

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**Y**ou are driving ever so slightly above the speed limit. You see a police car in your rear view mirror. You slow down. You know perfectly well that it is wrong to exceed the speed limit whether anyone is watching or not, but being human, the likelihood of being found out and penalized makes a difference.

Recently a series of experiments has been conducted by psychologists to test the impact of the sense of being observed on pro-social behaviour. Chenbo Zhong, Vanessa Bohns and Francesca Gino constructed a test to see whether a feeling of anonymity made a difference. They randomly assigned to a group of students either sunglasses or clear eyeglasses, telling them that they were testing reactions to a new product line. They were also, in an apparently unrelated task, given six dollars and chance of sharing any of it with a stranger. Those wearing clear glasses gave on average \$2.71 while those wearing dark sunglasses gave an average of \$1.81. The mere fact of wearing sunglasses, and thus feeling unrecognised and unrecognisable, reduced generosity. In another experiment, they found that students given the opportunity to cheat in a test were more likely to do so in a dimly lit room than in a brightly lit one. The more we think we may be observed, the more generous and moral we become.

Kevin Haley and Dan Fessler tested students on the so-called Dictator Game, in which you are given, say, ten dollars, together with the opportunity of sharing any or none of it with an anonymous stranger. Beforehand, and without realising it was part of the experiment, some of the students were briefly shown a pair of eyes as a computer screen saver, while others saw a different image. Those exposed to the eyes gave 55 per cent more to the stranger than the others. In another study researchers placed a coffee maker in a university hallway. Passers-by could take coffee and leave money in the box. On some weeks a poster with watchful eyes was hanging on the wall nearby, on others a picture of flowers. On the weeks where the

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Moshe ben Dovid hakohen, z"l

eyes were showing, people left on average 2.76 times as much money as at other times.<sup>1</sup>

Ara Norenzayan, author of the book *Big G-ds* from which these studies are taken, concludes that "Watched people are nice people." That is part of what makes religion a force for honest and altruistic behaviour: the belief that G-d sees what we do. It is no coincidence that, as belief in a personal G-d has waned in the West, surveillance by CCTV and other means has had to be increased. Voltaire once said that whatever his personal views on the matter he wanted his butler and other servants to believe in G-d because then he would be cheated less.

Less obvious is the experimental finding that what makes the difference to the way we behave is not simply what we believe, but rather the fact of being reminded of it. In one test, conducted by Brandon Randolph-Seng and Michael Nielsen, participants were exposed to words flashed for less than 100 milliseconds, that is, long enough to be detected by the brain but not long enough for conscious awareness. They were then given a test in which they had the opportunity to cheat. Those who had been shown words relating to G-d were significantly less likely to do so than people who had been shown neutral words. The same result was yielded by another test in which, beforehand, some of the participants were asked to recall the Ten Commandments while others were asked to remember the last ten books they had read. Merely being reminded of the Ten Commandments reduced the tendency to cheat.

Another researcher, Deepak Malhotra, surveyed the willingness of Christians to give to online charitable appeals. The response was 300 per cent greater if the appeal was made on a Sunday than on any other day of the week. Clearly the participants did not change their minds about religious belief or the importance of charitable giving between weekdays and Sundays. It was simply that on Sundays they were more likely to have thought about G-d on that day. A similar test was carried out among Muslims in Morocco, where it was found that people were more likely to give generously to charity if they lived in a place where they could hear the call to prayer from a local minaret.

Nazorayan's conclusion is that 'Religion is

<sup>1</sup> This and the following paragraphs are based on Ara Norenzayan, *Big G-ds: How religion transformed cooperation and conflict*, Princeton University Press, 2013, 13-54.

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more in the situation than in the person,<sup>2</sup> or to put it another way, what makes the difference to our behaviour is less what we believe than the phenomenon of being reminded, even subconsciously, of what we believe.

That is precisely the psychology behind the mitzvah of tsitsit in this week's parsha: This shall be your tsitsit and you shall see it and remember all the Lord's commandments and keep them, not straying after your heart and after your eyes, following your own sinful desires. Thus you will be reminded to keep all My commandments, and be holy to your G-d. (Num. 15: 39)

The Talmud<sup>3</sup> tells the story of a man who, in a moment of moral weakness, decided to pay a visit to a certain courtesan. He was in the course of removing his clothes when he saw the tsitsit and immediately froze. The courtesan asked him what was the matter, and he told her about the tsitsit, saying that the four fringes had become accusing witnesses against him for the sin he was about to commit. The woman was so impressed by the power of this simple command that she converted to Judaism.

We sometimes fail to understand the connection between religion and morality. Dostoevsky is said to have said that if G-d did not exist all would be permitted.<sup>4</sup> This is not the mainstream Jewish view. According to Rav Nissim Gaon, the moral imperatives accessible to reason have been binding since the dawn of humanity.<sup>5</sup> We have a moral sense. We know that certain things are wrong. But we also have conflicting desires. We are drawn to do what we know we should not do, and often we yield to temptation. Anyone who has ever tried to lose weight knows exactly what that means. In the moral domain, it is what the Torah means when it speaks of "straying after your heart and after your eyes, following your own sinful desires."

The moral sense, wrote James Q. Wilson, "is not a strong beacon light radiating outward to illuminate

in sharp outline all that it touches." It is, rather, "a small candle flame, casting vague and multiple shadows, flickering and sputtering in the strong winds of power and passion, greed and ideology." He add: "But brought close to the heart" it "dispels the darkness and warms the soul."<sup>6</sup>

Wittgenstein once said that "the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders."<sup>7</sup> In the case of Judaism the purpose of the outward signs – tsitsit, mezuzah and tefillin – is precisely that: to assemble reminders, on our clothes, our homes, our arms and head, that certain things are wrong, and that even if no other human being sees us, G-d sees us and will call us to account. We now have the empirical evidence that reminders make a significant difference to the way we act.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who shall know it?" said Jeremiah (Jer. 17: 9). One of the blessings and curses of human nature is that we use our power of reason not always and only to act rationally, but also to rationalize and make excuses for the things we do, even when we know we should not have done them. That, perhaps is one of the lessons the Torah wishes us to draw from the story of the spies. Had they recalled what G-d had done to Egypt, the mightiest empire of the ancient world, they would not have said, "We cannot attack those people; they are stronger than we are" (Num. 13: 31). But they were in the grip of fear. Strong emotion, fear especially, distorts our perception. It activates the amygdala, the source of our most primal reactions, causing it to override the prefrontal cortex that allows us to think rationally about the consequences of our decisions.

Tsitsit with their thread of blue remind us of heaven, and that is what we most need if we are consistently to act in accordance with the better angels of our nature. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"**W**e should go up at once and possess it [the land] for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30) The tragedy of the desert generation is the refusal of the Israelites to conquer the Land of Israel and to realize the main objective for their freedom from Egypt. The scouts give their report, show the luscious fruit with which they have returned and concede that Israel is a land flowing with milk and honey. But they continue to describe a land filled with aggressive giants, and well-fortified cities, concluding that; "we cannot go forward against those people... they are too strong for us." One individual, Caleb, speaks

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>3</sup> Menachot 44a.

<sup>4</sup> He did not say these precise words, but said something similar in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

<sup>5</sup> Commentary to Berakhot, introduction.

<sup>6</sup> James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense*, Free Press, 1993, 251.

<sup>7</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, §127.

out mightily on behalf of the land: "We must go forth and occupy the land.... We can do it." We will be able to conquer it because we must conquer it; without a homeland, we cannot be a nation. Caleb, however, loses the argument. The nation silences his plea; their conclusion is either to return to Egypt or to remain homeless in the desert forever. What was the point of this second view which won the day-at least for the desert generation?

I believe the difference between Caleb and the more vocal and convincing scouts is how to define the people Israel. Are we a religion or are we a nation? In more modern language, are we Israelis or are we Jews?

You will remember from previous commentaries that the Kotzker Rebbe referred to Korah as "the holy grandfather." Korah was deeply religious and he wanted more than anything else to be a kohen-priest and serve G-d. He didn't want to go to Israel, to get involved in a difficult war, to get his hands dirtied by the politics and arguments about nation-building. He believed, as the majority of scouts apparently believed, that the Hebrews could remain in the desert, focused on the sanctuary, pray to G-d and live off the manna from heaven. If the people of Israel is first and foremost a religion, then he was right. After all, life in the desert is an eternal Kollel with G-d taking care of you and no responsibilities to the outside world.

Moses, Caleb and Joshua-most importantly, G-d Himself-saw it differently. Yes, a very important part of Israel is our religion, which was given to us at our covenant at Sinai. But prior to that was the Abrahamic covenant "between the pieces," the covenant in which we are promised eternal life as the seed of Abraham and a national homeland. From the beginning of our history, G-d elects Abraham with a promise that "I shall make you a great nation... and all the families of the earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:2-3). And even before we received the Revelation at Sinai, we were charged with being a "kingdom of priest-teachers [to all of humanity] and a holy nation" (Ex.19:6). G-d determined that our mission is to influence the other nations to accept a philosophy of compassionate righteousness and moral justice; G-d also understood that we could never hope to influence other nations unless we were also a nation-state, subject to the same challenges as other countries. A religion only bears responsibility towards G-d; the Jewish religion is meant to be expressed within a nation-state with responsibility to the entire world.

This analysis has critical ramifications for our attitudes concerning conversion, especially in Israel where there are approximately 300,000 Israeli citizens from the former Soviet Union who are not yet halachic Jews. Ruth is undoubtedly the most famous convert in Jewish history aside from Abraham our Patriarch. Her formula of conversion begins with her statement to

Naomi, her Hebrew mother-in-law: "Wherever you go, I shall go... your nation shall be my nation and your G-d shall be my G-d..." (Ruth 1:16). For Ruth, the very first obligation of the convert is to live in the Land of Israel, the land of the Jewish nation; hence, her most important act of conversion is following her mother-in-law to the Land of Israel. When she defines what it means to convert to Judaism, she begins with national terms (your nation shall be my nation) then religious terms (your G-d shall be my G-d). She understands that whatever Judaism is, it includes a national as well as a religious aspect.

When one studies the Talmudic discussion of conversion (B.T. Yevamot 45-47) and even the Codes of Jewish Law, we see that our sages never insisted on total performance of commandments before one could become a Jew. They did insist that the convert be tutored in several of the more stringent and several of the more lenient commands and accept Judaism as a system of commandments. They also insisted upon ritual immersion (rebirth into the Jewish nation) and circumcision for males (the symbol of the Abrahamic covenant "between the pieces").

Citizens of Israel from the former Soviet Union, who themselves or whose children serve in the IDF, are performing the most stringent of our national commands in this generation. This must be taken into account by our conversion judges in addition to everything else these new immigrants will learn about the Sabbath, the festivals and our rituals. ©2015 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

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

Maimonides points out that the holiness of that conquest continued for as long as we remain sovereign in the land. Once Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians, the holiness ceased. (Yad, Hilkhot Beit ha-Bekhirah 6:16)

Interestingly, Maimonides states that when we re-entered the land with the permission of King Cyrus of Persia seventy years later, the holiness became eternal, continuing even after Israel was destroyed by the Romans.

Why was the first holiness finite and the second eternal?

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

Rav Soloveitchik offers another distinction. In

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

One final suggestion: Perhaps the difference lies in understanding the contrast between an event which occurs for the first time, and an event which is repeated. The first time something happens, the happening is as powerful as when it occurred. But once something is lost and still despite that loss, is restarted, the power of beginning again is so unusual that it is everlasting. It shows that one's involvement is not the function of the enthusiasm of a "first" decision. It is rather a thoughtful constant, ongoing involvement. In Jerusalem's case, it is eternal.

Some think that the most beautiful, the most lasting of experiences, of relationships, is the first. Yet often that is not the case. The real test of one's fortitude is what happens after one has failed. If even then, one can restart. That second start is considered so noble that it has the power to be even stronger than the first and often has the strength to last forever. ©2013 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 MORDECHAI WILLIG**

### **TorahWeb**

**"D**o not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray' (Bamidbar 15:39) - after your heart refers to heresy, and after your eyes refers to sexual immorality" (Berachos 12b). In order to avoid believing ideas that are antithetical to that which the Torah obligates us to believe, we must limit our thought and place a boundary for it to stop (Rambam, Sefer Hamitzvos Negative Mitzva 47). We may not even contemplate a thought which can cause a person to uproot one of the fundamentals of Torah. If a person thinks about these ideas critically, his limited mind may conclude that heresies are true; he may doubt the existence of Hashem, the truth of prophecy and the Divine source of the Torah (Rambam, Hilchos Avoda Zara 2:3). Such contemplation is prohibited even if no heretical conclusions are reached.

Unfortunately, the prescience of the Rambam has been borne out dramatically in our time. The zeitgeist of post-modernism and non-judgmentalism has corroded the allegiance to basic Jewish beliefs even within the Orthodox Jewish community to the

point that nothing is considered sacred and nothing is considered certain. Our youth are particularly vulnerable, more so than in medieval times when the Rashba (1:415) prohibited studying philosophy before the age of twenty five. Too often the beliefs of high school students are weakened by those who subject fundamental beliefs to secular critical thinking. On secular college campuses many graduates of these high schools, including those who learned in Israel, doubt or even deny the fundamentals of faith, exactly as the Rambam warned.

The Rambam (Sefer Hamitzvos ibid) continues: We may not be drawn after pleasures and physical lusts by our thoughts focusing on them constantly. Straying after one's eyes can lead to prohibited sexual activity. Here, too, the thought itself is prohibited, even if no physical violations result. Unfortunately, today's unprecedented availability of sexually arousing material makes this mitzva harder to fulfill. Moreover, the permissive culture we live in dramatically increases the chances that sins of thought, vision and speech will lead to sins of the flesh (Rashi 15:39). Too often, high school students do not observe the laws prohibiting physical contact between boys and girls (See Shulchan Aruch, Even HoEzersiman 21. Also see Igros Moshe Even HoEzer vol. 4 siman 60). In secular college campuses many ostensibly Orthodox Jews succumb to the permissive, and even promiscuous, culture.

The percentage of graduates of Orthodox high schools who attended secular colleges that abandon the basic Torah practices of Shabbos and kashrus is alarmingly high. "Orthodox Assimilation on College Campuses" (a recent work by Drs. Perl and Weinstein) shines light on this terrible and increasing reality. The Rambam's proof text refers to a Jewish man marrying a non-Jewish woman, and intermarriages, sometimes with an insincere and likely invalid conversion, are on the rise in this population.

The Sefer Hachinuch (mitzvah 387) notes that one of the reasons the Torah does not prescribe lashes for one who transgresses the prohibition of "Do not explore.." is that it is impossible for one's sights and thoughts to never go beyond that which is acceptable and therefore there is no clearly defined and detectable boundary which we could use to measure this transgression [See Freedom of Inquiry in Torah Umada Journal Vol. 1,2,3]. Nonetheless, placing a youngster in a spiritually dangerous situation is religiously reckless ("What should that son do and not sin?" Berachos 32a.)

Am Yisrael knew that avoda zara was meaningless and they did it only to allow themselves prohibited sexual relationships publicly (Sanhedrin 63b). Their sexual desires overcame them and they said, let us remove the entire burden of Torah from ourselves, then no one will rebuke us about sexual matters (Rashi). Today as well, heresy, the modern-day version of idolatry, and even the abandonment of all

Torah commandments, may be linked to sexual desires prohibited by halacha but permitted and even encouraged by today's decadent society's credo of "do whatever feels good."

Now, more than ever, we must guard our eyes and hearts with the necessary boundaries to distance ourselves from such behavior. Parents must model proper thought and conduct and do their utmost to protect their children as well. The Torah's prohibition and warning of, "Do not explore..", recited twice daily in Shema and reinforced constantly by the mitzva of tzitzis, must govern our decisions for ourselves and our children, "so that you may remember and perform all My commandments and be holy to your G-d" (15:40). © 2015 Rabbi M. Willig & the TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**M**oshe, at the behest and request of the Jewish people, chooses twelve outstanding leaders and orders them to embark on a mission of spying regarding the Land of Israel and its current Canaanite population. Moshe is confident that this mission will reinforce the enthusiasm and commitment of the Jewish people to settle and build their national homeland, promised to them by G-d through their ancestors.

G-d Himself, so to speak, appears to be almost aloof and passive about this spying mission. In the words of Rashi in this week's commentary to the parsha, the Lord leaves the choice of executing such a mission solely in the hands of Moshe. It is his option to proceed with the mission or to declare to the people that G-d's promises regarding the Holy Land are in themselves sufficient and need no human confirmation or empirical proof.

Moshe, the great leader, prophet and visionary of the Jewish people, is confident that the spies will confirm his positive view of the Land of Israel and thus dispel any remaining hesitation or doubts that the Jewish people may have regarding their old – new homeland. Once the spies returned and issue their glowing report, Moshe is convinced that he will no longer hear the nagging refrain of "let us return to Egypt."

He is therefore personally crushed by the betrayal of the ten spies, who not only do not issue a positive report but rather proclaim to the people that a Jewish homeland and national entity in the Land of Israel is an impossibility. And in a final statement of heresy, these ten spies state that even G-d Almighty cannot overcome the difficulties of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel.

Moshe apparently miscalculated the depth of fear and hesitation that lay within the Jewish people regarding the Land of Israel. This fear and hesitation was evident throughout the narrative of the wanderings

of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai. It resonates throughout the centuries of later Jewish history, even unto our day and in our current situation.

In a strange and almost irrational manner, the Jewish people favored being under foreign rule and its "protection" over true national independence and reliance upon their own abilities and G-d's protective hand, so to speak. Egypt was no picnic for the Jews, but it allowed them the luxury of not having to make hard choices and not having to become self-reliant.

Even the sojourn in the desert of Sinai appealed to them for they were free from the everyday challenges of toil, tilling the land, building communities and constantly defending themselves from the enemies that would always surround them. To a great extent it was this deep fear of independence and all of the challenges that independence would bring with it that motivated the Jewish people to accept the negative report that the ten spies presented and to long for foreign domination over personal and national independence.

Much of the ambivalence that is present today in the Jewish world regarding the State of Israel stems from this fear of independence and longing to belong to a foreign nation that will somehow alleviate our problems and make us less special. The millennia of Jewish history reflect this inner psychological struggle, which exists within us. As is often the case in human affairs, it is the minority report of Calev and Yehoshua that proves to be correct and beneficial. ©2015 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 DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

**"S**end for yourself men, and they shall scout the Land of Canaan" (Bamidbar 13:2). By adding the word(s) "for yourself," G-d was telling Moshe that He was not instructing him to send scouts, but that Moshe had permission to do so if he wanted (Rashi, based on Sotah 34b). However, since Moshe had asked G-d whether or not to follow the nation's request to send scouts (see D'varim 1:22), this answer is rather puzzling. Why didn't G-d answer the question? Was sending advance scouts a good idea or not? If so, why didn't G-d tell him to send them (as opposed to just allowing him to)? If not, why didn't G-d tell Moshe not to send them? What does it mean that Moshe can send them if he wants to, but doesn't have to?

Even more puzzling is that Moshe seems to have known that it was a bad idea. 39 years later, when he recounted the incident, he told the nation that he thought the idea to send scouts was a good one (D'varim 1:23), implying that although he thought it was

a good idea, G-d didn't (see Rashi, again based on Sotah 34b). Additionally, Moshe changed Y'hoshua's name hoping that G-d would save him from the bad intentions of the other scouts (see Rashi on Bamidbar 13:16); Moshe must have known that the scouts were up to no good if he asked G-d to protect Y'hoshua from them! Since Moshe was given the choice whether or not to send scouts, and he knew that doing so was problematic and that G-d didn't like the idea, why did he agree to send them?

[These issues, and others that revolve around them, are discussed by many of the commentators -- whether they be commentators on Chumash, on Rashi's commentary on Chumash, on the Talmud or on Ain Yaakov -- but I have yet to come across an approach that fully satisfies me. If anyone is interested in why I think the other approaches do not fully address the issues, or if anyone has come across an approach that they think does, please contact me by email (RabbiDMK at Yahoo dot com) or by commenting online (<http://tinyurl.com/q5ag4xy>).]

The original plan was to enter the Promised Land right away, but after the sin of the scouts, that plan was put on hold for about 40 years, until the generation that sinned died out. The common perception is that things changed after the scouts returned with their bad report and the nation accepted it. However, the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 16:17, Tanchuma Sh'lach 5/7, Yalkut Shimoni 742) paints a different picture. Explaining why G-d told Moshe to send scouts "for yourself," the Midrash tells us that the idea didn't come from G-d, as there was no need to send scouts. After all, He had already told the nation how good the Promised Land is, and He was going to show them exactly where to enter the land from (by leading them with His divine clouds). Rather, the request came from the people, who didn't trust what G-d had told them or that He would miraculously lead them to victory. Rabbi Y'hoshua then compares this to a king who told his son that he had found the perfect wife for him, but the son didn't trust him and wanted to meet her first. (Let's put aside the issue of the king expecting his son to agree to marry anyone without meeting her first, and focus on how the parable helps us understand what happened with the scouts.) The king was upset that his son didn't trust him, but realized that if he refused to let him meet her, his son would be convinced that there must be something wrong with her, and he was right for not trusting his father. Because the king was so upset, though, he decided that he wasn't going to allow his son to marry her even if, after meeting her, he wanted to. So he let him meet her, but told him that he can't marry her, only his son (the king's grandson) can. Getting back to the scouts, the Midrash continues: "and G-d had said to Israel that the land is good but they didn't believe Him, and asked to send scouts to investigate for [themselves]. G-d said,

'if I prevent them from doing so, they'll say that I didn't show it to [them] because the land really isn't good. Rather, they can see it, but I swear that they will not be able to enter it.'" In other words, it wasn't the bad report that prevented the nation from entering the land, it was the request to scout it.

Once we have established that G-d had already decreed that this generation would not be allowed to enter the land even before the scouts left on their mission, the question, partially answered by the Midrash, is why bother sending them at all. Although the Midrash says that G-d allowed them to send scouts anyway so that they shouldn't think G-d was trying to hide anything, this only addresses part of the issue. Moshe would have to deal with a nation that had to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River even if they wanted to cross into the Promised Land. Would letting them see the land they were not allowed to enter make things more difficult than if they were not allowed to see it? There are advantages and disadvantages to letting them send scouts even though they wouldn't be allowed to enter the land afterwards, but letting them scout the land was not going to impact whether or not they could enter it, only how they would react to not being allowed to. And this was something Moshe, as their leader, would have to deal with, so G-d left it up to him.

Although G-d gave permission to send the scouts (so that they wouldn't think He misled them), and giving His permission made it much more difficult for Moshe to say "no," G-d had to position it as permission and not a commandment because He didn't really want them to go. Once it was only permission and not a commandment, the ball was in Moshe's court to either say yes or no. Moshe decided it was better to let them see the land for themselves, but, knowing that the request itself was problematic, prayed that Y'hoshua would not be adversely affected by going on the mission that resulted from that improper request.

The Sifre (D'varim 21, quoted by Rashi on 1:23) says that Moshe thought it was a good idea to give them permission to send scouts because once they knew they could, perhaps they would no longer want to. A comparison is made to someone who wants to buy an animal and asks the seller if he can test it first. After the seller agreed to allow the animal to be put through all the rigorous tests requested, the buyer said there is no need to actually test it, as the seller would not have allowed him to do so if he wasn't confident that it would pass. It is therefore possible that Moshe was hoping that merely offering to let them send scouts would convince them that there was no need to actually send them. And if they changed their mind and decided not to send any scouts, perhaps he could convince G-d to change His mind (as it were) too, and let them enter the land. Or maybe he just thought that they would be better off knowing what they could have

had than maintaining their doubts about the land, and, by extension, about G-d. Either way, Moshe thought that despite G-d having already decreed that the nation cannot enter the land, it was still a good idea to let them go. But it was only "in his eyes" that it was good (not G-d's), because G-d had left the decision (whether or not to send them) to Moshe.

When the Talmud tells us (Sotah 34b) that the word(s) "for yourself" indicates that it was Moshe's choice, it continues by asking "does any person choose a bad portion for himself?" The commentators understand this "person" to be referring to G-d, with the Talmud asking either whether G-d would really have told them to send scouts if it would lead to such a tragedy, or whether G-d would have chosen this as the Promised Land if it wasn't good. Based on the above, it can be suggested that the "person" is really Moshe, with the Talmud asking (rhetorically) how Moshe could have chosen to send scouts if he knew it was a bad idea, answering that in Moshe's eyes it wasn't a bad thing. Rather than the proof-text ("and it was good in my eyes") being used to show that G-d didn't like the idea, so it must have been Moshe's decision not G-d's, it is brought to prove that even after G-d had told Moshe that He was upset that the nation wanted to send scouts, Moshe still thought it was a good idea to send them rather than letting the nation wander for 40 years without knowing what they had lost by requesting the scouts in the first place. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## **Piece of Cake**

It was not a good scenario. The twelve spies returned from their forty-day sojourn to the Land of Canaan and ten of them were not happy campers.

They left as an enthusiastic and united crew, selected by Moshe for what should have been an easy mission of assurance -- confirming what they were already told by their forebears, as well as the Almighty - Eretz Yisrael is a beautiful land that flows with milk and honey. Instead, the only two who had anything positive to say about the land of Israel, were Calev and Yehoshua. The rest of the spies claimed that the land was not good and that there were dangerous giants living there who would crush them. And now, in the face of the derogatory, inflammatory and frightening remarks that disparaged the Promised Land, Calev and Yehoshua were left to defend it.

It was too late. The ten evil spies had stirred up the negative passions of a disheartened nation. The people wanted to return to Egypt. But the two righteous men, Yehoshua and Calev, tried to persuade them otherwise.

The first and most difficult task facing them was to get the Children of Israel to listen to them. The Torah tells us: "They spoke to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, saying, "The Land that we passed

through, to spy it out -- the Land is very, very good.

If Hashem desires us, He will bring us to this Land and give it to us, a Land that flows with milk and honey. But do not rebel against Hashem! You should not fear the people of the Land, for they are our bread. Their protection has departed from them; Hashem is with us. Do not fear them!" (Numbers 14:7-9).

What did they mean by saying that the giants were "our bread"? Did they mean that the children of Israel will eat them like bread? Why bread of all things?

A story that circulated during the 1930s told of Yankel, a Jewish immigrant from the Ukraine who made his livelihood selling rolls on a corner in lower Manhattan. He was not an educated man. With poor eyesight and a hearing problem, he never read a newspaper or listened to the radio. He would daven, say Tehillim, learn a bit of Chumash, and bake his rolls. Then he would stand on the side of the road and sell his fresh-baked delicious smelling rolls.

"Buy a roll, mister?" he would ask passersby, the majority of them would gladly oblige with a generous purchase. Despite his simple approach, Yankel did well. He ordered a larger oven and increased his flour and yeast orders. He brought his son home from college to help him out. Then something happened. His son asked him, "Pa, haven't you heard about the situation with the world markets? There are going to be great problems soon. We are in the midst of a depression!" The father figured that his son's economic forecast was surely right. After all, his son went to college whereas he himself did not even read the papers. He canceled the order for the new oven and held s for more flour, took down his signs and waited. Sure enough with no advertisement and no inventory, his sales fell overnight. And soon enough Yankel said to his son. "You are right. We are in the middle of a great depression."

Bread is the staple of life, but it also is the parable of faith. Our attitude toward our bread represent our attitude toward every challenge of faith. If one lives life with emunah p'shutah, simple faith, then his bread will be sufficient to sustain him. The customers will come and he will enjoy success. It is when we aggrandize the bleakness of the situation through the eyes of the economic forecasters, the political pundits, or the nay sayers who believe in the power of their predictions and give up hope based on their mortal weaknesses, then one might as well close shop.

Yehosua and Calev told the people that these giants are no more of a challenge than the demands of our daily fare. They are our bread. And as with our daily fare, our situation is dependent totally on our faith.

If we listen to the predictions of the forecasters and spies, we lose faith in the Almighty and place our faith in the powerless. However, by realizing that the seemingly greatest challenges are the same challenges

of our daily fare -- our bread -- the defeat of even the largest giants will be a piece of cake. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

### AL SHEIM HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE Z"L

## Bais Hamussar

**W**hile many people succeed in suppressing feelings of anger in most scenarios, occasionally a situation may arise where they simply blow up. The instigation for the great anger is generally someone committing a severe offense which demands a stern response. The problem is that because the infraction caught our fuming friend off guard, instead of weighing his options and choosing a rational response, he erupted into a shouting frenzy which most likely did not achieve the desired results. How is one meant to overcome his anger and act sensibly when faced with such circumstances?

Rav Wolbe writes (AleI Shur vol. II pp. 219,220) that the answer can be found in Chazal and even traced back to this week's parsha. The Gemara (Brachos 7a) tells us that Hashem davens. "What does He daven? Said Rav Zutra bar Tuvi in the name of Rav, 'May it be My will that My compassion should suppress My anger. My compassion should overcome My other middos and I should deal with them (Bnei Yisrael) leniently.'" Hashem's anger is the attribute which demands perfection from His creations. Yet, His compassion has the ability to so to speak steamroll over all other attributes and change His reaction to one where He will act indulgently to His creatures.

Any middah through which Hashem expresses Himself can also be found in ourselves. While we certainly know that a person has the ability to zealously arouse his anger at a wrongdoer, it is also true that he has the ability to override his anger. His compassion can be aroused to such a degree where it will act as a torrential waterfall which surges down the side of the mountain, eliminating all rocks and branches standing in its way. Because one's emotions of love and compassion are usually internally deeper and stronger than his emotion of anger they have the ability to overcome it.

It was with this idea in mind that Moshe davened to Hashem after the disaster created by the meraglim: "Now may the strength of Hashem be magnified" (Bamidbar 14:17), i.e. may Your great compassion supersede the anger aroused by this terrible misdeed. In a similar vein, a human being has the ability to magnify the strength of his compassion in a time of need and overcome anger kindled by even terrible infractions. Generally it is a parent who becomes livid with a child, a teacher with a student, or a spiritual leader with a constituent. All these mentors are people who inherently love their charges. The love and compassion for their charges is what must be aroused and magnified when they are inclined to

become angry.

Practically how does one accomplish such a feat? It is very difficult to respond properly when caught off guard. Therefore, one must find ways of arousing his love at frequent intervals so that when a challenge does arrive he will be properly equipped to deal with it. One of the best ways of focusing on the love one feels for his charges is by davening for them. A day should not go by without offering a prayer for a child or a spouse. Likewise, a teacher should always have his students in mind. Not only does the tefillah itself effect tremendous results, it also increases our love for the recipient of the prayer and aids us in suppressing our anger -- something we all strive to accomplish! © *The AishDas Society*

### 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. © *Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.*

