

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Send for yourselves men, who will seek out (Heb, vayaturu) the Land of Canaan.'" Who were the real sinners in the episode of the scouts, what was the exact nature of their transgression, and why did they transgress?

The fact of the matter is that the "sin of the scouts" reverberates throughout Jewish History; the day the nation wept at the negative report, agreeing with the opinion of ten out of twelve not to attempt to conquer the land, is identified as the ninth day of the month of Av, the traditional date of Jewish destruction, exile and persecution. 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 built into every feasibility study is the possibility of rejection. And as we have seen, 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, insisting that it was quite understandable -and even desirable- that a reconnaissance mission be sent in order to determine the best way to approach the land they wish to conquer, and which cities to attempt to

take in their initial attack. Such a request can hardly be called sinful.

Building on the Ramban (as well as on an interpretation of my rebbe Rav J.B. Soloveitchik zt"l), I would suggest an alternative 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 last request merely elucidate the meaning of their initial words, or are they in fact requesting an investigation of the land itself (its topography, its fertility, its fortifications and the nature of its inhabitants) which will lead to a "statement" not only as to the project's feasibility but also as to its worthwhileness?

Moses, when he carefully instructs them what to be looking for, clearly understands their mission to be solely one of reconnaissance (the process of obtaining information about an enemy area, Numbers 13:16-20).

And G-d, in His command to Moses as our portion opens, goes one step further: He uses a totally different -and unique- verb to describe their mission which is vayaturu. 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; Deut.1:29-33, and Ezekiel 20:6), where the resting place is 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, less of a 'feasibility' study and more of 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 with passionate love just as the sinner is moved and directed to the prostitute with

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passionate lust (Numbers 14:33). Yes, Moses tells them that they must "look at the land, what it is" (13:18). But in looking, what they should be able to see is G-d, and G-d's covenant. And once they're able to see G-d, then necessarily they will 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 their Divine mission in the world, then they would have seen themselves as giants, as G-d's emissaries -and the Canaanites as grasshoppers; because they did not look at the land with passionate love, through "G-ds eyeglasses," they saw themselves as grasshoppers and the Canaanites as giants!

Now it becomes eminently clear why our Biblical reading ends with the portion of tzitzit, the white and blue ritual fringes which the Jew attaches to his four-cornered garments which he must "look upon ...in order that he remember the commandments and not direct himself towards, nor lust after (taturu) his heart and eyes." "And indeed the Hebrews "tzitz" literally means to gaze upon. Look at your garb, look at the fringes on the corners of your garb, and remember what G-d wants 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 (tzitz) 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 seduced (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, and into ourselves, and see G-d and His commandments. G-d wants us to understand that our unique nation and our unique land exist for the sake of our unique and Divine mission to perfect the world -and with this knowledge

and commitment we need 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. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“ [G-d] will wipe them out with a plague-like death and remove them, and I will make you [Moshe] into a great and mighty nation" (Bamidbar 14:12).

The standard approach to this verse is that, after the nation had accepted what 10 of the 12 advance scouts had said about the Promised Land, G-d threatened to wipe them out and build a new nation from Moshe. This is similar to what had occurred after the golden calf (Shemos 32:10), and in both instances Moshe comes to the rescue, begging G-d not to follow through, and the nation survives. The Shach (Sifsay Kohain, written over 400 years ago by Mordechai Hakohain), takes a much different approach.

Who did G-d want to wipe out? Not the Children of Israel, but the "Eirev Rav," the mixed-multitude of different nations that had joined the Children of Israel. When there was a famine in the days of Yoseif, many had moved to Egypt to escape it. They were unable to leave even after the famine ended because of Egypt's closed border policy, and joined the Children of Israel when they left. The "Eirev Rav" were much more numerous than those who had actually descended from Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and had instigated the sin of the golden calf and the sin of the scouts (or at least the complaints that followed the report of the scouts). Because they were adversely affecting His Chosen People, G-d wanted to wipe them out right away (as He did the scouts), but because of the "chillul Hashem" that would have occurred, Moshe prayed that G-d kill them over time instead so that it seemed more natural.

As for the Children of Israel, they had also sinned by complaining (after being instigated by the "Eirev Rav"), and this 10th "testing" of G-d used up the merit of the 10 tests that Avraham had passed, putting their ability to enter the Promised Land at risk as well. This was their status after Moshe's prayer (for the "Eirev Rav"), with the Shach understanding the words "if they will see the land I promised to their fathers" (Bamidbar 14:23) to be a conditional "if," i.e. they might, but they might not, depending on how they act from now on. When they continued to complain, G-d decided that they couldn't enter the land either, only their children, with the Shach explaining 14:26-35 to be referring to both the Children of Israel and the "Eirev Rav" (with some pronouns referring to one group and some to the other).

This approach deals with two difficulties mentioned by the Shach. First of all, when recounting

the sins of the nation during his rebuke shortly before he passed away, Moshe mentioned his prayer on behalf of the nation after the golden calf (Devarim 9:18-19 and 26-29), but there is no mention of any prayer after the sin of the scouts (either in chapter 1 or chapter 9). Since the prayer after the scouts was not on behalf of the nation (only about the "Eirav Rav"), and by that time (right before the next generation would enter the land) the "Eirav Rav" had all died out, there was no need to include it. Secondly, even though one of the main parts of the prayer after the golden calf was "zechus avos," the merits of our forefathers, this was not included in the prayer here. If the prayer was only on behalf of the "Eirev Rav," "zechus avos" was not relevant so couldn't be included.

Although the Shach's approach is fascinating, it raises more issues than it answers, and the issues it answers have other possible answers. Some (see Or Hachayim) point out that the first word of Moshe's prayer here started with "and," as he began by saying "and Egypt will hear," to imply that the following arguments are in addition to the earlier ones made after the "golden calf," which included "zechus avos." Others (see Rashi) understand G-d's promise to make Moshe into a "greater and mightier nation" to be 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's descendants would also be their descendants). I have previously suggested ([www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/shelach.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/shelach.pdf)) that the mentioning of our forefathers after the golden calf referred to the need for a means to repent from sin, as otherwise no matter many times G-d started from scratch there would come a time when the "new" nation would also mess up. Once this "teshuvah" process was taught to Moshe, there was no reason to ask for it again, only for time to be able to implement it. Moshe may not have mentioned this prayer in his rebuke because it was not fully answered (as the generation died out), or because he never asked for full forgiveness, only that G-d allow them to build another generation so that the current nation could survive (see Rashbam and Chizkuni on 14:20). The Riva quotes Rabbeinu Elyakim (Devarim 9:22), who says that the prayer that follows (26-29) was made after the sin of the scouts as well, meaning that Moshe did in fact mention it in his rebuke.

If G-d's intent were only to wipe out the "Eirev Rav," but not the Children of Israel, why would He need to build a new nation from Moshe? The Shach addresses this issue by suggesting that G-d was telling Moshe not to fret over the loss of such a large number of people (the "Eirev Rav" were much more numerous than the Children of Israel) because He would make up for the loss by increasing Moshe's descendants. I'm not sure why these lost numbers would have to come from Moshe, rather than being more equally distributed among the rest of the nation, or why G-d would imply

that it will be a separate and distinct nation from the still surviving Children of Israel. It is possible that G-d could have meant the entire nation when He said He will make "you" into a great a mighty nation (referring to the nation as a single unit becoming larger), but it is much more straightforward to understand the threat to be applying to the entire nation, with G-d saying he will build a new nation from Moshe.

Included in Moshe's prayer was that He would be destroying the nation that had "your cloud above them" (14:14). As the Shach himself mentions a little later, the "ananim" (clouds) did not protect the "Eirev Rav," and if any of them tried to enter within them, they were spit out. Unless there is a difference between the seventh "anan" that was above the other six protective "ananim" whereby it covered everybody (even the "Eirev Rav," and Chazal do say that it "stretched" to cover those that left the encampment - including those who were ritually impure), it would be difficult to say that this part of the prayer refers to the "Eirev Rav" at all.

Also included (14:16) was a reference to the promise to take the nation into the Promised Land. Unless the promise made to the Children of Israel shortly before the exodus (Shemos 6:8) or implied within the commandment to bring the Passover offering right before the exodus (12:25) was extended to all those who would leave with them, or Moshe was referring to what others might think was promised (even though it never was), the promise to take the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov into the Holy Land could not be referenced regarding the "Eirev Rav."

It therefore seems much more likely that the threat to wipe out the nation was made regarding the Children of Israel as well. However, it could be suggested that there were two separate threats, and two separate conversations about those threats. G-d had enough of the instigating "Eirev Rav," and wanted to wipe them out completely, right away. Moshe wasn't as concerned with there being a continuation of the "Eirev Rav," so in this conversation he only asked that they die over a period of time rather than right away. G-d also threatened to start from scratch from Moshe and wipe out the Children of Israel as well, and in this conversation Moshe asked that at the very least G-d give them enough time to produce another generation, and that only those between 20 and 60 years of age be punished. When G-d dictated the words of the Torah to Moshe, He embedded both conversations into the same words (see [www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/kiSisa.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/kiSisa.pdf), where I explained that the "he" in "and He/he called" in Shemos 34:6 refers to both Moshe and G-d; G-d at the beginning of the third set of 40 days and Moshe for the rest of those 40 days).

The Shach's approach (whether we use it exclusively or include it with the standard approach) does answer another issue; whatever happened to the "Eirev Rav?" The reason we never hear from them

again is that they all died out in the desert (even those not between the ages of 20 and 60), and as the Yalkut Reuvaini tells us (Bamidbar 25:14), their 22,000 children died in the plague that was stopped when Pinechas killed Zimri. By the time the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land, there was no longer any "Eirev Rav" to enter with them. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**M**oshe had a good idea to encourage the Jewish people to appreciate the gift being granted to them in possessing the Land of Israel. With the most positive of intentions he commissions twelve leaders of Israel, in whom he undoubtedly had unquestioned trust in their piety and wisdom, Moshe expects them to return with an enthusiastic assessment of the Land of Israel.

Instead they return with an even-handed cold blooded report about the land and its inhabitants. Like Obama's speech, the negative parts of their report somehow overwhelm the positive statements that they uttered. They eventually back up their report with personal agendas, woeful predictions and demagogic pronouncements. And Moshe is powerless to tell the people to reject the negative report.

A mood of wild depression overwhelms Israel and the great march to the promised land is ended permanently for that generation. There was always a predisposition among that generation to prefer to return to Egyptian servitude rather than to forge a new society in a new land and create their own independent state.

The uncomfortable but known past always has strong attraction and requires no special bravery or courage. However, the unknown future no matter how great its possibilities are is always an intimidating sight. This attitude is present in all Jewish and human generations and certainly was not limited to the generation of the Jews in the desert of Sinai. It is the unknown future that always destabilizes present wisdom and judgment. Moshe's assurances of G-dly support for Israel fall on unhearing ears.

The question arises as to why Moshe who was able to convince Israel to leave Egypt, march through the desert, accept the yoke of the Torah, reject the Golden Calf, build the Mishkan/tabernacle, etc. was unable to convince them of the importance of the Land of Israel to their physical and spiritual development.

Over the centuries the great commentators to the Torah have dealt with this issue, each in their own way. But the basic underlying assessment of the issue is that there is a hesitation if not even a fear of Jewish independence and self-government among the Jewish people. This is certainly reflected throughout large sections of the Jewish world today. This attitude is always cloaked in theological niceties and pious

nostrums as well as an unfounded belief in the Western humanitarian values of much of Europe and America.

But the harsh truth is that most Jews find it easier and more comfortable to live under foreign rule than to have to build their own self-governing society and nation. The exile mentality of the Jewish people, formed already in Egyptian bondage over three millennia ago, remains part of our DNA even today.

The Jewish State is spoken of as a place of refuge and escape for persecuted Jews. But a Jewish State is really much more than that. It is a challenge and a work in progress. It should not be viewed as merely a haven for the helpless but rather as a country that must eventually fulfill its role as a light unto the rest of humankind. Again, the Torah of Moshe must convince us of our true role in the world. © 2009 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **MACHON ZOMET**

### **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

*by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg*

**W**hen Moshe sends the scouts on their mission he gives them a sign that will help them penetrate the external facade and correctly judge the strength of the people living in the land. He tells them the following: "Look at the characteristics of the land, and the nation which dwells on it-whether it is strong or weak... And in what types of cities it dwells, are they open or fortified." [Bamidbar 13:18-19]. Rashi explains that he showed them a way to judge the people. If they dwell in open cities, they are strong, since they depend on their strength, but if they live in fortified cities they are weak. In the end the scouts did not use this sign, and as we are told they returned and reported, "The nation which dwells on the land is strong, with greatly fortified cities" [13:28].

The scouts arrived in the land and found a contradiction. On one hand, the cities were well fortified. On the other hand, they saw powerful giants dwelling in them. This gave them two possible interpretations: On one hand they could decide that the nations are an exception to the rules stated by Moshe. They were powerful and strong even though they dwelt in fortified cities. On the other hand, perhaps the apparent strength of the city dwellers was an illusion, and they should believe the words of Moshe, that the nations were in fact weak. As we know, the scouts choose the first alternative.

It is interesting to try to understand Moshe's approach in greater depth. After all, the scouts appeared to be right in that the giants living in the land indeed seemed to be very powerful. Even Yehoshua and Kalev, the righteous scouts, did not claim that the

inhabitants were weak, only that the Almighty was stronger than them. However, the scouts did not understand Moshe's great wisdom. He was not referring to the external prowess of the inhabitants of the land but rather to their internal resistance. Powerful people who need fortifications to back up their strength are thereby demonstrating that their strength is nothing more than external, and that from within they are consumed by doubt and worry.

The scouts found it difficult to accept this internal viewpoint because they saw themselves as nothing more than lowly grasshoppers. In spite of the Divine guidance that they had received in the desert, they only looked at their own external appearance. Therefore, when they attempted to estimate the strength of their enemies they looked only from the external viewpoint. If the scouts had looked at themselves as being powerful, they would have realized that the dwellers of the land had lost all their own courage.

Today we are also in the midst of a Divine mission of conquering the land, struggling against the power of others who dwell in the land and the fact that they are supported by other nations from the outside. This includes those who want to treat us with evil and other "enlightened" nations which provide legitimacy to the axis of evil which wants to swallow us.

Thus, as disciples of Yehoshua and Kalev, we must turn our eyes inward-to our own internal characteristics. If we look at ourselves as being powerful, knowing that G-d is our redeemer and provides us with strength, our enemies will view us the same way.

#### **RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

**O**ur sedra ends with one of the great commands of Judaism-tsitsit, the fringes we wear on the corner of our garments as a perennial reminder of our identity as Jews and our obligation to keep the Torah's commands:

"G-d spoke to Moses, telling him to speak to the Israelites and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments for all generations. Let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe: look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not stray after your heart and eyes which in the past have led you to immorality. You will thus remember and keep all my commandments and be holy to your G-d."

So central is this command, that it became the third paragraph of the Shema, the supreme declaration of Jewish faith. I once heard the following commentary from my teacher, Rabbi Dr Nahum Rabinovitch.

He began by pointing out some of the strange features of the command. On the one hand the sages

said that the command of tsitsit is equal to all the other commands together, as it is said: "Look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them." It is thus of fundamental significance.

On the other hand, it is not absolutely obligatory. It is possible to avoid the command of fringes altogether by never wearing a garment of four or more corners. Maimonides rules: "Even though one is not obligated to acquire a [four-cornered] robe and wrap oneself in it in order to [fulfil the command of] tsitsit, it is not fitting for a pious individual to exempt himself from this command" (Laws of Tsitsit, 3: 11). It is important and praiseworthy but not categorical. It is conditional: if you have such a garment, then you must put fringes on it. Why so? Surely it should be obligatory, in the way that tefillin (phylacteries) are.

There is another unusual phenomenon. In the course of time, the custom has evolved to fulfil the command in two quite different ways: the first, in the form of a tallit (robe, shawl) which is worn over our other clothes, specifically while we pray; the second in the form of an undergarment, worn beneath our outer clothing throughout the day.

Not only do we keep the one command in two different ways. We also make different blessings over the two forms. Over the tallit, we say: "who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to wrap ourselves in a fringed garment." Over the undergarment, we say, "who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the precept of the fringed garment." Why is one command split into two in this way?

He gave this answer: there are two kinds of clothing. There are the clothes we wear to project an image. A king, a judge, a soldier, all wear clothing that conceals the individual and instead proclaims a role, an office, a rank. As such, clothes, especially uniforms, can be misleading. A king dressed as a beggar will not (or would not, before television) be recognised as royalty. A beggar dressed as a king may find himself honoured. A policeman dressed as a policeman carries with him a certain authority, an aura of power, even though he may feel nervous and insecure. Clothes disguise. They are like a mask. They hide the person beneath. Such are the clothes we wear in public when we want to create a certain impression.

But there are other clothes we wear when we are alone, that may convey more powerfully than anything else the kind of person we really are: the artist in his studio, the writer at his desk, the gardener tending the roses. They do not dress to create an impression. To the contrary: they dress as they do because of what they are, not because of what they wish to seem.

The two kinds of tsitsit represent these different forms of dress. When we engage in prayer, we sense in our heart how unworthy we may be of the high demands G-d has made of us. We feel the need to come before G-d as something more than just ourselves. We wrap

ourselves in the robe, the tallit, the great symbol of the Jewish people at prayer. We conceal our individuality- in the language of the blessing over the tallit, we "wrap ourselves in a fringed garment." It is as if we were saying to G-d: I may only be a beggar, but I am wearing a royal robe, the robe of your people Israel who prayed to You throughout the centuries, to whom You showed a special love and took as Your own. The tallit hides the person we are and represents the person we would like to be, because in prayer we ask G-d to judge us, not for what we are, but for what we wish to be.

The deeper symbolism of tsitsit, however, is that it represents the commandments as a whole ("look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord") -- and these becomes part of what and who we are only when we accept them without coercion, of our own free will. That is why the command of tsitsit is not categorical. We do not have to keep it. We are not obligated to buy a four-cornered garment. When we do so, it is because we chose to do so. We obligate ourselves. That is why opting to wear tsitsit symbolises the free acceptance of all the duties of Jewish life.

This is the most inward, intimate, intensely personal aspect of faith whereby in our innermost soul we dedicate ourselves to G-d and His commands. There is nothing public about this. It is not for outer show. It is who we are when we are alone, not trying to impress anyone, not wishing to seem what we are not. This is the command of tsitsit as undergarment, beneath, not on top of, our clothing. Over this we make a different blessing. We do not talk about "wrapping ourselves in a fringed garment"-because this form of fringes is not for outward show. We are not trying to hide ourselves beneath a uniform. Instead, we are expressing our innermost commitment to G-d's word and call to us. Over this we say the blessing, "who has commanded us concerning the precept of tsitsit" because what matters is not the mask but the reality, not what we wish to seem but what we really are.

In this striking way tsitsit represent the dual nature of Judaism. On the one hand it is a way of life that is public, communal, shared with others across the world and through the ages. We keep Shabbat, celebrate the festivals, observe the dietary laws and the laws of family purity in a way that has hardly varied for many centuries. That is the public face of Judaism- the tallit we wear, the cloak woven out of the 613 threads, each a command.

But there is also our inner life as people of faith. There are things we can say to G-d that we can say to no one else. He knows our thoughts, hopes, fears, better than we know them ourselves. We speak to Him in the privacy of the soul, and He listens. That internal conversation-the opening of our heart to Him who brought us into existence in love-is not for public show. Like the fringed undergarment, it stays hidden. But it is no less real an aspect of Jewish spirituality. The two types of fringed garment represent the two dimensions

of the life of faith-the outer persona and the inner person, the image we present to the world and the face we show only to G-d. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks 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, Hilkhos 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. © 2009 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

I once offered a young man the opportunity to meet my good friend and renowned author and speaker, Rabbi Zelig Pliskin. The young man was a bit nervous, "But, what should I say to him?" I asked the young man, "Do you have any questions about life that you would like answered?" When he replied "No," I then suggested, "Well, then why not ask Rabbi Pliskin, 'What is the secret of life?' " The young man became very excited (perhaps at the thought that he might play "Stump the Rabbi") and anxiously walked with me to meet Rabbi Pliskin to ask his question.

Why did I suggest this question? I once saw a Ziggy cartoon with a young man climbing a steep mountain to ask the guru, "What is the secret of life?" And the guru answered, "Before I tell you... have you heard about Amway?" I knew that Rabbi Pliskin was not into Amway or selling "Kabbalah water," so not only was it safe to ask him this question, but with his sharp mind and keen sense of humor, his answer would be worth hearing. I wasn't disappointed!

"Breathing," replied Rabbi Pliskin. "Breathe in and breathe out. As long as you keep breathing you will be alive." Then Rabbi Pliskin continued, "The other secret to life is attitude. Life is how you decide to view it. I once read about a person going through a toll booth and the attendant had his radio blasting music and was dancing. He asked him, 'What's the occasion?' and the attendant answered, 'I'm having a party!' A few weeks later the driver went through the same toll booth and the same attendant had his radio blasting music and was dancing. The driver asked him, 'Why are you having another party?' He smiled and said, 'Mister, every day is a party. Life is a party. You have to celebrate!'"

King Solomon in his great wisdom tells us the secret of a high quality life. "Every day in the life of a poor person is bad. And for a person with a good heart, life is constant parties." (Proverbs 15:15)

A "poor person" refers to one who has a poor attitude. He keeps thinking about what is wrong and what is missing. So for him every day is distress and misery. The person with a "good heart" refers to someone who is constantly grateful and appreciative for all the good in his life. When you master this attitude your life will be full of moments of joy and celebration.

When you master joy for the good in your life, you will be able to be appreciative of each and every breath. So breathing will not only keep you alive, it will also give you what to celebrate. And since every moment of life is a moment of breathing, you will radiate joy!

If you are breathing while you are reading this, celebrate your ability to breathe and celebrate life!

The Torah states: "And we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Numbers 13:33).

The Kotzker Rebbe said that the mistake of the spies was in the words "and so we were in their sight." It should not bother a person how others view him. (Otzer Chaim)

A person who worries about how others view him will have no rest. Regardless of what he does or does not do, he will always be anxious about receiving the approval of others. Such a person makes his self-esteem dependent on the whims of others. It is a mistake to give others so much control over you. Keep your focus on doing what is right and proper. Work on mastering the ability to have a positive self-image regardless of how others view you.

If people give you constructive criticism because of things you are doing wrong, you should appreciate the opportunity to improve. However, do not allow your self-image to be dependent on the arbitrary approval and disapproval of others.

The Chofetz Chaim commented, When you view yourself as inferior, you will assume that others also view you in this manner. The truth could very well be that the other person views you in a much higher manner. As the Yalkut Shimoni states, "The Almighty said, 'Who says that you were not in their eyes as angels?' " (HaChofetz Chaim, Vol. 3, p. 1060)

Realize your intrinsic value as a being created in the image of the Almighty and you will feel much more comfortable around other people. *based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Chicken Yiddle

"The sky is falling!" they shouted. Well not quite, but when the ten spies who went to examine the Land of Israel brought back tales of horrific stories of mighty and formidable enemies they threw a confident nation into sheer terror. It is almost inconceivable that a nation that saw a sea split and Egypt humbled would shirk in utter terror—because of reports of giants and fortified cities in their new country. The Medrash details the episode. Upon returning to the Jewish camp the ten spies dispersed amongst their own families and began to bemoan their fate. "Woe is to us!" they cried. "Our daughters will be taken captive, our sons murdered, and our possessions looted!"

Neighbor to neighbor, the tales spread, and within hours, the entire nation was in a rebellious uproar, ignoring the positive reports that Calev and Yehoshua brought back. They even besieged Moshe, demanding to return to Egypt.

The Torah details the Jews' mordant reaction to the malicious tales of gloom. Yet, it seems that it was not the tales of fortified cities or the sight of mutated-

looking giant fruits or even the actual giants themselves that caused the Jews to lament. The way the story is related, the actual wailing and rebellion occurred only after an interesting detail. The spies described the giant men whom they encountered and the way they felt during that experience. "And there we saw the sons of giants; we felt in our own eyes like grasshoppers next to them" (Numbers 13:33). Immediately, the next verse tells us, "The entire assembly raised up their voices and wept that night, saying if only we had died in the land of Egypt or in the wilderness!" (Numbers 14:1-3) It seems that the final words of the spies, "we felt in our own eyes like grasshoppers next to them," set up this tragic and futile reaction. Why?

My brother, Rabbi Zvi Kamenetzky, a rebbe in Skokie Yeshiva, loves telling the following story:

Yankel, one of Warsaw's poorer folk, received a first-class train ticket from a wealthy cousin to visit him in Lodz. Yankel arrived at the station clutching his ticket tightly. He never took a train before and had no idea where to go. He spotted some well-dressed individuals and just knew he was not sitting with them. Then in the far corner of the waiting room he noticed a group of vagrants with packs on their shoulders, their eyes shifting back and forth. Yankel meandered toward them, figuring that their place was his. The first class passengers began to board but the vagrants still waited. All of a sudden, the whistle blew and the train began to move. The vagabonds quickly jumped aboard the baggage car, Yankel following in pursuit. He slithered into the dark car and lay with them underneath a pile of suitcases, still clutching his ticket in fear.

He endured the bumps and heat of the baggage car and figured that such was his fate until the door of the baggage compartment flew open and a burly conductor flanked by two policemen entered. They began moving suitcases and bags until they spotted poor Yankel and some of his new-found friends cowering in a corner.

The large conductor loomed over them and asked with a sneer in his voice, "can I see your tickets?"

Yankel looked up from his coat to see the officers staring at him. He emerged from the group, shaking, and presented the sweat-infused ticket that he had been clutching ever so tightly during the entire ordeal.

The conductor looked at it carefully and then began to laugh hysterically.

"Young man," he barked, "you have a first-class ticket! What are you doing here lying with these dregs in the baggage compartment? When you have a first-class ticket you ought act like a first-class passenger!"

The Jewish nation had no fear of giant fruit or giant men. They knew they had leaders that could overcome any obstacle. After all, Moshe led them across the Red Sea. Yehoshua and Chur helped defeat Amalek. But when they heard the ten spies - princes of the tribes—claim that they felt like insects they knew

that they had no chance to conquer the land of Israel. They had nothing left to do but cry. Because if you are holding the first class ticket but act as if you are a itinerant then your ticket is worthless.

The giant fruit, fortified cities and powerful giants - all tiny acorns compared to the power of the Almighty - suddenly loomed large. And the sky began to fall on a self-pitying nation that was led by self-pitying leaders. And with the falling sky, fell the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of a generation that once yearned to dwell in the land of their forefathers. The Jewish nation was left to ponder that message for 40 years in the desert and perhaps thousands of years in the Diaspora.

That is what happens when mighty princes with first-class tickets to paradise think that they are tiny grasshoppers holding tickets to nowhere. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**T**he major part of our parashah is devoted to the incident of the meraglim, who spied out Eretz Canaan and brought back a report that dissuaded Bnei Yisrael from attempting to conquer the Land. What motivated the meraglim, whom our Sages say were men of great spiritual stature?

Some commentaries explain that the meraglim were worried that Bnei Yisrael could not exist in the mundane environment that would prevail after they conquered and settled the Land. Such an environment would distract them from the lofty spiritual pursuits that are expected of a Jew, the meraglim believed. Therefore, they wanted to cause Hashem to decree that Bnei Yisrael would never enter Eretz Yisrael, but rather would stay in the desert forever.

However, observes R' Moshe Zvi Neriah z"l (1913-1995; founder of the Bnei Akiva yeshiva network and youth movement), the idea that the Shechinah needs to be restricted to a particular rarified environment is a gentile idea. As for us, our very reason for existence is to demonstrate that Hashem is present in every place and situation. When Hashem gave us the Torah, He called upon us to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." "Kingdom" implies material pursuits, while "priests" implies spirituality, and the Torah combines these two pursuits into one—"a kingdom of priests," i.e., a nation that brings holiness into its mundane activities.

Following the incident of the meraglim, the Torah teaches the mitzvah of pouring wine on the altar of the Bet Hamikdash. This juxtaposition is meant to demonstrate to the Spies that they erred. Bnei Yisrael were destined to live on and work the land, yet they would have a Temple where even wine would be an object of holiness. (Ner La'maor) © 2009 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org