

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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Cheit Hameraglim: Then & Now

by Rabbi Mordechai Willig

“It flows with milk and honey, but the people that dwell in the land is powerful and the cities are very greatly fortified” (Bamidbar 13:27, 28). This initial, factual report of the spies seems to be a proper fulfillment of their mission. What was their sin?

Perhaps the initial statement was not sinful. However, when Calev interjected, “We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we can surely do it” (ibid 30), the other spies responded, “We cannot ascend to that people, for it is too strong for us” (ibid 31). This was their sin.

The Shelah explains that the initial statement was the very point of their mission. Hashem wanted Am Yisroel to know that it was impossible to conquer Eretz Yisroel without divine assistance.

Indeed, in his parting message Moshe says, “Hear, Yisroel, you will cross the Jordan to drive out nations that are greater and mightier than you, cities that are great and fortified up to the heavens...you will know that Hashem, your G-d, He crosses before you, He will destroy them and He will subjugate them before you” (Devarim 9:13).

Thus, the purpose of the mission was to demonstrate that victory would be achieved only with Hashem's help. Calev, who believed, was sure they would prevail. The other spies responded that the enemy is too strong for us. Their lack of faith led Chazal to translate their words to mean that the enemy is too strong for Him (Rashi 13:31).

“What is the reason that the Torah begins with Braishis? Because, ‘the power of His acts he told to his people in order to give them the estate of nations’ (Tehillim 111:6). So that if the nations of the world will say to Yisroel, ‘You are bandits, for you have conquered the land of seven nations’, Yisroel will

respond, ‘The whole Earth belongs to Hashem. He created it and... he gave it to us’”-Rashi Braishis 1:1

Why can't every thief justify his theft in this manner? The Be'er Yosef answers that had Am Yisroel conquered Eretz Yisroel by natural means, the charge of “you are bandits” could not be refuted. However, since the conquest was clearly a result of divine intervention, and even our enemies recognized that, we are clearly entitled to the land.

Indeed, the spies exclaimed, “we were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes” (Bamidbar 13:33). Grasshoppers steal the grain of everyone (Rashi Bava Kamma 116b). Without belief in the divine promise of victory, the people did not merely reject Calev's advice not to fear (14:9-10), but also viewed themselves as thieves. As a result, the nations reached the same conclusion.

“All of the people we saw in the land were men of middos” (13:32). To buttress their subsequent claim of theft, the spies attributed good character traits, middos, to our enemies (Kli Yakar). Since they are just and righteous, we have no right to destroy them, and we will be vanquished. In reality, the Canaanites were the most perverted of all the nations (Rashi Vayikra 18:3). Precisely because of their wickedness Hashem drove them away (Devarim 9:5).

The spies ignored this fact to support their claim that conquering Eretz Yisroel is theft. This claim enabled them to refuse to fight the enemy they feared. This fear was due to a lack of belief in Hashem.

The sin of the spies led to a forty-year sojourn in the desert, and the death of the sinners there (Bamidbar 14:32-35). It was not until forty years elapsed that the lessons of the events of the first two years could be properly understood (Rashi, Devarim 29:6).

Exactly forty years ago, Hashem enabled the Israeli army to achieve a swift and stunning victory over powerful enemies and very greatly fortified positions. The conquest of huge swaths of land in six days was clearly a result of divine intervention.

This conclusion was reached not only by observant Jews. Even non-observant Jews understood, leading to a teshuva movement unprecedented in modern times. Even non-Jews attributed the incredible events to supernatural forces, stating, “No natural cause can explain this awesome phenomenon” (see, for example, Hamodia, 13 Sivan 5767, page B14).

Mazel tov to Yaffa & Tzvi Klugerman
on the birth of a baby boy!

תתגדלו לתורה לחופה ולמעשים טובים!

Love,

Yitz, Ruthie, Miriam, Dani, Eli & Leah

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The dire threat to the safety of Am Yisroel by enemies who threatened to kill us was suddenly lifted. The return to the Old City of Yerushalayim led to a spiritual euphoria unforgettable for those privileged to experience it firsthand. The triumph of a beleaguered people over vicious enemies by Hashem's grace united Am Yisroel. Everyone realized that Hashem had allowed us to conquer our ancestral homeland, which, as Rashi teaches, He gave us in the first place.

Even in the murderous cities of Chevron and Shechem our enemies covered at our men's presence. Israelis traveled Judea, Samaria, and Gaza fearlessly.

Alas, forty years later all this has changed. We fear our enemies. Some Israelis view our conquest as theft, and, as then, consider the Palestinians just and righteous, ignoring their murderous acts. Even observant, believing Jews have good reason to fear. After all, we have no divine guarantee of our security. Yet we must unabashedly state, to others as well as to ourselves, our belief in our Biblical right to Eretz Yisroel. And we dare not ignore the wickedness of our implacable foes.

Moreover, our tradition teaches that our conquest of Eretz Yisroel will continue uninterrupted until the messianic era (see Rashi Eicha 4:22 and "Double Consolation" http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2004/moadim/rwil_nachamu.html). Setbacks may be part of the redemptive process (see Shir Hashirim Rabba 2:9(3)). But patience, based on absolute certainty that we will prevail, is critical both religiously and strategically.

We do not know when or how we will prevail, but we echo Calev, who rejected the spies of then, as we reject today's pessimists and post-Zionists and explain, "We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we can surely do it." © 2007 The TorahWeb Foundation

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!"

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 Chushite 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. © 2007 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Even though the central theme of this week's Torah reading seems to be the story of the ill-fated mission of the spies that Moshe sends to gather intelligence regarding the Land of Israel, there are other important topics in the Torah reading as well. The Torah teaches us that it is possible that all of Israel, including its leaders and scholars, can make a mistake regarding matters of ritual. The Torah provides antidote and forgiveness for this national oversight by the means of a specific sacrifice that was to be brought in the Temple as a forgiveness offering.

The entire subject, with all of its technicalities and halachic requirements, is discussed in detail in the Talmud in mesechet Horayot. I will not enter into these details here. But I wish to concentrate on the main theme of this subject itself - namely that national errors and mistakes are part of the human story. One would think that the Torah and its scholars, having the best of intentions and foresight, would be immune from making such errors of judgment. But the Torah warns us that this is not the case.

All human beings, even the greatest and most knowledgeable, are subject to error and fault. In fact, the Torah goes out of its way to praise those leaders who recognize their errors and attempt to atone for them. The Torah records that even Moshe, the greatest of all humans and scholars, admitted error regarding

his opinion in the instance of the requirements of mourning after the death of Aharon's two sons. And Rashi states that Moshe's greatness was that he was not ashamed to admit his mistake. It is the rare leader that can emulate Moshe in this regard.

There is unfortunately no Temple rebuilt yet in our days and thus the technical aspects of this Torah law regarding mistakes that sweep the entire Jewish people are not practically relevant. But the moral and spirit of the law of national error remains cogent and vital for all of us today. Unfortunately, the past centuries are witness to great national errors of the Jewish people. Popularity rarely is wisdom and wishful thinking never matches reality. One would therefore think that by now the Jewish people would recognize and admit their national errors.

Marxism, secularism, nationalism per se, assimilation and self-ghettoization all have had their day. A realistic view of our current situation, politically, spiritually and physically, would lead the logical and honest person to say that we have lost our way and have committed grievous and dangerous errors. But no one is willing to easily confess that this is the case. Thus the same old mistaken mantras and policies are pursued as though nothing has really happened to change our collective minds and beliefs for the better.

A people that remain blind to its past errors will undoubtedly repeat them. Usually this leads to sad if not even tragic consequences. The lesson of the Torah reading is that human beings err, that they need to recognize and react to this and seek redress spiritually and practically to prevent further error and likely disaster. I think that this is the connection of this subject to that of the spies in the Torah reading of the week. Errors should be eliminated not justified and continued.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Who were the real culprits in the story of the scouts, and what-and why-was the nature of their transgression? That sin reverberates throughout the generations of Jewish history, with the night in which the entire congregation lifted up their voices and wept upon hearing the scouts' reportage of a land which devours its inhabitants, indigenous people whose physical dimensions are enormous" (Numbers 14:1) having been identified as the ninth day of the month of Av, the traditional date of Jewish destruction, exile and persecution. Apparently G-d faults the entire nation since virtually that entire generation of Israelites must suffer the penalty for the transgression (the only male exceptions being Joshua and Calab) by their

having been doomed to die in the desert; (Numbers 14:29,30); but why blame the nation for G-d's command to scout out the land (Numbers 13:1,2), and for Moses' immediate acquiescence to carry out that command (13:17)?

Did not G-d as well as Moses understand the inherent dangers of sending out an advance team to assess the desirability and feasibility of their project? Everyone understands that a feasibility study may well result in rejecting the plan before it begins! And here, according to our text in Numbers (13:1,2), it is G-d who suggests the team of scouts in the first place?!

The classical commentary Rashi immediately alerts us to the fact that in the Book of Deuteronomy, wherein Moses recounts the episode of the scouts, the genesis of the idea emanates not from G-d, but rather from the people themselves: "All of you came near to me and said, 'let us send out men in front of us; let them investigate (vayahperu) the land for us and bring back to us a statement; the path from which we ought enter, and the cities which we ought come into' (Deut. 1:22). From Rashi's perspective, the Divine statement at the outset of our Torah reading must be understood to have come after the people insisted on the advance team, and is actually taking issue with it: "Send in accordance with your will (lecha) the men...," as far I (G-d) am concerned, I have no interest in such a mission!

The Ramban disagrees with Rashi's interpretation here, insisting that it was quite understandable-and even desirable- that a reconnaissance mission be sent out in order to discover the best way to approach the land they wish to conquer, and which cities to attempt to take in their initial attack. Such request can hardly be called sinful.

Building on the Ramban (as well as on an interpretation of my rebbe Rav J.B. Soloeitchik ztz"l), I would suggest a different meaning of our opening verse. The peoples' request was legitimate, but it was also ambiguous. They ask for an advance team to "investigate (vayahperu) the land and bring back a report (davar)" continuing with a request for information regarding the best passage of entry and the initial cities of conquest; does their latter request merely elucidate the meaning of their initial words, or are they first requesting an investigation of the land itself (its topography, its fertility, its fortifications and the nature of its inhabitant) and are then asking for a "statement" as to the worthwhileness and feasibility of the entire project? Moses, when he carefully instructs them as to what to look for, clearly understands their mission to be solely one of reconnaissance investigation (Numbers 13:16-20); this mandate had nothing to do with assessing the worthwhileness or feasibility of a project commanded, and desired for us, by the Almighty!

G-d, in His command to Moses in the beginning of our portion, goes one step further: He uses a totally

different-and unique-verb to describe their mission: vayateru. Rav Elhanan Samet, in his magnificent work on the Biblical portions, teaches that the verb tur appears no less than twelve times in our portion, paralleling the twelve tribes and the twelve scouts; he likewise takes the verb to mean to show the way, to be the scout leader discovering and uncovering the path to G-d's Divine resting place (Numbers 10:13 in reference to the ark of the Divine Covenant, which travels a three day distance in front of the Israelites to discover-investigate-for them a resting place, menuchah; Dt. 1:29-33, and Ezekiel 20:6, where the resting place to be discovered is clearly the land of Israel: "on that day I lifted up my hand to them (in oath) to take them out of the land of Egypt to the land which I investigated-or discovered-tarti, for them, the land flowing with milk and honey, a hart (tsvi) for all the lands").

G-d is telling Moses that this must be more than a reconnaissance mission, but not in the sense of a feasibility study, but rather a faithfulness study. The advance team with their report must inspire the nation to become emotionally, spiritually and intellectually connected to the land of Israel before they even get there; they must be moved and directed to Israel with passionate love just as the sinner is moved and directed to the prostitute with passionate lust (Numbers 14:33). Yes, Moses tells them that they must "look at the land, what it is" (13:18). But what they must see when they look is G-d, and G-d's covenant. And if they see G-d, they look upon the inhabitants of the land with a different perspective, a different pair of eye-glasses. If only the Israelites had understood that the land of Israel was to be given to the people of Israel in order for them to fulfill the Divine mission in the world, then they would have seen themselves as giants-G-d's emissaries-and the Canaanites as grasshoppers!

Now it becomes eminently clear why our Biblical reading ends with the portion of tzitzit, the white and blue ritual fringes which the observant Jew must appendage to his four-cornered garments, "in order that he remember the commandments and not direct himself towards nor lust after-taturu-his heart and eyes. Our clothing expresses our image to the world, as human beings rather than animals, our persona garbed in the picture of ourselves we wish to present to those around us. Look at your garb, look at the fringes on the corners of your garb, look at how you appear to the world and what does G-d want you to see? The blue and white of the heavens, "like the making of the white of the sapphire, the essence of the heavens (blue-white) for sanctity" (Ex 24:10), the blue-white glory of the Divine Presence which is the singular Unity behind all of the superficial colors of the rainbow, the eternal covenant of G-d with His eternal people. You will then remember the commandments of G-d, you will be adorned with the royal-blue (t'khelet) mitre of the High Priest (tzitzit) in the form of your royal blue (t'khelet)

ritual fringe, you will understand that G-d took you out of Egypt in order for you to teach the world the message of human freedom and Divine Love, and you will not be directed (taturu) after the vain and empty lusts of your heart and your eyes. <>

G-d wanted the scouts to look at the land of Israel and see G-d and His commandments just as He wants each of us to look at our garments, at and into ourselves, and see G-d and His commandments. G-d wants us to understand that our nationality and our land is for the sake of our Divine mission to perfect the world-and with this knowledge and commitment we will fear no human being, no mighty earthly power. Alas, the "Princes" of Israel did not see it then, and the "Princes" of Israel do not see it now. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

Near the end of this week's Torah portion, we are told about the man who gathered wood on Shabbat and his punishment (Bamidbar 15:32-35). This passage, which appears between the requirement to pour wine on the Altar (15:1-16) and tzitzit (15:37-41), is quite remarkable. In the past, we have discussed the connection between the commandments in the Torah and the sin of the scouts, in that the mitzvot are meant to overcome the problems which led to the sin. Why then does the affair of gathering wood appear at this point in the Torah? The Ramban notes that "the simple interpretation is that this took place after the affair of the scouts." But this still leaves us with a question of why the Torah felt it was important to tell this story just at this point.

When we look deeper, we can indeed see that there is a strong link between the affair of gathering wood and the events of the scouts. This can be seen first of all from analyzing the text. These are the only two places in the Torah where people turn to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire community. With respect to the scouts, it is written, "And they went and came to Moshe, and to Aharon, and to the entire community of Bnei Yisrael, to the Paran Desert, at Kadesh. And they gave them and the entire community a reply and showed them the fruits of the land." [13:26]. The same phrase appears in the passage of the woodchopper. "And those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moshe and to Aharon and to the entire community." [15:33]. This phrase is especially noteworthy in view of the well known parallels between the affair of gathering wood and that of the one who blasphemed the Almighty (Vayikra 24:10-13). Even though there are many parallel elements between the two passages, in that case we are only told, "They brought him to Moshe" [24:11]. Another parallel between the scouts and the wood gathering can be seen in the descriptions of the

actions of the people. With respect to the scouts, it is written, "And the entire community said that they would pelt them with stones." [Bamidbar 14:10]. And a similar expression appears in the affair of the woodchopper: "Let the entire community pelt him with stones... and the entire community took him outside of the camp, and pelted him with stones." [15:35-36].

Rashi sees this passage as a disgrace for Yisrael. "They observed only the first Shabbat, and on the second one this man came and desecrated it." On the other hand, a simpler outlook views the affair of the wood as an attempt by Bnei Yisrael to mend their ways after the sin of the scouts. In that case, a small group of ten men was able to influence the entire nation to do evil. In the affair of the wood, on the other hand, the nation was able to withstand a single man, not only by not being drawn into the sin but even refusing to accept what he did. At the time of the scouts, the community wanted to stone Moshe and Aharon, thereby demonstrating their lack of faith in G-d. In the affair of the wood, on the other hand, the community showed that it was not willing to accept an act against the Almighty, and the stones were thrown not at those who represented G-d but at the person who acted against His wishes.

Thus, the affair of the woodchopper shows us that even after the first generation was told that they would not be allowed to enter the land the people did not turn their backs on G-d and His commandments. Rather, they continued to maintain the sanctity of Shabbat within their camp.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

A glimpse at the narrative in the book of Numbers reveals an almost parallel pattern of events to that which occurred to the Jews after their leaving Egypt. In Numbers, the Jews began to murmur that they did not have meat to eat. (Numbers 11:4) This corresponds to the longing of the Jews "for the fleshpots" in Egypt, resulting in the giving of the manna. (Exodus 16:3)

Also, the Numbers narrative states that after the Jews complained that they lacked water, Moshe (Moses) hit instead of spoke to the rock-and water came forth. (Numbers 20:2, 3, 8, 11) So too in the Exodus story, did Moshe hit the rock after the Jews militated for water. (Exodus 17:2, 6)

And the Numbers narrative includes several challenges the Jews faced from nations like Edom. (Numbers 20:14-21) This is much like the battle the Jews fought with Amalek after they departed Egypt. (Exodus 17:8-16)

Finally, the story of the spies which highlights this week's portion is viewed as an episode revealing the Jews' basic lack of faith in G-d. (Numbers 13, 14) This, of course, is similar in underlying theme to the

Golden Calf story which seems to describe the Jews' lack of faith. (Exodus 32, 33)

So similar are the stories in these two narratives that the Bekhor Shor (a medieval French commentator) insists that the water stories are one and the same. The latter is a more detailed account of the former.

But a closer look reveals an interesting pattern. In each of the narratives the consequences escalate in their seriousness in the Book of Numbers.

Unlike the manna story in Exodus, the request for meat in the Book of Numbers resulted in the Lord "smit[ing] the people with a very great plague." (Numbers 11:33) Also, only after Moshe hits the rock in the Book of Numbers, is he given the severe punishment of not being allowed to enter Israel. (Numbers 20:12) And while Amalek was defeated with no mention of Jewish losses in Exodus, many Jews died when they were forced to go around the land of Edom. (Numbers 21:4, 6) Finally, only after the spy incident - not after the episode of the Golden Calf - does G-d decree that the generation that left Egypt must die in the desert. (Numbers 14:29)

Why are the consequences greater in the Book of Numbers, when the transgressions seem so similar? First, the events in the book of Exodus occur either prior to Sinai or, in the case of the Golden Calf, according to Rashi, prior to the construction of the sanctuary. With the Sinaitic teachings and the Tabernacle construction in place the Jews should have known better than to falter again.

Second, to err once is forgivable and even sometimes understandable. The same transgression committed again deserves to be treated much more harshly.

So the patterns of the narratives may be similar, but the message is clear: G-d understands that we will fall. But we must take the lessons we learn in our mistakes and redeem ourselves. G-d gives us opportunities for repentance, but we cannot address those opportunities as unlimited. Sometimes one is given just so many chances. © 2007 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.

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. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

On the verge of entering the Promised Land, the Children of Israel sent scouts ahead to investigate their future home. Their report scares the nation, which now dreads the prospect of going. This upsets G-d, and after Moshe's prayer saves them from being destroyed, the nation is told that they will wander for 40 years in the desert, where they will die, and that their children will inherit the land instead. It is a turning point in the life of the new nation, one that raises numerous questions.

Since Moshe felt the need to pray for his disciple, Yehoshua so that he wouldn't join the other scouts if/when they derided the land (see Rashi on Bamidbar 13:16), he obviously knew that the mission could be disastrous. G-d telling him that He wasn't sanctioning the mission (see Rashi on 13:2) indicated that He wasn't thrilled with the idea, and Moshe later acknowledges (see Rashi on Devarim 1:20) that he knew G-d didn't like the idea. So why did he agree to send the scouts in the first place?

Also, did the scouts give an accurate report? If they did, why was G-d so upset when the nation

believed them? If they didn't, why didn't Moshe just refute their findings, and send other scouts to prove that the first ones were distorting the truth? Besides, the commentators point out that even though G-d didn't approve of the request to send scouts, He tried to give them the best chance of not messing up indicating who to send (see Emes Le'Yaakov, where Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky says that they were chosen via the Urim veTumim). How could G-d choose (or approve) scouts that would mislead the nation?

The disagreement between the 10 scouts that spoke against the land and the two that defended it seems to have centered around whether they would be able to conquer the land or not. After all that they had seen, including the 10 plagues, the splitting of the sea, defeating Amalek, the public revelation at Sinai, the heavenly mun that fell daily, the clouds of glory that surrounded and protected them, et al, how could they have doubted whether or not G-d could defeat the inhabitants of the land?

Finally, our sages tell us (Taanis 29a) that G-d declared that because they cried for no reason they would be destined to cry for generations over a real tragedy, referring to the mourning on Tisha b'Av over the destruction of the Temple(s) on the same date. How can later generations be made to endure such mourning because of the sin of that generation? Even if subsequent generations can be affected by the mistakes of our ancestors (such as the firstborn being replaced by the Levi'im after the sin of the golden calf, where the consequences were implemented immediately and already in place when each generation arrived), what connection is there between the sin of the scouts and the destruction of the Temples and the resulting exiles? Why should the latter be a result of the former?

Bamidbar Rabbah (16:7) says that the decision to not allow that generation to enter the land was made even before the scouts embarked on their mission. G-d had already told them that the land was good, and if they didn't trust G-d, they didn't deserve to go. Nevertheless, since refusing to let them check it out for themselves might leave the impression that they were right in doubting how good the land was, G-d let the scouts go. Even if the scouts had given a good report, and the nation been excited about going, they still wouldn't have been allowed to go; they would have had to wander the desert for the same 40 years till they died out.

This is borne out by the length of time they had to wander, 40 years for the 40 days that the scouts were out on their mission. If it were a punishment for the bad report or the reaction to it, the length of time it took to gather the information should be irrelevant. If, on the other hand, the mission itself was the problem, it follows that the punishment would correspond to the length of the mission; they spent 40 days trying to

determine whether the land was really appropriate for them, so G-d made them stay in the desert for 40 years.

Moshe knew that they had doubts about how good the land really was, and that this poor disposition could lead to a subjective conclusion, so he prayed that Yehoshua would not be influenced by the biases of the other scouts. Although G-d was upset that they even wanted to send scouts, Moshe knew that once they requested it more harm would come from denying the request than letting them see for themselves how good the land really was. Hopefully, they'd realize their mistake in doubting G-d and Moshe could ask G-d to forgive them for asking to send the scouts. Unfortunately, rather than the situation improving after seeing the land, it got worse.

Being that their questioning G-d before the mission started was the reason that they couldn't enter the land, it must have been something else that caused G-d to want to wipe them out. In fact, the scouts confirmed that the land was good (Bamidbar 13:27 and Devarim 1:25), but reported that its inhabitants were very strong, as were the nations surrounding them. Not only that, but it was a land that "ate its inhabitants" (Bamidbar 13:32), i.e. you had to be very strong in order to survive even after conquering it. Instead of the large produce being a symbol of how good the land was, it was used to portray the land as not suitable for normal human residence. This would not be a problem for a nation with G-d looking out for it, but would be a problem for a nation that didn't want to rely on G-d looking out for it in order to thrive (or even survive).

True, G-d had provided for their every need since leaving Egypt, and had protected them within His clouds of glory. However, if there was even a slight misstep, the consequences were severe. Amalek attacked when they had become lax in their Torah study (see Mechilta on Shemos 17:8). They were given enough nourishment, but when they asked for something more (i.e. meat). G-d's wrath was kindled (Bamidbar 11:33). Even Miriam, Moshe's older sister who had saved him when he was little and was trying to give constructive criticism on Tziporah's behalf, was stricken with tzoraas. Living with G-d was special, but came with enormous responsibility, including harsh consequences for not doing the right thing. Can a nation survive when it is always in a state of "midas hadin," being judged by the strictest of standards? G-d knew that the world couldn't survive that way, so had to partner it with "midas harachamim" (see Rashi on Beraishis 1:1). Was the nation expected to live in a constant state of intense divine scrutiny?

Knowing that they would have to plow, plant, and harvest the land, it is reasonable for the nation to have assumed that their lives would change from surviving through G-d's daily (obvious) miracles to a more natural lifestyle. They would no longer have to

worry that the miracles they relied on could disappear if/when they messed up, because they would no longer need any to survive. It has been suggested (see Eliyahu Ki Tov's Sefer Haparshiyos, pg. 331) that the despair the nation felt was because they were told that they still wouldn't be able to live naturally. They couldn't conquer the land without G-d fighting for them (not just with them), couldn't defend it without G-d protecting them, and couldn't even live in it without G-d's help (as it "eats its inhabitants"). In other words, the same spiritual pressure they were under in the desert would always be with them. They didn't doubt G-d's ability to do these things, only their own to constantly deserve it. The scouts were telling the truth, but rather than appreciating the opportunity to maintain their attachment to G-d, they were saddened that they would be forced to do so in order to survive. Because of this, they wept.

This rejection angered G-d so much that He wanted to wipe out the entire nation and start from scratch with Moshe. Not just because they deserved to die, but also because such a nation, which prefers to not be constantly attached to G-d, could not survive long term in the Promised Land. Even their children will find it extremely difficult (if not impossible) to turn things around and want to be in a situation of extreme closeness (and therefore extreme scrutiny). Just as there was a high occurrence of children whose parents viewed Judaism as a burden rather than a blessing leaving the faith, subsequent generations retained this preference to live a normal life without their success being tied to their observance (if I recall correctly, the Netziv explains the drive to worship idols in a similar manner). We may be "rachmanim b'nei rachman," having inherited being merciful from our forefathers, but having rejected the opportunity to be close with G-d, including the built-in incentive of not being able to survive without it, this also took root in the soul of the nation and was passed on to future generations.

It was almost inevitable that without a strong desire to be close with G-d despite (or perhaps because of) the associated consequences for slipping up, eventually the land would "vomit them out," and the nation would be sent into exile. Therefore, because they cried over the thought of living a life that demanded attachment to G-d for survival, we suffered the exiles that bring tears every Tisha b'Av. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

