears three times in the Pentateuch, and two of those three are in our Biblical portion of Shelah: the first in the instructions Moses gives the scouts: "You shall see (or look upon) the land, as to which qualities it contains" (Numbers 13:18), and the second in the passage of the ritual fringes, "You shall see (look upon) the fringes and remember all the commandments of the Lord" (Numbers 15:39).

Once again, we see a fascinating linguistic parallel between the incident of the sin of the scouts and the commandment of ritual fringes. Obviously these must be a connection between these two passages, but what is it?

Both passages are dealing with the sense perception of sight, and with the underlying question as to whether seeing is merely an ocular and therefore an objective exercise-as in "seeing is believing"-or whether one's subjective attitudes and preferences color those objects or events which we perceive and significantly influence our perception of them. A case in point is the nature of the inhabitants of Canaan whom the scouts observed, as the Bible records: "And all of the people whom we saw on it (the land) were people of great dimensions. We saw there the giants...And so one individual (scout) said to the other, 'Let us make a (new) leader and return to Egypt' (Numbers 13:32, 14:4) However only one generation later, when Joshua, Moses' successor, does conquer the Land of Canaan with the Israelites, he also sends out scouts who were guarded and hidden by Rachab, and who saw the very same people: "And she (Rachab) said to the men, 'I know that the Lord is giving this land to you and that fear of you has fallen upon us; all of the inhabitants of the land are melting before you'" (Joshua 2:9).

We even declare in Moses' song at the Reed Sea, "A trembling fear grasped the inhabitants of

Philistine". Will the real nature of the inhabitants of Canaan express itself?

The truth is that just as "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", that is, in the subjective sight of the individual, so is everything else. Our Torah portion actually explains what lay behind the exaggerated report of the scouts concerning the physical prowess of the Canaanites: "We were like grasshoppers in our (own) eyes, so that was how we appeared in their eyes" (Numbers 13:33). The real sin of the scouts actually is to be found in the verse; They lost their sense of Divine election, they stopped believing in themselves and in the vital significance of their mission. Once they saw themselves as grasshoppers, that's how the "giant" enemy saw them as well!

There is a well-known Mishnah in Avot (Ethics of the fathers) which says it all: "Turn (the Bible) over and over again, for everything is in it. And with it shall you look..."

So did Rav Mendelovitz, the head-master of the Torah VeDaah Academy translate the passage: one must look out at the world with Torah eye-glasses, and view every person and phenomenon with a Torah outlook. It is incorrect to say that seeing is believing, it is more correct to say that believing is seeing, since our beliefs profoundly affect our visual perceptions. Did the Reed Sea Split, or was the low tides of the "strong easterly wind" responsible for the safe crossing of the Israelites? Was the Six Day War a Divinely wrought miracle or rather a function of the dismally poor military capacity of the Arab world? Are we Israelis occupying someone else's land by right of our strength or are we inhabiting areas which have been ours for the past 4000 years and were guaranteed in the Treaty of Versailles by the strength of our right? It all depends upon how we view history, how we view ourselves, and how we view the Divine Covenant! © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rev Bernard Koschland

A James Bond spy yarn scenario is quite different to the expedition of Moses' 12 good and true men (Rashi), which raises more questions than can be answered fully in this Insight. Why are two words used for "spying"-latur (Bemidbar) and l'ragel with its derivative noun meraglim (Devarim)? Why is the whole event repeated, or just referred to, 6 times, Devarim (three times), Joshua, Ezekiel (a hint) and Psalm 95, lechu neran'na, which represents the 1st day of the week? Why, when the story is repeated in Deuteronomy, e.g. chapter 1, are there differences? Who suggested the mission? Did G-d instruct or merely approve Moses' decision? How do the later parts of the Sidrah fit together- the Mitzvot hateluyot ba'arets

(Mitzvot dependent on the land), the breach of the Sabbath and Zizit?

Latur and l'ragel express different concepts. Latur means to look for a place that is better than the current one, but by peaceful means, whereas l'ragel implies the intention of military conquest (commentaries of Haamek Davar and Malbim). Latur of the spies links with Zizit, the conclusion of the Sidrah; velo taturu, not to go after one's heart and eyes. We are warned that other's fields may look greener than ours, that society around us may offer more pleasant ways to follow. No, says the Torah, by reminding us to observe the Mitzvot, of which the actual fringes of the Zizit are a visible reminder at all times.

The six fold repetition of the expedition fills in further details, as explained by the Talmud: "The Torah is poor in one place and rich in another" (J.Rosh Hashanah 3:5), that is-the original is fleshed out in another place. Thus these differences in Devarim amplify from possibly a slightly different angle, since Moses finally summarises the experiences of past events.

The Torah is somewhat ambivalent about who originated the request for spies, seeing that G-d had promised a land flowing with milk and honey. Shelach lecha, send spies if you think so, but I (G-d) do not command you; send them if you wish. (Rashi) Yet the Midrash on Devarim states: "I, Moses, am not suggesting spies, but it comes from G-d." (Sifrei) The people were fed up, as shown in last week's Sidrah; Moses therefore agreed to their request as appeasement but sought the approval of G-d.

After the report of the 10 spies, and the disastrous outcomes, the people made a vain attempt-vayapilu-to force an entry into Eretz Yisrael, but were utterly defeated. Had they listened to Joshua and Caleb, then that generation would have been able to fulfil the Mitzvot dependent on the Land. The wood gatherer also went his own way in going against Divine commands regarding the Shabbat. Hence the final paragraph on Zizit demands obedience to the Mitzvot, and that like with the Exodus, G-d's protection is always with us, IF we obey His commandments, which become compulsory from Bar Mitzvah, as my grandson Adam has become today.

THE HAFTARAH

by Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Finchley Synagogue

The two spy stories that are featured in today's Sidra and Haftarah tell us a lot about faith in Hashem and the disastrous consequences of its absence. The mission undertaken by the two spies sent by Joshua to Jericho, as recorded in our Haftarah, corrected the foolhardy and faithless endeavours of ten of the spies sent previously by Moses to the Land of Canaan.

In addition, we learn from these two texts how to adopt a general formula for success. When

contemplating the settlement of Canaan, Moses asked, "Should we do it?" His faith in Hashem should have given him the obvious answer and it ultimately came to him when Joshua and Calev reported back with a definitive "Yes". Joshua's question was, "We know that we will now conquer the land, but how are we going to do it?" His mission to Jericho served to answer this very question. After the spies reported back to him, he acted immediately in order to accomplish his goal.

So, our Sidra and Haftarah together present a formula for effective leadership and success. First, one should enquire: should it be done at all? If so, one should ask: how should it be done? And then, finally, go for it! As Joshua himself put it, *chazak ve'ematz-be strong and of good courage!* © 2006 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI LEVI COOPER

Where Will You Go for Community?

Why is the synagogue our locus of prayer? Is this always the ideal place for genuine meditation? A lonely mountaintop overlooking a stunning sunset as it reflects off of calm waters may be more spiritually uplifting. Synagogues and the societal norms they perpetuate may stifle our inner voice, as our focus is often diverted from earnest conversation with the Almighty. Despite the challenges, the sages insist on sincere intent during communal prayer.

Our sages place particular emphasis on the final word of the first verse of the Shema prayer - ehad (one): "Those who prolong the pronunciation of the word ehad have their days and years prolonged" (B. Berachot 13b; Y. Berachot 4a).

The Talmud elucidates the procedure for protracting the articulation of the word ehad: The final letter of the word - dalet - should be drawn out while intoning the word. Extending the final letter should not be done at the expense of the middle letter - het - which need not be hurried. Stretching out this final word of the opening line of Shema provides ample opportunity to ponder the oneness and omnipresence of the Almighty and to meditate on the aspiration for a time when all will recognize G-d's unity (Semak, 13th century, France).

The common pronunciation of the letter dalet makes it difficult to lengthen its articulation. Thus halachic authorities caution against adding an extra vowel to give the dalet a longer sound - as in e-ha- de - adding that the meditation should be protracted, not the articulation of the word (Rabbi Shneur Zalman Lyady, 18th-19th century, Byelorussia).

The Yemenite tradition preserves a different articulation of this consonant. This culture pronounces the dalet as a hard th as in the word this. Hence

Yemenites are able to elongate the final word with the fricative th-th-th-th until they run out of breath.

The Talmud proceeds with an example of a sage who followed this rabbinic directive by protracting the dalet as he articulated the word ehad, but the anecdote highlights the limitations of this instruction. Rabbi Yirmiya was sitting before his teacher, Rabbi Zeira, while reciting the Shema. Rabbi Zeira saw that his disciple was excessively prolonging the pronunciation of the final word of Shema. The master turned to the disciple: "Once you have acknowledged G-d's rule over the heavens above and the earth below and the four directions, no more is required."

What was Rabbi Yirmiya's mistake? Surely intense meditation on the unity of the Almighty cannot be faulted! In light of the rabbinic dictate we would have expected Rabbi Zeira to praise his student for his heartfelt recitation of this quintessential prayer.

Faced with this twist in the flow of the passage, one commentator opines that Rabbi Zeira did not approve of Rabbi Yirmiya falling behind the congregation (Maharsha, 16th-17th centuries, Poland). The congregation was about to continue to the silent Amida prayer, and Rabbi Zeira chastised his pupil for lengthening his own personal prayer at the expense of communal participation. This highlights an important aspect of synagogue prayer - being part of a community. Indeed, the synagogue experience is not just about prayer, it is also about community.

There are synagogues that boldly display signs cautioning worshipers: "If you come here to talk, where will you go to pray?" Entering the synagogue, one could say, tongue-in-cheek: "Prayer? I can pray at home; I come here to talk!" While no one would seriously advocate chatting during services, nor earnestly suggest that the synagogue is the locale for catching up with friends and discussing current events instead of praying, the role of the synagogue as a community center should not be overlooked. The Hebrew term for the synagogue - beit kneset (the house of gathering) - indicates that this institution is more than just a place for prayer; it is a meeting place for the community. In reality, we go to the beit kneset to commune with G-d, but we also go to commune with our fellow worshipers.

Stressing the importance of communal prayer, the Talmud relates how the sage Rabbi Yitzhak inquired about the whereabouts of Rav Nahman: "Why have you not been coming to the synagogue to pray with the congregation?" Rav Nahman responded saying he was too weak to attend the service.

Rabbi Yitzhak offered to assemble a quorum in the home of the infirm scholar so that he could pray with a congregation. Rav Nahman balked at the offer, saying that he was bothered by the prospect of burdening people.

Rabbi Yitzhak was not discouraged: "Why don't you ask a messenger to inform you when the

congregation is worshipping so that you can pray at the same time?" Seeing that his colleague was not to be deterred and perhaps somewhat puzzled, Rav Nahman asked: "Why are you being so adamant?" At this point Rabbi Yitzhak relayed a rabbinic tradition acclaiming the time of communal prayer. The Talmudic passage continues extolling the virtues of communal prayer (B. Berachot 7b-8a).

A cursory look at the prayers reveals that almost the entire service is said in the plural. Our prayers were not composed to be uttered in a cloister; they were designed to be recited by a group coming together to connect with the Almighty. Our desires are phrased as requests for the well-being and improvement of the whole community, not as self-centered wishes for our own betterment. Moreover, we join a community of worshipers so that our prayers will be accepted on communal merit, even if as individuals we may not have earned favored status.

Looking beyond our own experience, our presence in the synagogue may create the conditions necessary for our peers' heartfelt prayer and facilitate the spiritual journey of others.

One hassidic master asserted: The worst prayer in a congregation is better than the best prayer alone (Rabbi Menahem Nahum of Stefanesti, 19th century, Romania).

Intent concentration on the oneness of G-d is unquestionably laudable and indeed the hub of prayer. Awareness of our fellow worshipers and attentiveness to their needs, however, is a parallel focal point of the *beit kneset*.

Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in *The Jerusalem Post Up Front Magazine*. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, *Brachot*, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts. © 2006 Rabbi L Cooper. *Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

This week's Torah portion discusses methods of atoning for sins "beshogeg," without evil intent, both for the entire community—"And if you make a mistake" [Bamidbar 15:22-26] -- and for an individual—"If a single soul sins unintentionally" [15:27-31]. This passage is a repetition of the description of the Chatat sacrifice, mentioned in the book of Vayikra, which is also concerned with an unintentional sin of the community—"If the whole community of Yisrael makes

a mistake" [Vayikra 4:13-21] -- and of an individual—"If one soul sins unintentionally" [4:27-35]. However, the two passages for an entire community are very different. In Vayikra, the community is commanded to offer a bull as a Chatat sacrifice, while in this week's Torah portion the command is to bring a bull as an Olah sacrifice and a goat as a Chatat. How can this difference be explained?

Rashi, following the sages, explains that this week's portion is referring to the sin of idol worship. Other commentators have suggested different explanations, following the simple interpretation of the passages. Ibn Ezra writes that Vayikra is concerned with actively doing a sin, while this week's portion is concerned with refraining from observing a positive mitzva. The Ramban notes that this week's portion is "unclear," and that it refers to people who do not observe any of the commandments, for various reasons, including a mistaken world outlook. (This approach, which implies that a mistaken world outlook can be viewed as an unintentional sin, is very important, but this cannot be expanded in a short article.)

Perhaps the difference between the two passages stems not from different types of sin but from two ways of looking at an unintentional sin. In Vayikra, the Torah is concerned with the harm that a sin does to the Tabernacle, since it causes the Tabernacle and the Altar to be unclean. In Vayikra, the main difference between a community and an individual is that for a communal sin, which causes greater damage than an individual sin, blood is sprinkled on the curtain and the incense altar in the Tabernacle, while for an individual sin, which is not as serious, blood is "only" sprinkled on the corners of the Altar of the Olah, outside the boundaries of the Tent of Meeting.

This week's portion is not concerned with this issue, and in fact the Tabernacle and the way to purify it are not mentioned at all. The Torah implies that the sacrifice is needed in order to renew the link between the sinners and the Almighty and in order to atone for the sin. In this case, the difference between the community and an individual is seen in the number and the size of the sacrifices. The community brings a bull as an Olah and a goat as a Chatat, while an individual brings a goat. Thus, while in Vayikra the process of atonement is mainly based on sprinkling the sacrificial blood, in this week's portion the main atonement is the sacrifice itself. "And the Kohen will atone for the entire community of Bnei Yisrael, and they will be forgiven, for it was unintentional, and they have brought their sacrifice to G-d, and their Chatat for their mistake" [Bamidbar 15:25].

Halachically, the sages ruled that the special laws in this week's portion are indeed relevant only for an unintentional sin of idol worship. We can say that the sages have established that the sin of idol worship

requires two levels of atonement—both cleansing the Tabernacle and also renewing the direct link between the sinner and the Almighty.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

When someone loves and appreciates someone or something and finds that others fail to share that feeling as strongly, one can experience a sense of disappointment and frustration. How can others be so blind and foolish not to see what one sees in that person or object? Moshe loves the people of Israel and the Land of Israel. His love for both is so great that it shuts out the reality of human frailties, deviousness and selfishness that are omnipresent in human societies, even great societies such as the generation of the desert- the dor hamidbar. He is convinced that the spies that he now sends to bring back a report regarding the Land of Israel will see it through his eyes of longing, love and faith.

They will certainly be enthusiastic in their praise of the land, its luscious fruits and stark scenery. They will appreciate G-d's gift of that land to His people and be everlastingly grateful to tread upon the soil that their patriarchs and matriarchs walked upon. Moshe is certain of this, for otherwise he would not have allowed the spying mission to take place.

But when disaster strikes and the spies' report regarding the Land of Israel is tinged with doubt, criticism and pessimism, Moshe is shocked, amazed and disheartened. His disappointment is not limited to the contents of the report itself but rather his disillusionment is even more profound over the inability of the spies to see things as he sees them. Their blindness to the truth outweighs even their pettiness, selfishness and evil in forming such a negative report regarding G-d's great gift to the Jewish people - the Land of Israel.

Over the long run of Jewish history there have been two parallel yet contradictory strains in Jewish society. One powerful strain was the undying love and longing for the Land of Israel. In the end, the secular Zionists were not willing to trade the Land of Israel for Uganda. The State of Israel arose in the Land of Israel because Jews did not allow themselves to forget Zion and Jerusalem, even for a moment. The right hands of many tyrants and empires have failed over the centuries but the Jewish loyalty to the Land of Israel never faltered or wavered.

These Jewish feelings were in line with Moshe's view of the Land of Israel. But there was and is another strain of attitude in the Jewish world that sees the Land of Israel - and currently the State of Israel - as the problem and not the solution in the Jewish world. The words of Rabbi Meir Simcha Cohen in Meshech Chachma continually ring in my ears -

"Woe to those who substitute in their thoughts Berlin for Jerusalem!"

On the two extremes of the spectrum of Jewish society there exist the spiritual heirs of the spies. They see no good in the Land, the State and in effect the people who live in Zion and Jerusalem. Better in Egypt, the spies said. But it was never better in Egypt and it is this lie, perhaps more than any other statement that challenges Moshe's love of Israel to its very core. Well, unfortunately, 'better in Egypt' still exists in the Jewish world today. Only by seeing things through the eyes of Moshe can we overcome this enemy within our midst. © 2006 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 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, Hilkhoh 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 impacted 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. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

“**A**fter 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? G-d 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 G-d'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 G-d:

If the Israelites are destroyed by G-d 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 G-d's name.

Moses appealed to G-d'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 G-d to forgive the people their sin.

Rashi is telling us that when G-d 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 G-d forgave only in accordance with that part of Moses' plea that referred to the chilul Hashem which would result if G-d didn't bring the people Israel into the Land of Canaan. G-d's forgiveness relates to the fact that, in spite of their sin, the nation of Israel—the next generation—will be brought by G-d 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. G-d 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?

Hint: Read these verses carefully.

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 G-d'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 G-d'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 G-d 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.)

G-d 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 G-d's "morality."

The Psalmist says (25:8): "Good and upright is G-d, 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 G-d'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.

G-d 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. © 2006 Dr. Avigdor Bonchek & Project Genesis

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the entire congregation talked of stoning them; and the honor of G-d appeared in the Tent of Meeting (i.e. the Mishkan) to all of the Children of Israel" (Bamidbar 14:10). After Yehoshua and Kaleiv tried to counter the report of the others sent to investigate the Promised Land, we are told that not only was their argument rejected, but it was followed by talk of a lynching. This seems to have brought about some kind of "revelation," as G-d's honor (or glory) became visible in the Mishkan. Which leads to several questions.

For one thing, isn't a divine revelation the result of becoming closer to G-d, as opposed to angering Him? Secondly, wasn't G-d's honor always in the Mishkan when the nation wasn't traveling (see 9:16)? How could our verse imply that only as a result of what was going on did G-d descend (as it were) into the Mishkan?

Rashi explains "G-d's honor appearing in the Mishkan" to mean that "the Anan (cloud) descended there." This doesn't really answer our questions, but the commentators understand Rashi to be referring to what our sages say (in numerous Midrashim), that the Anan pillar descended in order to intercept the stones that were being hurled (according to Rashi at Yehoshua and Kaleiv, while according to most Midrashim at Moshe and Aharon). However, we would have expected Rashi to tell us this part as well, rather than just telling us that the Anan descended without telling us why. Besides, the Sefer Hazikaron brings an alternate version of Rashi that, after first saying that the Anan descended there, quotes the Midrash that it was Moshe and Aharon who were the target, and that the

Anan absorbed the stones thrown at them. It would seem, then, that the first explanation must mean something else.

There is a remarkable similarity between the way G-d reacted to the sin of the scouts (14:12) and how He reacted to the sin of the golden calf (Shemos 32:10), as in both cases He threatened to wipe out the entire nation and start again from Moshe. And both times Moshe saves the nation through (similar) prayers. We know that as a consequence of the golden calf, the Ananim left, only to return when the nation started to build the Mishkan (Vilna Gaon's commentary on Shir Hashirim 1:4, commonly used to explain why Succos begins in the 15th of Tishray). We might have expected a similar consequence by the spies, yet we see that the Anan was not only still around, but made a special appearance! Why would one cause the Ananim to leave, while the other seems to have had the opposite effect?

Last week* I suggested that the Anan that contained the Shechinah (divine presence) spread out over the entire nation. I based this primarily on the fact that Chazal (in numerous places, including the Sifray Zuta) tell us that the "Amud heAnan" (Anan pillar) would extend behind any individual that left the camp. It wasn't the Anan on that side that stretched to still encompass the individual, but the "Amud heAnan" that stretched above. If it would stretch in order to stay over each individual, it would seem obvious that it would already be covering the rest of the nation!

A further proof can be brought from Yisro's inability to enter the camp, thereby having to send a message to Moshe that he had arrived (Shemos 18:6, see Rashi). The Midrash Aggadah explains that Yisro couldn't enter because of the Ananim, so Moshe (and a multitude of others) went outside the Ananim to meet him. But how could they be outside the Ananim (where Yisro was) if the Ananim followed every individual? If it was only the Anan haShechinah that "stretched," it could have covered Moshe (et al) but not Yisro.

In any case, if, once the Mishkan was built, the Shechinah stayed despite subsequent sins, it would still seem unlikely that it would cover the entire nation when they were not fulfilling G-d's will. It is therefore possible that because of the sin of the scouts, and specifically when the nation wanted to attack Yehoshua and Kaleiv for countering their report, the Anan that had been covering the entire camp receded to only be in the Mishkan. Whereas until now they could see the Anan haShechinah above them wherever they were, now "G-d's honor was only visible over the Mishkan." Perhaps this is what Rashi meant when he said that "the Anan descended there," i.e. the Anan that had covered everyone had descended into the Mishkan.

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* www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/behaaloscha.pdf