

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he episode of the spies has rightly puzzled commentators throughout the centuries. How could they have got it so wrong? The land, they said, was as Moses had promised. It was indeed "flowing with milk and honey." But conquering it was impossible. "The people who live there are powerful, and the cities fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of the giant there... We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are... All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the titans there... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we seemed in theirs" (Num. 13:28-33).

They were terrified of the inhabitants of the land, and entirely failed to realise that the inhabitants were terrified of them. Rahab, the prostitute in Jericho, tells the spies sent by Joshua a generation later: "I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you... our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:10-11).

The truth was the exact opposite of the spies' report. The inhabitants feared the Israelites more than the Israelites feared the inhabitants. We hear this at the start of the story of Bilaam: "Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites." Earlier the Israelites themselves had sung at the Red Sea: "The people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall on them" (Ex. 15:15-16).

How then did the spies err so egregiously? Did they misinterpret what they saw? Did they lack faith in God? Did they—more likely—lack faith in themselves? Or was it simply, as Maimonides argues in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, that their fear was inevitable given their past history? They had spent most of their lives as slaves. Only recently had they acquired their freedom. They were not yet ready to fight a prolonged series of battles and establish themselves as a free people in their own land. That would take a new generation, born in freedom. Humans change, but not that quickly (*Guide III, 32*).

Most of the commentators assume that the spies were guilty of a failure of nerve, or faith, or both. It is hard to read the text otherwise. However, in the Hassidic literature—from the Baal Shem Tov to R. Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger (Sefat Emet) to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Menachem Mendel Schneersohn—an entirely different line of interpretation emerged, reading the text against the grain to dramatic effect so that it remains relevant and powerful today. According to their interpretation, the spies were well-intentioned. They were, after all, "princes, chieftains, leaders" (Num. 13:2-3). They did not doubt that Israel could win its battles with the inhabitants of the land. They did not fear failure; they feared success. Their concern was not physical but spiritual. They did not want to leave the wilderness. They did not want to become just another nation among the nations of the earth. They did not want to lose their unique relationship with God in the reverberating silence of the desert, far removed from civilization and its discontents.

Here they were close to God, closer than any generation before or since. He was a palpable presence in the Sanctuary in their midst, and in the clouds of glory that surrounded them. Here His people ate manna from heaven and water from the rock and experienced miracles daily. So long as they stayed in the desert under God's sheltering canopy, they did not need to plough the earth, plant seeds, gather harvests, defend a country, run an economy, maintain a welfare system, or shoulder any of the other earthly burdens and distractions that take peoples' minds away from the Divine.

Here, in no-man's-land, in liminal space, suspended between past and future, they were able to live with a simplicity and directness of encounter they could not hope to find once they had re-entered the gravitational pull of everyday life in the material world. Paradoxically, since a desert is normally the exact opposite of a garden, the wilderness was the Israelites' Eden. Here they were as close to God as were the first humans before their loss of innocence.

If that comparison is too discordant, recall that Hosea and Jeremiah both compared the wilderness to a honeymoon. Hosea said in the name of God: "I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her" (Hos. 2:16), implying that in the future God would take the people back there to celebrate a second honeymoon. Jeremiah said in God's name, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a

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bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown" (Jer. 2:2). For both prophets, the wilderness years were the time of the first love between God and the Israelites. That is what the spies did not want to leave.

Clearly this interpretation is not the plain sense of the narrative, but we should not dismiss it on that account. It is, as it were, a psychoanalytical reading, an account of the unconscious mindset of the spies. They did not want to let go of the intimacy and innocence of childhood and enter the adult world. Sometimes it is hard for parents to let go of their children; at others it is the other way round. But there must be a measure of separation if children are to become responsible adults. Ultimately the spies feared freedom and its responsibilities.

But that is what Torah is about. Judaism is not a religion of monastic retreat from the world. It is supremely a religion of engagement with the world. The Torah is a template for the construction of a society with all its gritty details: laws of warfare and welfare, harvests and livestock, loans and employer-employee relationships, the code of a nation in its land, part of the real world of politics and economics, yet somehow pointing to a better world where justice and compassion, love of the neighbour and stranger, are not remote ideals but part of the texture of everyday life. God chose Israel to make His presence visible in the world, and that means that Israel must live in the world.

To be sure, the Jewish people were not without their desert-dwellers and ascetics. The Qumran sect known to us from the Dead Sea Scrolls was such a group. The Talmud speaks of R. Shimon bar Yochai in similar terms. Having lived for thirteen years in a cave, he could not bear to see people engaged in such earthly pursuits as ploughing a field. Maimonides speaks of people who live as hermits in the desert to escape the corruptions of society (Laws of ethical character, 6:1; Eight Chapters, ch. 4). But these were the exceptions, not the rule. This is not the destiny of Israel, to live outside time and space in ashrams or monasteries as the world's recluses. Far from being the supreme height of faith, such a fear of freedom and its responsibilities is- according to both the Gerer and Lubavitcher Rebbe- the sin of the spies.

There is a voice within the tradition, most famously identified with R. Shimon bar Yochai, that

regards engagement with the world as fundamentally incompatible with the heights of spirituality. But the mainstream held otherwise. "Torah study without an occupation will in the end fail and lead to sin" (Avot 2:2). "One who makes his mind up to study Torah and not to work but to live on charity, profanes the name of God, brings the Torah into contempt, extinguishes the light of religion, brings evil upon himself, and deprives himself of life hereafter" (Maimonides, Laws of Torah Study 3:10).

The spies did not want to contaminate Judaism by bringing it into contact with the real world. They sought the eternal childhood of God's protection and the endless honeymoon of His all-embracing love. There is something noble about this desire, but also something profoundly irresponsible that demoralised the people and provoked God's anger. For the Jewish project- the Torah as the constitution of the Jewish nation under the sovereignty of God-is about building a society in the land of Israel that so honours human dignity and freedom that it will one day lead the world to say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. 4:6).

The Jewish task is not to fear the real world but to enter and transform it. That is what the spies did not understand. Do we-Jews of faith- understand it even now? © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he attitude of Jews towards the Land of Israel has always been a litmus type of test of Jewish commitment and even faith throughout the ages. As we see in this week's parsha, from the beginning of our national existence there have always been Jews - leading Jews, well-intentioned Jews, even outwardly pious Jews - who have preferred living somewhere else in the world to living in the Land of Israel.

Even when Hitler came to power, European Jews in many cases refused to consider the option of immigration to the Land of Israel. It is not my place to judge others for their behavior in a very dreadful time, especially since I am blessed with the perfect hindsight that they tragically lacked, but it is a strange fact that throughout Jewish history the naysayers regarding the Land of Israel in Jewish society have always abounded.

Jews in the generation of Moses claimed their preference for the land of Egypt over the Land of Israel. An entire generation of special and gifted Jews was destroyed in the desert of Sinai because of their unwillingness to consider living in the Land of Israel as a viable option for them and their descendants. The challenge of living in the Land of Israel was apparently too great a problem for them to overcome - physically, psychologically and spiritually.

To me this attitude remains one of the supreme mysteries of all of Jewish history. But mystery or not, it

certainly is a fact that has governed Jewish life over the ages.

When Moses' own relative refused the offer to go to the Land of Israel, Rashi explains that the two reasons for his behavior had to do with family and making a living. These are very strong reasons that exist today that prevent many Jews from considering immigrating to the Land of Israel. Again, I neither judge nor begrudge anyone in this or any other life changing matter.

However, I feel that the issue of the Land of Israel, independent of any other causes and motives, strikes at a very deep place within our personal and national soul. The fact that the most ultra-assimilated and the most outwardly ultra-pious within the Jewish people are included in our generation's most vociferous of the anti- Land of Israel groups, shows that the problem is both deep and sensitive.

The extremes in Jewish society cannot deal with the Land of Israel as a reality and earnestly hope that the issue will somehow disappear completely. There are millions of Jews who prefer living in exile to living in the Land of Israel. The Jewish people, as a whole has not absorbed the lessons of the exile, its alienation, assimilation and its ultimate corruption of Torah values.

Today, many Jews who physically live in the Land of Israel still psychologically and spiritually live in the exile, in a fantasy of the long-destroyed shtetel of Eastern Europe. As foretold to us by our prophets, the ultimate fate of the Jewish people will be determined for us by our attitude to the Land of Israel. Living in the Land of Israel or at least visiting it regularly is currently the centerpiece of Jewish life, its faith and its future. © 2012 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)

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**“W**e are now ready; let us go up to the place that G-d described, for we have sinned!" (Numbers 14: 40)

After the sin of the spies and the failure of the nation to enter the Land of Israel as a result of their ill-advised reconnaissance mission, Divine punishment is meted out. But what follows this sin and its punishment is an even stranger account which seems to challenge the power of repentance to achieve forgiveness. "Moses related these words (of penalty and desert destruction) to all the children of Israel... And they arose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying: "We are now ready; let us go up to the place that G-d described, for we have sinned!" And Moses said,"... Do not go up; G-d is not in your midst.... But (the people) wickedly went up to the top of the

mountain, while the ark of the covenant of the Lord and Moses did not move from the midst of the encampment. The Amalakites and the Canaanites who dwelt on that mountain scooped down and defeated (the Israelites), pursuing them with crushing force all the way to Hormah" (Numbers 14: 39-45).

But why was G-d not in their midst? Why did the Almighty allow the Israelites to be defeated? They seem to have repented; they were apparently trying to repair the sin of the scouts and make it to Israel! Why is this considered an added transgression rather than an act of repentance; the repair, or tikkun, for the major transgression of the desert!

I would add to this the Abarbanel's question. What follows this incident of the ma'apilim - wicked or defiant climbers of the mountain seems to be a string of disparate commandments unconnected to our theme of the Land of Israel: the sacrificial offerings, the gift of hallah, national atonement for unwitting transgressions, the sin of the wood gatherer on the Sabbath and the commandment of the ritual fringes. What have these laws to do with each other, and what is their connection to the sin of the scouts and the story of the ma'apilim?

Let us begin by trying to comprehend the negative action of the mountain climbers. The Biblical text hints that we are not dealing with an act of true repentance by the perverted order of their words: "We are now ready. Let us go up to the place... We have sinned" (Numbers 14:40). Repentance demands recognition of sin and contrition for past misdeed. Only after atonement has been made, ought the penitent proceed with an act of reparation. Here they are focused first and foremost on the place; they mention their sin merely as an afterthought without any expression of contrition.

The issue becomes even clearer as the text continues. Moses tells them not to ascend the mountain to Israel because G-d is not in their midst. They are Israel oriented rather than G-d oriented, committed to occupying a land rather than to fulfilling Divine will. Indeed, they barely seem to recognize the relationship between the physical soil of Israel and the Divine soul of Israel.

Hence,"(the people) wickedly went up to the top of the mountain while neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses moved out from the midst of the encampment" (ibid. 14:44). Remember, they had been warned only one verse previously that; "up ahead were the Amalekites and the Canaanites, and you will fall by the sword" (ibid. 14:43); and they had already received the message that: "(Only) when the Ark (of the Lord) went forth, would Moses say, "Arise Oh G-d and scatter your enemies and cause those who hate you to flee before you" (Numbers 10:35). Nevertheless, these defiant mountain-climbers were prepared to face their enemies on their way to the Land of Israel without the Ark of G-d and without Moses, the prophet of G-d. Apparently, they were completely secular Zionists, who

may have been committed to the land but were blind to its Divine mission and messages.

Perhaps this is what Rabbi Yehuda Ben Betera has in mind when he argues against Rabbi Akiva- that Tselafhad, whose daughters insisted on their feminine rights of inheritance to the land of Israel, was one of the defiant mountain climbers (ma'apilim) and not the Sabbath desecrator who gathered wood (B.T. Shabbat 96b). The Bible teaches that Tselafhad died in the desert because of his sin. Rabbi Yehuda Ben Betera refuses to accept the fact that the father of such righteous lovers of Zion could have been guilty of a crime as major as that of Sabbath desecration as Rabbi Akiva maintains. He prefers to believe that his sin was rather that of the ma'apilim, an incomplete appreciation of the Land of Israel. But Tselafhad did succeed in transmitting his passion for the Land of Israel to his daughters, who added their commitment to G-d.

From this perspective, we can well understand the list of laws which follow the incident of the ma'apilim. The Bible reminds the Israelites that when they enter the land, they must be mindful of its true purpose: offerings to G-d, national atonement, commitment to the Sabbath and involvement in all 613 commandments. The Land of Israel and the laws of the Torah must be connected as one to express the true mission and message of our nation. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**ELIEZER ABRAHAMSON**

## Olive Seedlings

In Parshas Shelach we learn of the incident of the meraglim-spies-in which the spies sent to investigate the land of Israel returned with an evil report about the land. The Jewish people accepted this report and spent the night crying and bemoaning their fate. In the end, God condemned the people to remain in the wilderness for forty years, while the spies themselves died immediately in a plague.

What exactly was the sin of the Jewish people in accepting the report of the spies? God sums up the sin in His initial statement to Moses (Numbers 14:11), "How long will this people anger Me, and how long will they not have faith in Me, with all the signs that I have done in its midst?" The essence of their sin was their failure to have faith in God. After all that God had already done for them, with all the miracles of the Exodus, the Revelation at Sinai, and their supernatural survival in the wilderness (e.g. manna, clouds of glory, the well of Miriam, etc.), the Jewish people were still not ready to wholeheartedly trust God.

As a rebbi, when I would teach this parsha, my students would often ask, "What was wrong with those people? After everything they had seen with their own eyes, they still didn't believe?" The following is how I would address this issue when it came up in the classroom.

Clearly, the Jewish people believed in God. They knew God in a way that no later generation can even begin to comprehend. Yet, despite their knowledge, they were not yet capable of truly trusting Him. Trust is an emotion, and with all their intellectual knowledge of God, they were incapable of creating the emotion of trust within themselves.

The Jewish people had just experienced several generations of horrific abuse at the hands of the Egyptians. When they had first come to Egypt, they were welcomed, and they had been respected and productive members of Egyptian society. Suddenly, almost overnight and for no apparent reason, that ended and the Egyptians turned against them. The Jews were forced into dehumanizing servitude and became nothing more than property.

Unsurprisingly, this experience deeply scarred the Jewish people. Not only had they been abused, but they had been abused by people who were once their friends! And not only had their friends turned against them, but they had done so for no reason!

Now along came God and rescued them from Egypt, bringing them into a wilderness where they are completely dependent on Him, telling them He that He would bring them to a land "flowing with milk and honey". Everything looked wonderful- yet the Jewish people, deep down inside, were listening for the second shoe to drop. On some level, even with all that they knew of God, they still had an irrational fear that all of this was just a set-up for a betrayal. In the end it would go bad, because, after generations of slavery, they knew, on an almost instinctual level, that things always go bad.

With this understanding, much of the behavior of the Jewish people in the wilderness (from the sin of the golden calf to the complaints about the food) makes far more sense. While they certainly wanted to trust God, their insecurity in their relationship with God caused them to continually "test" the relationship and to overreact to every possible problem.

This is why, even after the people had repented, they still had to remain in the desert for forty years. The forty years in the desert wasn't really a punishment; it was therapy. The people needed to experience forty years of life in which God directly participated in the daily life of every single person. Only after those forty years would their relationship with God be strong enough that they would be ready to go on to a normal life in the land of Israel.

God certainly understood the internal struggles that the Jewish people were going through, and He knew that they were not truly ready for a healthy relationship. God knew from the beginning that the Jewish people would need to spend the next forty years in the desert. Yet, before this could be made "official", it was necessary that the people recognize this as well. Otherwise, the forty years in the desert would have appeared utterly senseless, and would have led to even

greater problems. It was therefore necessary for the Jewish people to "sin" in such a manner that they too would recognize that they were not yet ready to enter the land of Israel.

This explains why God told Moses to send the spies, even though He knew what would happen. "Send for yourself men..."-in the end the spies revealed to the Jewish people far more about themselves than they did about the land of Israel.

This also explains why God had to "go through the motions" of "anger" and "forgiveness", first threatening to destroy them and then, in response to the prayers of Moses, "forgiving" them. (Indeed, the Sforno (14: 20) understands God's response to Moses' prayer to mean that God had already forgiven the Jewish people before Moses had even begun praying.) This taught the Jewish people two vitally important lessons. Firstly, it made it clear that this kind of distrust was not acceptable in a proper relationship and that they needed to change. Secondly, it made it clear that even so, no matter what they did, God would ultimately forgive them.

This understanding of the incident of the spies teaches us several important lessons. One lesson we can learn from this is that there are times when God will send us a test that He knows we will fail. This can happen when we are unaware of a spiritual flaw that is preventing our spiritual development. When we fail a test that, by all appearances, we should have passed, we realize that we aren't really at the level that we thought, and, hopefully, we are motivated to find those hidden flaws and rectify them. (See Rav Eliyahu Dessler in *Michtav M'Eliyahu* I:165 and IV:186-187 for a discussion of this concept, based on the Pri Ha'aretz of R' Menachem Mendel M'Vitepsk.)

A more basic lesson that we can learn from here is the profound connection between our relationships with others and our relationship with God. To the degree that our relationships with other human beings are dysfunctional, so will be our relationship with God, whether we recognize it or not. If our fellow human beings find us difficult to deal with, then the likelihood is that God feels the same way. Thus the Sages taught, "Anyone who is pleasing to his fellow men is pleasing to God, and anyone who is displeasing to his fellow men is displeasing to God." (*Pirkei Avos* 3:10)

Along the same lines, this idea also brings out the spiritual aspect of our interpersonal obligations. For when we hurt another person, we are not only hurting them physically and emotionally, we are also hurting them spiritually. Every time we betray a friend, hurt a loved one, abuse our authority, or any of the other cruel things that we do one another, not only do we undermine our relationships with our fellow human beings but we also chip away at our fellow human being's relationship with God. On the other hand, every time we do an act of kindness, when we keep our word, when we give of ourselves for the benefit of others, not

only are we making the world a better place for ourselves and others, but we are also bringing the world a little bit closer to God. © 2012 E. Abrahamson

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg  
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The sages delved deep into the souls of the scouts, and they found personal interests which led them to object to entering Eretz Yisrael. For example, "Why did they arrive at this idea? They said, if Yisrael enters the land they will remove us from our positions as leaders, and Moshe will appoint other leaders" [*Zohar*, volume 3, 158:1]. Rabbi Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, the author of "Eim Habanim Semeicha," writes, "The same is true of our time. Even the rabbis and the Chassidic leader - each one might have a satisfactory congregation, and the people have good businesses or good factories... If they move to Eretz Yisrael they fear that they will be worse off." [page 38].

Rabbi Teichtal adds that Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld would scold anybody who spoke against the pioneers, and he would say that the land would bring them back to performing good deeds. He added that the seventeenth of Elul is a fast day in memory of righteous men, since it is the day that the scouts died. But Magen Avraham asks how this could be, in view of the verse, "when evil men perish there is joy" [*Mishlei* 11:10]. In answer to this question the SHELAH replies that the scouts were righteous men. And Rabbi Sonnenfeld would therefore say, "Even righteous men can act the way the scouts did."

Rabbi Eliyahu of Gridich (who was described in *Responsa "Nefesh Chayah"* as a "Divine angel") wrote: "Happy is the one who toils to expand the settlement in Eretz Yisrael... because I have many proofs that as soon as the enterprise of settling the land is finished the spark of the redemption will come. And we can see how great this goal is from the fact that the 'evil shell' increases its power in the most righteous men, to cause them to object to this good action. The full strength of the 'shell' depends on the exile, and it will lose its power if the exile comes to an end."

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, who was broadly accepted throughout the exile in the period before the Holocaust, encouraged people to move to Eretz Yisrael, purchase land, and perform agricultural work. Here is what he wrote: "With thanks to the G-d of Yisrael, who kept us alive and brought us to this time, when the movement has awakened in all of our people to get involved in the holy matter of settling Eretz Yisrael... As a result of our merits in trying to increase the size and the glory of the holy settlements with agricultural work and industry of young people who want to reap the benefits of their own labor, let our eyes see our nation rise up... and dwell on our holy land which was taken

away from us for the last two thousand years. From the initial dire suffering let us rise up to an end that is very exalted."

In another letter, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan describes an organization in Kovno whose purpose was to buy land and to settle in Eretz Yisrael, and he ends the letter, "Every person in Yisrael is obligated to help them in this holy matter."

The Rebbe of Pilov wrote an interesting insight. King David wrote with respect to the scouts that "they despised the desired land" [Tehillim 106:24]. According to the halacha, one who does not thank G-d in the Grace after Meals "for a land that is pleasant, good, and broad" has not fulfilled the obligation of giving thanks. In addition, one who does not have the proper intention when he recites this phrase also does not get credit for observing the mitzva. The conclusion is that one who thinks about the land in a derogatory manner and does not recognize the praise that is due to the land will not be able to fulfill his obligation of reciting the Grace after Meals. © 2012 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

The episode of the spies indicates that the challenges facing the Jewish people after we left Egypt were not merely a temporary phase. They were built into the very fabric of our nation.

As we left Egypt, the Jews complained that they lacked food and water. They were forced to defend themselves against the vicious Amalekites. Even after they received the Ten Declarations, they built the golden calf at Sinai. Despite experiencing the greatest miracles from God, we were a people constantly struggling to believe in the constant presence of the Divine.

Sensing that these problems were simply the natural reactions of a brand new nation, Moshe (Moses) comes to Israel's defense and asks lamah, "why?" "Why, Oh God, should Your anger flare up against Your people whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt?" (Exodus 32:11). Having just left Egypt, Moshe asks God to have patience with the people who have just come out of an experience of slavery.

Indeed, after leaving Sinai, things improved. The Tabernacle was built, and, in the Book of Leviticus, the laws of the priesthood and Torah ethics are given. And, in the beginning of the Book of Numbers, the Jewish people are counted as they prepare to enter the land of Israel.

Just as they're ready to enter, we encounter the mit-onenim, the complainers. (Numbers 11:1) For Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, that word comes from ana. It is a cry of woe, a cry of a people that had lost its way.

Here it became clear that the problem the Jewish people faced was no longer a passing one, but it

was one that was endemic to its very core. Soon after, in our portion, the spies are sent out. Later, Korach rebels against Moshe. In the end, the Jews wandered in the desert for forty years.

In the incident of mit-onenim, Moshe cries out with yet another lamah, with another "why?" But this time, he does not question God as he did in the incident of the golden calf. Rather, he asks, "why have You done evil to your servant?" (Numbers 11:11) Here, Moshe recognizes that the challenge of the Jewish people would remain for many years and Moshe bemoans that he would have to lead the Jewish people like "a nurse carries a suckling." (Numbers 11:12)

In no small measure, we today face a similar extremely difficult and sad situation. There was a time when some thought that the conflict with our Arab neighbors, specifically with the Palestinians, was passing and with time it would work itself out. But, as Jews are murdered so mercilessly these days, we have come to recognize that the problem is not a temporary one. Seventy five percent of Palestinians support suicide bombings; one third of the suicide bombers have received higher education; the father of the suicide bomber who murdered twenty teenagers in Tel Aviv, wishes that all his sons be the same; Palestinian children are taught to hate Jews; and Arab newspapers equate Judaism with Nazism. What is clear is that the enemy has dug in and we face a danger that is a protracted one.

Like the Biblical Moshe, we too wonder why it has become so difficult. But we must not let the "why?" paralyze us. Each of us must recognize the obligation to do all we can, to care, to speak out and to visit our sisters and brothers in Israel who are on the front lines teaching us the way to love the land and the people of Israel. May we stand strong to this challenge that, although we pray that it be a temporary one, looks like it is one that will be with us for quite some time. © 2001 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 SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**A**mong the questions about the land of Canaan that Moshe commanded the twelve spies to investigate was "does it have trees or not?" and then added "you should take from the fruit of the land." Rashi cites a midrash explaining that this question was not literally about trees, but rather whether there were upright people in the land whose merit might protect the inhabitants. The Satmar Rav (quoted in Talelei Orot) asks a question on the Midrash: How were the spies to determine if there were upright individuals in the land? We all know that there are plenty of phonies around and sometimes the person with the most pious exterior is disguising a rotten core.

The Rav explains that "you should take from the fruit of the land" was Moshe's advice on how to investigate the true character of the Canaanites. Look at their "fruit," their children and their students.

A person can easily fool the casual observer, but children and students are acutely sensitive to hypocrisy. If there were truly upright and righteous people among the Canaanites, the spies would find upright and righteous children and students; but if there was no proper "fruit" to be found, then the "trees" were absent as well. May we merit to have the sincerity and integrity to be "trees" that produce the proper fruit.

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### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**T**he scouts returned from the Promised Land, painting a very dim picture (Bamidbar 13:31-33). Y'hoshua and Kalev disagreed, stating emphatically that the land is "very, very good," and that with G-d's help they could conquer it (14:6-9). In response, "the entire congregation said they should stone them" (14:10). From the context of the narrative, it seems fairly clear that the targets of the stoning were Y'hoshua and Kalev, who had dared to contradict the other scouts. And this is how Rashi and Ibn Ezra explain the verse (see also Midrash HaGadol on 14:4). However, the Midrashim (e.g. Tanchuma 12/22 and P'sikta Rabasi 26) are (almost) unanimous that the targets were Moshe and Aharon; why would Chazal explain the verse differently than its much more straightforward meaning?

One possibility is based on G-d's reaction, "showing His glory to the Children of Israel" (14:10). The Mechilta (on Sh'mos 16:10) says this was how G-d showed His support for and/or protected Moshe and Aharon when the nation complained about them or attacked them. If "showing His glory" was an indication of protecting Moshe and Aharon, and it was assumed that only Moshe and Aharon deserved such protection (see Radal on Bamidbar Rabbah 16:21, quoted by Eitz Yosef), we can understand why Chazal would say that the targets must have been Moshe and Aharon. However, the context of the verses, which had most recently discussed Y'hoshua and Kalev, does indicate that they were the "them" being stoned.

In their commentary on Bamidbar Rabbah (16:21), Maharzo and Radal (quoted by Eitz Yosef) point out that the conversation as it is related in Parashas Sh'lach is incomplete; Moshe filled in some of the missing parts in Parashas D'varim (1:22-45). These commentators piece the conversation together by suggesting that the nation was responding to Y'hoshua and Kalev when they said "our brethren have dissolved our resolve (lit. melted our hearts)" (1:28), with Moshe then telling them "not to fear [the giant natives of Canaan], for G-d will fight for you" (1:29-30). If it was at

this point that the nation wanted to stone "them," the "them" would refer to Moshe and Aharon (assuming Aharon was at Moshe's side), since Moshe was the person who had most recently spoken. Nevertheless, it is difficult to know exactly where each part of the conversation related in D'varim fits into the conversation in Sh'lach, leaving us to rely on the original context of the stoning happening after Y'hoshua and Kalev took their stand, implying that they were the ones attacked.

Many commentators discuss why Rashi needed to tell us who was being attacked. Although Chazal telling us that it was Moshe and Aharon should be enough of a reason for Rashi to want to tell us that "al pi p'shuto shel mikra," based on a straightforward reading of the text, it was really Y'hoshua and Kalev, the commentators make suggestions as to why we might have thought it wasn't Y'hoshua and Kalev. For example, Rebbi Yaakov K'nizel says there is no need to use the word "them" at all; if the verse only stated that the nation threw stones we would realize that Y'hoshua and Kalev were the targets. Therefore (he continues), Rashi had to tell us that the extra verbiage did not mean that it wasn't Y'hoshua and Kalev. It could therefore be suggested that the Midrashim understood the extra "them" to mean others, not Y'hoshua and Kalev, with those others being Moshe and Aharon. However, if the extra word is there to teach us that Y'hoshua and Kalev weren't the targets, we would expect the Torah to tell us explicitly who the real targets were. (It's not as if the only other option was Moshe and Aharon; see Maysiach Il'mim, who suggests that Rashi had to point out that it was Y'hoshua and Kalev so that we wouldn't think that Y'hoshua and Kalev had convinced the nation that the other scouts were misleading them, and that those other scouts were the targets of the stones.)

B'er BaSadeh explains the Midrashim in a totally different way, pointing out that the Torah says the nation "said they would stone them," rather than "attempted to stone them." Who did the nation "say" this to? According to B'er BaSadeh, the Midrashim are telling us that that they "said" it to Moshe and Aharon, asking permission to stone Y'hoshua and Kalev. Aside from this not being the straightforward way to read the Midrashim, it seems rather far-fetched for the nation to have thought that Moshe and Aharon would give permission to stone the two scouts that had defended the Promised Land (especially since Y'hoshua was Moshe's primary student and Kalev was Moshe and Aharon's brother-in-law).

B'er BaSadeh's point about the nation "saying" they would stone them (rather than that they actually attempted to do so) is a valid one (baruch she'kivanti), but there are others ways of addressing this issue. Many of the same Midrashim that tell us that the targets were Moshe and Aharon also tell us (on a previous usage of the word), that the term used for "congregation" ("eidah") refers specifically to the "Sanhedriyos," the nation's high courts. Therefore, the

"saying" could refer to a "verdict" these courts gave, "telling" the nation that they can (or perhaps should) stone either Moshe and Aharon or Y'hoshua and Kalev (see Maharzo). Even though other sources (Shir HaShirim Zuta 1 and Ba'al HaTurim on Bamidbar 11:16) understand "eidah" to be one of the 70 ways terms used to describe the nation as a whole (not just the "Sanhedriyos"), if the nation made sure it was within legal parameters before throwing any stones, the expression "and the entire eidah," i.e. the Sanhedriyos, "said to stone them" i.e. that the could/should, is quite exact.

Another possible explanation for the nation "saying" they would throw stones rather than just doing it could be based on the end of the verse—"and the honor of G-d appeared in the Mishkan to all the Children of Israel." If the purpose of this "divine appearance" was to scare the nation, thereby preventing them from attacking anyone (see Midrash Lekach Tov), it could be suggested that the nation spoke about stoning Y'hoshua and Kalev (or Moshe and Aharon), but were prevented from ever doing so. Nevertheless, most Midrashim have it that the nation not only stoned "them," but stoned the cloud-pillar that contained G-d's honor within it as well. If there was actual stoning going on even after the cloud-pillar made its appearance, obviously it didn't stop the nation from turning its talk of stoning into action. (The commentators on the Midrashim explain that the juxtaposition of the appearance of G-d's honor with the nation throwing stones indicates that they threw stones at G-d, as it were, as well.)

Although it is doubtful that there was really a legal court case held to decide whether or not to stone anyone who defended the Promised Land, it does make sense that the leaders (at least those who were sympathetic to the anti-Promised Land cause) would be consulted in order to formulate a plan of action. Any game-planning would include trying to figure out what the opposition would do in response and how to deal with it. When considering whether or not to stone Y'hoshua and Kalev for defending the Promised Land, it would have been expected that Moshe and Aharon would come to their defense. Should they stone Y'hoshua and Kalev even though Moshe and Aharon will try to stop them? What should they do when Moshe and Aharon step in? If Moshe and Aharon could be considered primary targets, they could certainly have been the secondary targets, to be attacked only after they defended Y'hoshua and Kalev. It is therefore possible that the plan was to stone Y'hoshua and Kalev for defending the Promised Land, with part of the plan being to keep up the attack even after Moshe and Aharon took their side.

Who were the primary targets? As the context of the verse indicates, Y'hoshua and Kalev were. The Midrashim, picking up on the nuances of the context and choices of words, tell us that ultimately they weren't

the only targets, as the nation would have been willing to stone Moshe and Aharon too. However, since the cloud-pillar of G-d's honor came down to protect them ("them" being Moshe and Aharon, who would have been targeted next), the nation ended up only "talking" about throwing stones at them. Actual stones were only tossed at Y'hoshua and Kalev, and then at the cloud-pillar, while Moshe and Aharon would have been targeted had G-d not intervened. Rashi, explaining the verse on its most simple level, tells us that it was Y'hoshua and Kalev who were targeted. The Midrashim, reading between the lines, tell us that the nation would have stoned Moshe and Aharon as well, had G-d not prevented it. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### SHLOMO KATZ

### Hama'ayan

The 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)  
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