

Toras Aish



Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

One of the most powerful addresses I ever heard was given by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, on this week's parsha: the story of the spies. For me, it was nothing less than life-changing.

He asked the obvious questions. How could ten of the spies have come back with a demoralising, defeatist report? How could they say, we cannot win, the people are stronger than us, their cities are well fortified, they are giants and we are grasshoppers?

They had seen with their own eyes how G-d had sent a series of plagues that brought Egypt, the strongest and longest-lived of all the empires of the ancient world, to its knees. They had seen the Egyptian army with its cutting-edge military technology, the horse-drawn chariot, drown in the Reed Sea while the Israelites passed through it on dry land. Egypt was far stronger than the Canaanites, Perrizites, Jebusites and other minor kingdoms that they would have to confront in conquering the land. Nor was this an ancient memory. It had happened not much more than a year before.

What is more, they already knew that, far from being giants confronting grasshoppers, the people of the land were terrified of the Israelites. They had said so themselves in the course of singing the Song at the Sea: "The peoples have heard; they tremble; / Pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. / Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; / Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; / All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. / Terror and dread fall upon them; / Because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone" (Ex. 15:14-16)

The people of the land were afraid of the Israelites. Why then were the spies afraid of them?

What is more, continued the Rebbe, the spies were not people plucked at random from among the population. The Torah states that they were "all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel." They were leaders. They were not people given lightly to fear.

The questions are straightforward, but the answer the Rebbe gave was utterly unexpected. The spies were not afraid of failure, he said. They were afraid of success.

What was their situation now? They were eating manna from heaven. They were drinking water from a miraculous well. They were surrounded by Clouds of Glory. They were camped around the Sanctuary. They were in continuous contact with the Shekhinah. Never had a people lived so close to G-d.

What would be their situation if they entered the land? They would have to fight battles, maintain an army, create an economy, farm the land, worry about whether there would be enough rain to produce a crop, and all the other thousand distractions that come from living in the world. What would happen to their closeness to G-d? They would be preoccupied with mundane and material pursuits. Here they could spend their entire lives learning Torah, lit by the radiance of the Divine. There they would be no more than one more nation in a world of nations, with the same kind of economic, social and political problems that every nation has to deal with.

The spies were not afraid of failure. They were afraid of success. Their mistake was the mistake of very holy men. They wanted to spend their lives in the closest possible proximity to G-d. What they did not understand was that G-d seeks, in the Hasidic phrase, "a dwelling in the lower worlds". One of the great differences between Judaism and other religions is that while others seek to lift people to heaven, Judaism seeks to bring heaven down to earth.

Much of Torah is about things not conventionally seen as religious at all: labour relations, agriculture, welfare provisions, loans and debts, land ownership and so on. It is not difficult to have an intense religious experience in the desert, or in a monastic retreat, or in an ashram. Most religions have holy places and holy people who live far removed from the stresses and strains of everyday life. There was one such Jewish sect in Qumran, known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls, and there were certainly others. About this there is nothing unusual at all.

But that is not the Jewish project, the Jewish mission. G-d wanted the Israelites to create a model



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society where human beings were not treated as slaves, where rulers were not worshipped as demigods, where human dignity was respected, where law was impartially administered to rich and poor alike, where no one was destitute, no one was abandoned to isolation, no one was above the law and no realm of life was a morality-free zone. That requires a society, and a society needs a land. It requires an economy, an army, fields and flocks, labour and enterprise. All these, in Judaism, become ways of bringing the Shekhinah into the shared spaces of our collective life.

The spies feared success, not failure. It was the mistake of deeply religious men. But it was a mistake.

That is the spiritual challenge of the greatest event in two thousand years of Jewish history: the return of Jews to the land and state of Israel. Perhaps never before and never since has there been a political movement accompanied by so many dreams as Zionism. For some it was the fulfillment of prophetic visions, for others the secular achievement of people who had decided to take history into their own hands. Some saw it as a Tolstoy-like reconnection with land and soil, others a Nietzschean assertion of will and power. Some saw it as a refuge from European antisemitism, others as the first flowering of messianic redemption. Every Zionist thinker had his or her version of utopia, and to a remarkable degree they all came to pass.

But Israel always was something simpler and more basic. Jews have known virtually every fate and circumstance between tragedy and triumph in the almost four thousand years of their history, and they have lived in almost every land on earth. But in all that time there only ever was one place where they could do what they were called on to do from the dawn of their history: to build their own society in accord with their highest ideals, a society that would be different from their neighbours and become a role model of how a society, an economy, an educational system and the administration of welfare could become vehicles for bringing the Divine presence down to earth.

It is not difficult to find G-d in the wilderness, if you do not eat from the labour of your hands and if you rely on G-d to fight your battles for you. Ten of the spies, according to the Rebbe, sought to live that way forever. But that, suggested the Rebbe, is not what G-d

wants from us. He wants us to engage with the world. He wants us to heal the sick, feed the hungry, fight injustice with all the power of law, and combat ignorance with universal education. He wants us to show what it is to love the neighbour and the stranger, and say, with Rabbi Akiva, "Beloved is humanity because we are each created in G-d's image."

Jewish spirituality lives in the midst of life itself, the life of society and its institutions. To create it we have to battle with two kinds of fear: fear of failure, and fear of success. Fear of failure is common; fear of success is rarer but no less debilitating. Both come from the reluctance to take risks. Faith is the courage to take risks. It is not certainty; it is the ability to live with uncertainty. It is the ability to hear G-d saying to us as He said to Abraham, "Walk on ahead of Me" (Gen. 17:1).

The Rebbe lived what he taught. He sent emissaries out to virtually every place on earth where there were Jews. In so doing, he transformed Jewish life. He knew he was asking his followers to take risks, by going to places where the whole environment would be challenging in many ways, but he had faith in them and in G-d and in the Jewish mission whose place is in the public square where we share our faith with others and do so in deeply practical ways.

It is challenging to leave the desert and go out into the world with all its trials and temptations, but that is where G-d wants us to be, bringing His spirit to the way we run an economy, a welfare system, a judiciary, a health service and an army, healing some of the wounds of the world and bringing, to places often shrouded in darkness, fragments of Divine light. © 2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And G-d spoke to Moses saying 'Send men to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people...' (Num. 13:1-2) In the process of becoming a nation, the Jewish people committed any number of sins, but one in particular, as recorded in this week's portion, Shlach, dwarfs all others.

The events are as follows: G-d commands Moses to appoint men to explore the land they will be settling — a reasonable request. And so Moses appoints 12 princes to survey the land. After 40 days, they return with their report. As it turns out, the report is phrased in a way which sours the spirit of the people, and instead of being excited about the prospects of the new land, they let out a great cry. As a result of this wail, the midrash tells us that G-d decides that if they think they have something to cry about now, let them wait. And so this date, the 9th of Av, becomes fixed in the Jewish calendar, reserved for mourning major national tragedies such as the destruction of both

Temples, and the exile of the Jews from Spain 500 years ago.

To understand the nature of their sin, we have to look more closely at the events recorded in the portion of Shlach. The report's opening phrase evokes the splendor of the promised land. "Indeed it's a land of milk and honey," (Num. 13:27), an expression that has virtually become synonymous with the land of Israel. Displaying the enormous fruits of the land, we can safely conclude from their opening words that the spies had no doubts about the land's fertility. One would be hard-pressed to find in their entire report something against the land itself. True, "the people living in the land are aggressive, and the cities are large and well-fortified. We also saw the giants there." (13:28) is what they say, but are these words against the land?

If the sin of the people wasn't against the land, perhaps it was against G-d? But they never actually say that G-d is wrong, nor do they deny that this is the land promised to them by G-d. In fact, using the expression "milk and honey" reaffirms G-d's promise to Moses at the Burning Bush: "I will bring you to a land of milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). If we cannot pin their rebellion against G-d or against the land, what are we left with?

A clue can be found if we take a look at the verse which speaks of the land consuming its inhabitants: "They began to speak badly about the land that they had explored. They told the Israelites, 'The land that we crossed to explore is a land that consumes its inhabitants. All the men we saw there were huge. While we were there we saw Nephilim . . . We felt like tiny grasshoppers. That's all that we were in their eyes'" (Numbers 13:32-33).

But if the land consumes its inhabitants, how is it possible that the people are huge? There should be no one alive, let alone giants and sons of the Nephilim?! As Nachmanides points out (13:32), a poor, weak land cannot produce people strong in stature. Implicit in Nachmanides' words is that the land is not for average people. And this is the heart of the problem.

Notice the sequence: "There we saw the giants. We felt like grasshoppers," is followed by "That's all we were in their eyes." What this points to is a common phenomenon — how we see ourselves determines how others end up seeing us. If you're a grasshopper in someone else's eyes, obviously he'll crush you without a second thought, and once you think of yourself as a grasshopper, the rest of the world seconds the motion.

The image of a grasshopper is striking, capturing the essence of exile: a chirping, tiny creature at the mercy of all; one who is easily crushed. "We were like grasshoppers" means that the scouts, although princes of tribes, still think like slaves in Egypt, seeing themselves as despised, dependent creatures. How could they have possibly believed in themselves? And if one doesn't believe in oneself, one usually assimilates, gives oneself over to a higher

power, decides either to return to Egypt — which Datan and Aviram always wanted to do — or to remain paralyzed and inactive in the desert. In accepting defeat rather than displaying defiance, the Jew is meekly and passively surrendering to fate as it "hops" all over him.

Now we see how in the scouts' sin lies the seed of the destruction of both Temples. Tragedy erupts not so much when others take a sudden dislike to us, but when we dislike ourselves and become paralyzed and passive as a result. The sin of the scouts is not in the terrible report they bring, but in their vision of themselves, a perception which becomes contagious, and which ends up as a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. As James Baldwin said so aptly, he could forgive America for enslaving black people, but he could never forgive America for making the blacks feel that they were worthless, that they deserved to be slaves. And that's precisely what Egypt did to the Hebrews!

In this century, we've taken giant steps toward rectifying this distorted vision; but apparently more work needs to be done before the self-image of the grasshopper is gone. Then, even if we live "in a land that consumes" its inhabitants, it only acts as a curse for those who live passive grasshoppery lives. But for the ex-grasshoppers, ready to take responsibility for the road to redemption, this land can really be a blessing.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

To a great extent the Jewish people have always had an easier time dealing with the study and observance of Torah than with the primacy of the Land of Israel in Jewish life and thought. For various reasons, throughout our history we have always had difficulty dealing with the reality of being an independent, self-governing national entity living within the borders of the country that the Lord assigned to us.

Even before ever entering the Land of Israel, as we read in this week's Torah portion, the Jewish people shied away completely from entering that land and establishing their home there. They preferred living in a trackless desert to having to face the realities of nation building and a problem-laden challenging existence.

Centuries after Jacob and Joseph attempted to remind their descendants that Egypt was not their homeland and that their eventual future lay in their return to the Land of Israel, the Jewish people were still reluctant to revamp the core ideas and values of their tradition and of their ancestors. All later generations of Torah scholars and biblical commentators have attempted to understand what the driving force was that made the Jewish people so resist their entry into the Holy Land.

Though there are many incisive and psychologically penetrating thoughts advanced on this

subject, after all is said and done, the question remains a perplexing and disturbing one. Why is it that the generation that saw so many miracles – in fact lived a miraculous existence on a daily basis and pledged themselves and their descendants to live a unique and moral lifestyle, should somehow have balked at entering the Land of Israel. Like most questions that begin with the word "why" there are no easy or convincing answers to this difficult issue.

There is a concept in Jewish thought advanced in the Talmud of "seek out and analyze and study the matter and receive reward for so doing" even if there is no practical answer or solution to the issue involved. The Talmud itself raises this comment regarding the number of cases that appear in the Torah that are so complex and technical as to render them impractical of any rational solution or mode of behavior.

This opinion really teaches us that we should be able to recognize the possibility of such situations occurring even though we cannot attribute cause or practical solutions to the issues involved. Apparently it is sufficient for us to recognize that such a possibility exists and may still exist and not be disheartened or forlorn over that fact.

The mere recognition that somehow these events occur is sufficient enough for us to learn a lesson and continue to persevere in a positive fashion. There are unfortunately many Jews within the Jewish world today who still do not recognize the Land of Israel as being a central tenet of our faith and our existence. It is almost irrational, certainly inexplicable, why after all of the events of the past two centuries of Jewish life this should be so.

And, no matter what causes we will search for, the perplexing question as to why this is so remains. So, all we can do is recognize that this has been a constant problem in Jewish society since the days of Moshe and that basically all we can do is acknowledge the situation while continuing to persevere in building and populating the Land of Israel. © 2016 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Minyan of Ten

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit

by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Everything that is deemed "Holy" (Davar Shebikdusha) such as "Kaddish", "Barchu", "Kedusha", the repetition of the Amidah, and according to some the reading of the Haftorah, the reading of the Torah, and the priestly blessing, need ten men to fulfill this task. This law is derived from the sentence in Leviticus (22,32) "And I will be sanctified in

the midst of the children of Israel" ("v'nikdashti Betoch Benai Yisrael"). However where do we derive the number ten? Perhaps it is less or more than ten?

One of the ways of deriving it is by using a "Gezeira Shaveh" (similar words in different contexts are meant to clarify one another). In this context by the usage of the two words "Mitoch" (from the midst) that appear here and in the story of the rebellion of Korach and his congregation. There the Torah states (Numbers 16,21) "separate yourself from the midst ("Mitoch") of this congregation". However there, we are referring to a congregation of two hundred and fifty people, where do we derive the number ten?

To this we arrive full circle to our portion where the Torah, when referring to the ten spies, (not Caleb and Joshua who had no part in relating the bad report on the land of Israel) states "until when must I contend with this bad congregation ("Ad matai L'edah Haraah Hazot" 14,27). Since here the definition of a congregation is ten, also in our original sentence of "And I will be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel" must also be referring to ten, however not ten sinful people as in the story of the spies, but rather free male adults. © 2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

What is the purpose of wearing tzitzit, the ritual fringes that are attached to the four cornered garment mentioned in our parsha? (Numbers 15:37-41) Several classic answers come to mind.

Some suggest the meaning lies in the tekhelet, the unique blue color found amongst the fringes. This color "is like the sea, the sea is like the sky and the sky like the throne of glory." (Menahot 43b) In other words, wearing tzitzit reminds us of G-d's presence.

Still others suggest that the tzitzit remind us to commit to G-d's mitzvot. The numerical value of tzitzit, coupled with the number of knots and strings used to make these fringes, is 613, equal to the number of commandments. Beyond feeling G-d's presence, one, through the wearing of tzitzit, has a constant awareness of responsibility to G-d's law.

Yet another thought comes to mind. The tzitzit remind us of the first garment recorded in the Torah, the one made by G-d for Adam and Eve after they ate from the tree in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, Adam and Eve disobeyed G-d, following the temptations of their eyes and heart. (Genesis 3:6) Here, G-d commands the wearing of fringes in order to avoid being seduced by our own hearts and eyes. (Numbers 15-39)

Note also the use of the verb "tur" (to go after) found in the portion of fringes, (Numbers 15:39) and found when Moshe (Moses) sends the spies out to check out the land at the beginning of our

parsha. (Numbers 13:16) Our In the case of the spies, they followed their inner whims and brought back an evil report. Here, in the paragraph of tzitzit, the Torah teaches us not to make the same mistake, not to be led astray.

Ibn Ezra's comments about the prayer shawl worn during services now become clear. He insists that "it is much more necessary...to wear tzitzit during the rest of the day and not merely during prayers, in order to remember not to err and commit a sin, since during prayers [he will be in a holy frame of mind and] in any case, [will] not sin."

In a sense, the prayer shawl serves a different function than that of the fringed garment worn all day. Wrapping ourselves with the prayer shawl helps us to feel G-d's love, G-d's protection and G-d's embrace.

With the establishment of the State of Israel, the tzitzit has impacted upon our national psyche as well. David Wolfsohn records in his memoirs that during the first Zionist Congress, it was unanimously decided that the Israeli flag be blue and white, the same colors as the tzitzit. He writes, "This talit is our coat of arms, our emblem. Let us take out the talit and unfurl it before the eyes of Israel, before the eyes of all the nations."

May it represent for us as individuals and as people the enveloping love from G-d and, at the same time, the continued need to remind ourselves of our goals and our collective focus. ©2016 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 LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

Moshe sent them to scout the Land of Canaan, and he said to them, "Go up this way in the south and climb up the mountain. You shall see what [kind of] land it is, and the people who inhabit it; are they strong or weak? Are there few or many? And what of the land they inhabit? Is it good or bad? And what of the cities in which they reside are they in camps or in fortresses? What is the soil like? Is it fat or lean? Are there any trees in it or not? You shall be courageous and take from the fruit of the land." It was the season when the first grapes begin to ripen. (Bamidbar 13:17-20)

Are they strong or weak?: He gave them a sign. If they live in open cities [it is a sign that] they are strong, since they rely on their might. And if they live in fortified cities [it is a sign that] they are weak. -- Rashi

This Rashi is rather counter intuitive! We would think things should be just the other way around. If they are in walled cities they are secure and if they are in open encampments they are vulnerable and weak!

What's origin of this notion? What's the relevance?

When peaking back at the earliest moments of human history we find a curious phenomenon. What was the first recorded human invention? Take a few moments to think before answering. Some will guess fire but that's not explicitly related. Well surprisingly it's clothing, albeit primitive and minimal. Adam and Chava felt the need to cover-up with a fig leaf after they ingested the forbidden fruit because their innocence was now lost. Prior to that moment they were naked and without any shameful or selfish tendencies. Now, however, afterwards, because of an inner weakness, a moral failing they needed to shield themselves from themselves.

The stronger a person is the less they are reliant on external devices. The weaker a person is the more they need stuff on the outside. We are never envious of a person who requires a wheelchair or someone who is hooked up to wires and tubes in the hospital. The outer equipment betrays a weakness in limb or bodily function. The same is true in the spiritual realm.

Armed with this information the conversation can move in many directions. Let us focus on this point for now. I wonder how our ancestors understood the Mishne in Pirke' Avos, "Know what is above from you, an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are recorded in a book!" This Mishne is thousands of years old and it predates the video, and the tape recorder. How did they conceive that what we do now is recorded forever?! The Chofetz Chaim had observed that the invention of the phone is an "object lesson" meant to reinforce the notion that what we say here and now can be heard and create an impact elsewhere. There is no such thing as a perfectly private conversation in the spiritual universe. Now the world of technology that envelopes us crying out for inspection to figure what deeper lessons these objects and devices come to teach us.

This list is long and the page is short. The ubiquitous GPS is a classic. I can remember taking a long ride to New Hampshire with a bunch of fellows. The driver of the luxury suburban had a GPS fixed in his car. Another guy sat in the front and attached his own GPS to the window. Both inputted the destination. One had a woman's voice and the other a man's voice, because his wife didn't want another woman telling him what to do. Like an old married couple the GPS's dueled and disagreed until the last half mile.

I was thinking the machine is teaching, "Harbe Drachim l' Makom". There are many ways to get to the place. Elu v' Elu Divre' Elochim Chaim! These and these are the word of the living G-d. Disputes in Hallachah allow for differing approaches. If you're driving a truck it's one way, and a regular car another. I drove back from Baltimore once with no money in my pocket and no EZEE Pass so the GPS directed me on

a circuitous and toll-free way home.

Also we learn how to educate and correct. The GPS is never impatient. It recalibrates and then tells us calmly how to get to our destination. It reminds us we need a goal or it's entirely useless. It affirms for us the value of having a Rebbe who knows us, and where we are at. It is just one machine, but it speaks volumes in volume. © 2016 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd if you err, and don't do all of these commandments that G-d spoke to Moshe" (Bamidbar 15:22). Rashi tells us that only one commandment is being referred to, worshipping other deities; it is described as "all of these commandments" because worshipping a deity other than the Creator is the equivalent of transgressing every commandment. He then explains the words "that G-d spoke to Moshe" by quoting the Talmud (Horiyos 8a), which says the first two of the Ten Commandments were heard by the entire nation directly from G-d (as opposed to the other eight of the Ten Commandments, as well as the other 603 biblical commandments, which G-d told to Moshe, who then relayed it to us. But how could the words "that G-d spoke to Moshe" refer specifically to commandments that G-d spoke to all of us, not just Moshe? Shouldn't this commandment be described as having been "spoken" or "commanded" to "you" rather than to Moshe? How can commandments "spoken to Moshe" refer exclusively (and it is exclusively, since the offerings differ if other commandments are violated) to commandments that weren't spoken only to Moshe?

Several commentators address this issue, with mixed results. Bartenura understands Rashi's comment to mean that the expression "that G-d spoke to Moshe" specifically excludes worshipping idols, since the first two of the Ten Commandments were heard by the entire nation (and were therefore not spoken just to Moshe). Aside from the implication of Rashi's wording being that these words refer specifically to idol worship (and not to everything but idol worship), and aside from the context of the Talmud (and how Rashi explains it, which we will get to shortly) contradicting this, many of the details of idol worship did come through Moshe. It is also a bit awkward for a verse that is referring specifically to idol worship to use an expression that purposely excludes it.

The L'vush presents a similar explanation, with the comparison being between idol worship (which is not being referred to in the verse at all) and the other 611 commandments, which G-d spoke only to Moshe. Rebbe Yaakov K'nizel takes it a step further, saying that idol worship cannot be said to be equal to all the commandments of the Torah, since it is one of them, and putting idol worship on one side of the scale and all 613 commandments on the other side cannot balance

(i.e. cannot be called equivalent) unless none of the other commandments carry any weight (which is obviously not true). Therefore, in order to compare idol worship with "all the commandments of the Torah," the commandment not to worship idols must be excluded from that side of the scale. In order to indicate that idol worship is not part of "all these commandments," these commandments are described as "that G-d spoke to Moshe," which would exclude idol worship (since we heard that directly from G-d). Besides the issues raised above, we can add that it is obvious that comparing any one commandment to "all the commandments" must mean "besides counting this one on both sides of the ledger," and there should be no need to point it out. Additionally, there are several commandments said to be "equal to all the commandments," such as Shabbos, Tzitzis and circumcision, making the statement a literal impossibility. [How can Shabbos plus everything else weigh the same as idol worship if idol worship plus everything else weighs the same as Shabbos? Add others that are "equal to all the commandments" to the mix and the impossibility becomes, um, more impossible (which itself is impossible!).] Rather, the expression is meant figuratively, showing how important each of these commandments are, and there is therefore no need to exclude the commandment under discussion from being included in "all commandments."

Rebbe Sh'muel El-Moshnenu suggests that the expression "that G-d spoke to Moshe" means "only to Moshe, without being intended to be repeated to us" (especially when contrasted with the next verse, which mentions "all that G-d commanded you through Moshe"). Since every commandment taught to Moshe was supposed to be repeated to us, the only thing this expression could possibly refer to is "something that Moshe didn't need to repeat to us, since we heard it from G-d ourselves," i.e. the first two of the Ten Commandments. However, Moshe did repeat those to us as well (when he repeated the Ten Commandments in Sefer D'varim), besides constantly warning us against idol worship. This would also mean that the "commandments" referred to in 15:22 are not the same as those referred to in 15:23, even though both are the "commandments" whose transgression triggers the offerings subsequently described.

The Talmud contrasts the commandments "that G-d spoke" (15:22) which implies our hearing it directly from G-d, with the opening words of the next verse, "all that G-d commanded you through Moshe," with the only commandment given through G-d's direct speech (the first two of the Ten Commandments) and by Moshe relaying it to us (i.e. Sh'mos 34:14) being idol worship. It is clear that the point of the Talmud, which Rashi is using in his commentary on Chumash, is that we heard the commandment not to worship idols directly from G-d. As far as why it is described as G-d having

"spoken with Moshe" if we all heard it, Rashi (on the Talmud) says that G-d was speaking to Moshe, but we were able to hear what G-d said to him.

Although this explains how the commandments we heard directly from G-d can be described as being "spoken to Moshe," it doesn't explain why G-d directed His speech to Moshe if the intended audience was much wider (or why it would be described as being directed only to Moshe). Maharal (Gur Aryeh) and Maskil L'Dovid (on Rashi's commentary on Chumash) reference the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:33, see Rashi on Sh'mos 20:2) that says the reason the Ten Commandments were said in singular form is to enable Moshe to defend the nation after the sin of the golden calf by pointing out that only he was told not to worship idols. Which means that they were, in a sense, only said to Moshe, even if they were said loudly and clearly enough for the entire nation to (over)hear it. Nevertheless, despite it being technically accurate that this was "spoken to Moshe," it still seems a bit out of place to highlight this technicality if the point is that we heard it directly from G-d rather than it being relayed to us by Moshe.

The Talmud brings a couple of ways we know the transgression being discussed here is idol worship, with the contrast between "spoken by G-d to Moshe" (Bamidbar 15:22) and "G-d commanded us through Moshe" (15:23) being the second. Rashi paraphrases the first in his previous comment (actually, he is quoting Sifre 111, but the "proof" is similar, while being dissimilar enough to make us aware that he is using multiple sources), so his point regarding which commandments were "spoken to Moshe" cannot be to prove that the transgression under discussion is idol worship. [This is borne out by Rashi ignoring the contrast between 15:22 and 15:23.] Instead, Rashi is highlighting the fact that we heard the prohibition against idol worship directly from G-d. But why does that make a difference? Is the transgression (which, in this case, was not done purposely) more severe because we heard it directly from G-d, or less severe, because G-d purposely didn't say it to us, but to Moshe?

Being that Moshe reiterated the severity of the sin of idol worship numerous times, there is no doubt that it fully applied to everyone, not just to Moshe. Nevertheless, in the situations under discussion, where the sin was not committed purposely, since there was already a precedent set (by directing the Ten Commandments to Moshe) that G-d will, to some extent, try to lessen the impact of idol worship so that we can more easily return to Him, it might cross our minds that exculpation is not really important. Therefore, the Torah highlights the fact that even though the Ten Commandment were "spoken to Moshe" so that he can present a defense for the nation's sin, these offerings must be brought in order to

achieve forgiveness. "And if you err, and don't keep the commandments that you heard G-d Himself say, that were purposely spoken to Moshe and not directed towards you" (15:22), "commandments that Moshe clearly and continually told you applied to you now and forever" (15:23), here is the process to achieve forgiveness (15:24-28). © 2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

The men who had gone up with him said, "We cannot ascend to that people, for it is too strong for us." They brought forth to the Bnei Yisrael an evil report on the Land that they had spied out, saying, "The Land through which we have passed...devours its inhabitants. All the people that we saw in it were of midos/ great measurement...We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes."

Be'er Yosef: Rashi, citing the gemara (Sotah 35A) expands upon the arguments of the ten spies, but leaves us with even more questions! In claiming that the inhabitants of the Land were "Too strong for us," says the gemara, they really meant that even Hashem himself could not dislodge them. Since the spies encountered funeral processions wherever they went, they concluded that the Land "devoured its inhabitants."

Shelah HaKadosh sees a common thread in all their arguments. The spies believed that they would hold on to their positions of authority so long as the people did not pass into the Land. Their goal was to delay the entry as long as possible, allowing them to continue their appointments. They therefore referred to the native inhabitants as "people of midos," meaning good character. Their point was that the Bnei Yisrael could not hope to take possession of the Land until the previous occupants became so thoroughly evil, that the Land would no longer abide their presence. This, claimed the spies, was just not the case. Hashem had told Avrohom centuries before that his descendants would not become masters of the Land until the iniquity of the earlier residents reached a threshold of evil. That had not taken place, said the spies. While it was the nature of the Land to "devour its inhabitants" when they behaved evilly, this had not happened to the people whom the spies encountered, who should be seen as people of midos, i.e. refined character. Not being evil enough to be ejected from the Land, the would-be next occupants would just have to wait.

We could add that the report of the spies that they observed funeral processions throughout the Land can be understood similarly. They argued that the citizens were upstanding people, who routinely ceased their activities to be able to provide the final show of chesed to the deceased, by accompanying them on their final journey.

Similarly, this Shelah helps us understand why

the spies argued that not even G-d could dislodge the people from the Land -- an argument that resides someplace between the blasphemous and the ludicrous. They did not mean that He was incapable of overpowering them. Rather, they argued that by the rules of justice that He Himself had established, the Canaanites could not be dispossessed, because they were not guilty enough to deserve such a fate. In fact, in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Land, the Bnei Yisroel were like "grasshoppers" which swarm and plunder the crops laboriously tended by the rightful owners of property. Should the Bnei Yisroel attempt to take the Land by force, they would be seen as no more rightful and just than marauding grasshoppers.

The spies, of course, had twisted the meaning of what they observed for their own purposes. The unusual numbers of funeral processions they observed did not point to a society of chesed-oriented, sensitive people. Rather, HKBH caused a spike in deaths in order to provide cover for the spies who could then move about without being detected by a populace preoccupied with their grief.

Yet in some of their report, the spies seem to us to be faultless. "The people that dwells in the Land is powerful. The cities are fortified and very great. We also saw there the offspring of the giants." (Bamidbar 13:28) This was all entirely accurate, observe the commentators. Why do they seem to be criticized for this part of the report as well?

Here, too, the Shelah helps out. Hashem's purpose in sending the spies, he writes, was for them to report back that it would be impossible to conquer the Land through conventional tactics. Hashem wanted the people to understand that only through Divine assistance could they enter the Land. The spies were meant to increase the level of bitachon/ trust in Hashem of the Bnei Yisroel!

This provides us with a different way of understanding the "grasshopper" reference. Rashi at the beginning of Bereishis cites the famous question: Why begin a Torah which is first and foremost a book of law, with the story of Creation? R. Yitzchok's answer is that the nations of the world would point an accusing finger at us. "You are thieves who stole the land of the seven nations that rightfully possessed it." The Creation story shows G-d as Creator Who has the right to do with His creation as He sees fit, and Who chooses repeatedly to reward the good and punish the guilty -- including by expelling evildoers from the Land.

The argument is troubling. Can it not be extended to mitigate every human theft? The thief will claim that his very success proves that he is the intended successor to a previous owner who is being punished for his sins by losing his right to ownership! We must conclude that the argument is specious -- except under one set of circumstances. If it can be shown that the successor came to the property only

through miraculous circumstances, then there is substance to the argument. Where the change in ownership could only come about through miraculous Divine intervention, we can conclude that it is with Divine approval.

The Canaanites indeed looked at the spies as grasshoppers -- as unwanted pests ready to steal that to which they had no right. But just as G-d gave us the Creation story to equip us with the moral fiber to resist the accusations of the world community, so too did He give the generation of the Exodus the argument with which to defuse the charge that they were thieving pests, like grasshoppers. By learning of the great strength of the Canaanites and their cities -- by understanding that the conquest would take place through direct and miraculous Divine assistance -- the Bnei Yisroel were meant to comprehend that Heaven itself was reassuring them of the Divine justice in their possession of the Land.

They missed the point, hearing only the voice of their accusers, but not the reassuring voice of their Divine protector. (Based on Be'er Yosef, Bamidbar 13: 31-33) © 2015 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And Moshe called Hoshea, the son of Nun, Yehoshua" (Numbers 13:16). What did Moshe hope to accomplish by changing his name? What can we learn from it?

Rashi tells us that Moshe called him Yehoshua because Moshe prayed that the Almighty should save him from the plans of his fellow spies. Targum Yonoson (an Aramaic commentary on the Torah) comments on this verse that Moshe called him Yehoshua when Moshe saw Hoshea's humility.

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai of Gur explained that the nature of a person with humility is not to be stubborn about his own opinions and wishes. He is compliant and will easily give in to the opinions and wishes of others. The other spies were all very distinguished and important men. Moshe feared that Yehoshua might concede to their opinions and be swayed by them even though he felt differently. Therefore, Moshe especially prayed for Yehoshua not to be negatively influenced by the others.

When a question of Torah ideals is involved, one must not budge. That is when it is appropriate to resist. When dealing with basic principles, remain steadfast and do not allow others to sway you. One needs wisdom to know the difference between situations when it is proper to give in to others and when it is not. For this we need the Almighty's assistance. Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2014 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

