

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Whose idea was it to send the spies? According to this week's sedra, it was God.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.' So at the Lord's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran." (Numbers 13:1-3)

According to Moses in Deuteronomy, it was the people: "Then all of you came to me and said, 'Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to.' The idea seemed good to me; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe." (Deut. 1:22-23)

Rashi reconciles the apparent contradiction. The people came to Moses with their request. Moses asked God what he should do. God gave him permission to send the spies. He did not command it; He merely did not oppose it. "Where a person wants to go, that is where he is led" (Makkot 10b) -- so said the sages. Meaning: God does not stop people from a course of action on which they are intent, even though He knows that it may end in tragedy. Such is the nature of the freedom God has given us. It includes the freedom to make mistakes.

However, Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed III:32) offers an interpretation that gives a different perspective to the whole episode. He begins by noting the verse (Ex. 13:17) with which the exodus begins: "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.' So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Reed Sea."

Maimonides comments: "Here God led the people about, away from the direct route he had

originally intended, because He feared that they might encounter hardships too great for their present strength. So He took them by a different route in order to achieve His original object." He then adds the following: "It is a well-known fact that traveling in the wilderness without physical comforts such as bathing produces courage, while the opposite produces faint-heartedness. Besides this, another generation rose during the wanderings that had not been accustomed to degradation and slavery."

According to Maimonides, then, it was irrelevant who sent the spies. Nor was the verdict after the episode -- that the people would be condemned to spend 40 years in the wilderness, and that it would only be their children who would enter the land -- a punishment as such. It was an inevitable consequence of human nature.

It takes more than a few days or weeks to turn a population of slaves into a nation capable of handling the responsibilities of freedom. In the case of the Israelites it needed a generation born in liberty, hardened by the experience of the desert, untrammelled by habits of servitude. Freedom takes time, and there are no shortcuts. Often it takes a very long time indeed.

That dimension of time is fundamental to the Jewish view of politics and human progress. That is why, in the Torah, Moses repeatedly tells the adults to educate their children, to tell them the story of the past, to "remember". It is why the covenant itself is extended through time -- handed on from one generation to the next. It is why the story of the Israelites is told at such length in Tanakh: the time-span covered by the Hebrew Bible is a thousand years from the days of Moses to the last of the prophets. It is why God acts in and through history.

Unlike Christianity or Islam there is, in Judaism, no sudden transformation of the human condition, no one moment or single generation in which everything significant is fully disclosed. Why, asks Maimonides (Guide, III: 32), did God not simply give the Israelites in the desert the strength or self-confidence they needed to cross the Jordan and enter the land? His answer: because it would have meant saying goodbye to human freedom, choice and responsibility. Even God Himself, implies Maimonides, has to work with the grain of human nature and its all-too-slow pace of change. Not because God cannot change people: of course He can.

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated

לעלוי נשמת

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Weiss ע"ה

הרב משה בן הרב דוד הכהן ז"ל

on his 2nd yartzeit

נפטר כא סיון תשע"ה

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He created them; He could re-create them. The reason is that God chooses not to. He practices what the Safed Kabbalists called *tzimtzum*, self-limitation. He wants human beings to construct a society of freedom -- and how could He do that if, in order to bring it about, He had to deprive them of the very freedom He wanted them to create.

There are some things a parent may not do for a child if he or she wants the child to become an adult. There are some things even God must choose not to do for His people if He wants them to grow to moral and political maturity. In one of my books I called this the chronological imagination, as opposed to the Greek logical imagination. Logic lacks the dimension of time. That is why philosophers tend to be either rigidly conservative (Plato did not want poets in his Republic; they threatened to disturb the social order) or profoundly revolutionary (Rousseau, Marx). The current social order is either right or wrong. If it is right, we should not change it. If it is wrong, we should overthrow it. The fact that change takes time, even many generations, is not an idea easy to square with philosophy (even those philosophers, like Hegel and Marx, who factored in time, did so mechanically, speaking about "historical inevitability" rather than the unpredictable exercise of freedom).

One of the odd facts about Western civilisation in recent centuries is that the people who have been most eloquent about tradition -- Edmund Burke, Michael Oakeshott, T.S. Eliot -- have been deeply conservative, defenders of the status quo. Yet there is no reason why a tradition should be conservative. We can hand on to our children not only our past but also our unrealised ideals. We can want them to go beyond us; to travel further on the road to freedom than we were able to do. That, for example, is how the Seder service on Pesach begins: "This year, slaves, next year free; this year here, next year in Israel". A tradition can be evolutionary without being revolutionary.

That is the lesson of the spies. Despite the Divine anger, the people were not condemned to permanent exile. They simply had to face the fact that their children would achieve what they themselves were not ready for.

People still forget this. The wars in Afghanistan

and Iraq were undertaken, at least in part, in the name of democracy and freedom. Yet that is the work not of a war, but of education, society-building, and the slow acceptance of responsibility. It takes generations. Sometimes it never happens at all. The people -- like the Israelites, demoralised by the spies' report -- lose heart and want to go back to the predictable past ("Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt"), not the unseen, hazardous, demanding future. That is why, historically, there have been more tyrannies than democracies.

The politics of liberty demands patience. It needs years of struggle without giving up hope. The late Emmanuel Levinas spoke about "difficult freedom" -- and freedom always is difficult. The story of the spies tells us that the generation who left Egypt were not yet ready for it. That was their tragedy.

But their children would be. That was their consolation. *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Send, for yourselves, men, who will seek out [vayaturu] the Land of Canaan that I am giving to the People of Israel" [Num. 13:2]. Of the sins that the People of Israel commit in the Bible, the most serious of all takes place in our portion of *Sh'lach*. The spies' severe report directly causes the death of the desert generation. However, it is difficult to understand that the suggestion to establish such an ill-fated reconnaissance team came directly from the Almighty. What did God want the spies to actually report?

Rabbi Elchanan Samet suggests that the answer lies in the verb form used in the charge given by the Almighty: "Send, for yourselves, men who will seek out [vayaturu] the land..." Crucially, the verb *tur* appears no less than twelve times in this sequence, the very number of the members of the delegation itself.

Further analysis reveals that, in other Biblical contexts, the verb form *tur* is used similarly to the way it is used in our Biblical portion, as in, "[God] Who walks before you on the way, to seek out [latur] for you a place in which you may settle your encampment" (Deut. 1:33).

Even the prophet Ezekiel declares that "on that day I shall raise my hand for them to bring them out of the Land of Egypt to the land which I have sought out [tarti] for them. A land flowing with milk and honey, a most precious land for them among all the other lands" [20:6].

In contrast, in Moses' retelling of the story [Deut. 1:22, 24], the people say: "Let us send men before us that they may check out [vayachp'ru] the

land...and spy [va'yerag'lu] it out," using two verb forms very different from the vayaturu used by God in our portion.

The power of the specific verb form tur used by God is even more clearly expressed in the very conclusion of this Torah reading, where we encounter that same verb form in a totally different but most revealing context.

The commandment to wear tzitzit [fringes] on the corners of our four-cornered garments includes a rationale: "...so that you not seek out or lust [taturu] after your heart and after your eyes which lead you to commit acts of illicit lust [zonim] after them" [Num. 15:39].

And when punishing the People of Israel, God once again makes reference to the sin of the spies as having been an act of illicit lust (z'nut), "and your children shall be shepherds in the desert for forty years, thereby bearing [the sin] of your illicit lust [z'nutekhem]" [ibid. 14:33].

God was not interested in a reconnaissance mission to scout out the land—or even in an intelligence delegation to assess the military practicability of engaging in an act of conquest. Perhaps that was what the people had in mind when they asked Moses to send men before them to check out the land, which probably meant to see by which routes it would be best to enter and which cities ought to be attacked first [Deut. 1:22–23].

The Almighty had a very different design in mind. God wanted to impress upon them the uniqueness, the chosenness of the land that He had picked for them, the land that would be their ultimate resting place, the land that was very good, which produced luscious fruits and full-bodied animals, the land whose produce developed strong and capable people. God wanted them to conquer the land with great anticipation and overwhelming desire [Num. 13:1–2, Nahmanides ad loc.].

The Bible refers to both the Torah of Israel and the Land of Israel as a morasha, [heritage] (Ex. 6:8; Deut. 33:4), which our sages linked to me'orasa, "betrothed" and "beloved". According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, the conquest of the Torah of Israel as well as of the Land of Israel by the People of Israel require strong feelings of love for each.

And just as the rabbis of the Talmud command us not to marry a woman unless we first see her and know that we love her [Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 41a], so did God ask Moses to send a group who would give the kind of visual description of the Land of Israel to the People of Israel that would inspire them to love the land and even lust after it, in the best sense of the word.

God understood that such an emotional attachment was absolutely crucial if the People of Israel were to overcome the many obstacles involved in

conquering the land, settling it, and forging within it a holy nation and kingdom of priests.

Alas, the people—especially the spies—did not understand the Divine command. Their sin was in misunderstanding the purpose of their journey; they took it to be a scouting enterprise rather than an inspirational foretaste of what waited in store for them after their conquest, a reconnaissance mission rather than an observer's picture of a beautiful and luscious patrimony worthy of their love and sacrifice.

Our generation—so similar to the one that went from the darkness of Egypt to the light of freedom and stood at the entrance to the Promised Land—must do whatever is necessary to recapture and strengthen the love of the Land of Israel if we are to succeed in properly settling it and developing it into our haven of world redemption. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Revisiting a story on the spies that Moshe sent to the Land of Israel is always a very discouraging moment. How could everything have gone so wrong and so fast? All of the reasons advanced over the ages by the great commentators to the Torah – personal ambition, fear of the unknown, disregard for tradition, lack of faith in God, etc. – are undoubtedly true and correct. But to a certain extent they all only beg the question.

They perhaps answer the why part of the issue but the how to part of the story still remains pretty much a mystery. It is obvious that a climate of fear must have pervaded the entire Jewish nation as they stood at the cusp of entry into the Holy Land. The leaders of Israel who were the spies were, in the main, representative of the people and the tribes that they headed. Jewish tradition teaches us that there is no king without a people.

So the general prevailing climate and belief of the people have enormous influence on the views and behavior of those leaders that Moshe sent on this fateful journey. The ready acceptance by the people of the negative report of the ten spies indicates clearly their preconceived notion of the land and its inhabitants. The Jewish people of that generation simply were not willing to embark on the great adventure that is always associated with living and populating the Land of Israel. Moshe had chosen the best people he could find for this mission. But he misread the mood of the people that they represented. Hence this tragedy became an almost unavoidable one.

From the beginning of the Jewish story with our father Avraham, the Land of Israel has always posed a great challenge. To Avraham it would be a land of wars, famine and wandering. And yet, it is also to be the ultimate land of promise. The Lord had entered into a

binding covenant between him and his descendants, that this land would be their eventual homeland and would represent spiritual and physical redemption for the Jewish people.

Our forefather Yitzchak encountered strife, discrimination and famine while living in the land. Nevertheless, he never left Israel and saw in it the eternal home for his later generations. Some of the names that he gave to the locations of the wells of water still speak to us today, thousands of years later.

Our father Yaakov tasted the bitterness of exile when he fled to find refuge in the house of Lavan. He therefore treasured his return to the Land of Israel even though he found it fraught with danger and violence. His dying wish was that he should be transported back to the Land of Israel to be buried in its holy earth.

In this respect, the Jewish people did not quite follow the example of their forefathers but rather adopted a preconceived negative view of the land and its possibilities. This was transmitted directly or indirectly to the leadership of their tribes, resulting in a lost generation. ©2017 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

Why was the first holiness finite and the second eternal?

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

Rav Soloveitchik offers another distinction. In Joshua's conquest, Jerusalem was the last city to be liberated. In the time of Cyrus, it was the first. The holiness of Jerusalem comes from God. 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 God 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. ©2017 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

DR. ARNOLD LUSTIGER

Vort from the Rav

"We can surely go up and take possession of it, for we can indeed overcome it." Bamidbar 13:30

Chazal say that three grants have been bestowed upon Israel: Torah, the Land of Israel and the world to come; but the Jew had to acquire them through effort, through suffering (Berachos 5a). A God rewards a person in accordance with his effort. A person appreciates something in proportion to the level of hardship he had to undergo to achieve it. To create the eternal bond between spiritual values and the Jew, he had to work for it, to experience pain.

Holiness has one source: sacrifice. Holiness and sacrifice, both literally and figuratively, are fundamentally the same concept. Holiness can only be created through self-sacrifice, pain, effort, and exertion. If a person does not anticipate and struggle, holiness cannot come into being.

That the existence of the State of Israel is a miracle is beyond doubt. At the same time, it is a miracle that came at great cost. At Israel's very inception, on the first night of the State of Israel's existence, bombs were dropped on Tel Aviv. Subsequently, in the years since it has come into being, the relationship of world Jewry to the State of Israel has

been like the relationship of a mother to her only child: saturated with trembling, fear, and insecurity. Insecurity, because one is never sure if a passenger bus will be attacked. One is never certain if a small fishing vessel in the Gulf of Aqaba will not be fired upon. A mother whose son is stationed only a few miles from her home is never sure if he will not become the next victim of Arab snipers.

Why is the suffering that has accompanied the entire history of the State of Israel necessary? Because the State of Israel involves holiness, and holiness only exists if man, through sacrifice, becomes a partner with God.

The paradigm of this partnership is the mitzvah of circumcision, to which the prophet refers: through your blood shall you live (Ez.16:6). The blood and the suffering allow us to merit the continued existence of Medinas Yisrael. We experience this uncertain period in our history because our very insecurity is a sign that Hashem indeed desires the State of Israel. If He did not, the birth and the subsequent building of the State would have proceeded smoothly.

Jewish history is on a zig-zag trajectory. Abraham was repeatedly promised a child by God, and yet had to wait many long years for Isaac's birth, ultimately to be commanded to sacrifice him. Moses had to wait atop a cold mountain for forty days until God finally revealed Himself with the message of Israel's forgiveness. The suffering, the worry, the uncertainty, is precisely what God desires of us. (Derashot Harav, pp. 172-177) (*From the newly released Chumash Mesoras HaRav -- Sefer Bamidbar.*)
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RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Shelach contains the famous story of the spies that are sent in to check out Canaan, which would later become Israel. The decision to send the twelve spies, however, was made by the people, as G-d previously assured the Jews that He would take care of everything. But they insisted on seeing for themselves, and were instructed to send the spies of their own accord (13:2). The tribe leaders went in to spy, and came back with an awful report, scaring the Jews into wanting to go back to Egypt. What happened to the faith in G-d, and with all His open miracles? What happened to the spies that they didn't realize that everything they saw in Canaan was actually a blessing (1- They saw huge fortresses, but that really meant that people in them were scared of something, 2- They saw people dying, but G-d made it that someone died when the spies came, so that the inhabitants would be preoccupied with burying them and not notice the spies, etc.)?

The answer lies in their very first mistake... They wanted to see the land through their own

pessimistic eyes, and that's what they got to see. Seeing things without the proper perspective can make even positive things look bad, even if you're a tribe leader that people depend on and look up to, even if you've witnessed countless miracles in your life, and even if G-d just told you that He's on your side. What seemed like a harmless request turned out to be a disaster that cost the Jews 39 more years in the desert. They could have done it right had they done what Yehoshua (Joshua) did: put G-d's name first (Yud, the letter representing G-d added to the beginning of his).

We too can look at the world and at our lives, and see living without G-d and the Torah, and it may not seem so bad. Inevitably we'd end up wandering in circles, only to realize that it was our decision to be "free" that caused us to be slaves to nature and to our desires. Conversely, we can find our Torah goal, hang it where we can see it, and despite the challenges and through it all, we're guaranteed to "see" it through.
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RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

Chazal teach us that after the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, although the gates of prayer were closed, the gates of tears have remained open. What is the unique power of tears that enables them to penetrate the otherwise sealed gates of heaven? Why must this gate remain open forever, especially at a time when there is no Beis Hamikdash?

The tragedy of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash began with tears. On that fateful first Tisha B'av described in Parshas Shlach, the Jewish People cried when hearing the report about Eretz Yisrael. Frightened by the words of the spies, the nation cried that night. It was those inappropriate tears that transformed the night of Tisha B'av into a time of crying for future generations. The fear and despair alone which followed the report of the spies would not have resulted in a churban. There was something about the tears that were shed in vain that were directly responsible for the future tragedies that would occur on Tisha B'av.

The Beis Hamikdash is described in Parshas Vayeitzei as the "Gate of Heaven" -- the conduit through which all prayers ascend to Heaven. The most intense form of prayer is the one that is accompanied by tears. The highlight of tefillah on Rosh Hashanah is the moment of tekias shofar. The sound of the teruah is the sound of crying. Even the halachos of tekias shofar are an expression of its similarity to tears. There are three kinds of crying: some cries resemble the sound of a shevarim -- three longer sounds, whereas others sound like a teruah, nine short ones. Others are a combination of the two, the sound of a shevarim-teruah. On Rosh Hashanah, we beseech Hashem through prayers of words and through another form of prayer,

namely the sounds of the shofar. The shofar is a prayer which, just like tears, expresses our innermost feelings which cannot be articulated with words.

When the Jewish People abused the power of tears by crying in an inappropriate manner, the seeds of churban were planted. Churban would result in the closing of the Gates of Heaven to prayer. The gates of tears should have been closed as well. In the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, the rules of justice would dictate that there would no longer be any avenue available to approach Hashem. However, in His mercy Hashem allowed the gates of tears to remain open. The most sincere tefillos that cannot even be articulated through words remain as the way to beseech Hashem, even during a time of churban. It is through this power of tears that ultimately the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt. Yirmiyahu Hanavi describes in Megillas Eicha how Yerushalayim cries in solitude over its fate of destruction. Yet, Yirmiyahu also prophesizes how Rochel's tears pierce the heavens as her children are exiled. It is the collective tears of the Jewish People that combine with the tears of their mother, Rachel, that ultimately bring about the comforting words from Hashem, "Refrain your voice from crying and your eyes from tearing because the Jewish People will return to Eretz Yisroel."

Churban began with the abuse of the unique power of the most intense form of prayer. Redemption will only occur when we sincerely beseech Hashem, invoking our tears and our innermost desires to return to Hashem. May we soon merit the day when the tears of sadness will become tears of joy. ©2017 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & TorahWeb.org

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 Haftarah, 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'nikdashiti Betch 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 PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

Who doesn't know that Parashas Shlach Lecha is about how the Jewish people rejected Eretz Yisroel? Everyone knows about the 12 spies sent by Moshe Rabbeinu to check out the land in advance of the arrival of the rest of the nation, and how 10 of them came back with a negative report.

Even the Israeli Ministry of Tourism chose to use the two "good" spies as their logo. It's as if, one person joked, that they want to remind tourists not to bad-mouth Israel after their visit. "Remember what happened to the last group that spoke negatively after Israeli life!" they might be saying.

Interestingly enough is how no one ever seems to speak about how the Land rejected the Jewish people. Yes, it was the Spies who came back and delivered a scathing report, that dissuaded the rest of the nation from making aliyah. Perhaps though, it was what the Land WANTED them to do, so that they would NOT come into the Land.

We know that the Land does this from here: "You shall not defile yourselves by any of these things, for the nations, whom I am sending away from before you, have defiled themselves with all these things. The land became defiled, and I visited its sin upon it, and the land vomited out its inhabitants." (Vayikra 18:24-25)

"No, I CHOSE to leave," a person making "yeridah" from Eretz Yisroel once told me. "I could have stayed if I chose to."

"So, why didn't you?" I asked him.

"It wasn't working out for me there. I wasn't enjoying myself like I thought I would," he explained.

"Why not?" I asked.

"I'm just not used to a Middle-Eastern country. I thought I could adjust my way of thinking, but apparently I could not."

"But others have?" I pursued.

"I guess they could," he shrugged.

"I'm not sure," I said. "A lot of people said similar things but somehow they made it work and stayed. What do you think was the difference?"

He thought about it for a moment. I could see

that he had never taken the discussion that far, and did not have an answer.

"I guess they're just luckier than I am," he finally said.

Aside from the fact that we do not believe in luck, his answer overlooks one very important factor in life: Hashgochah Pratis -- Divine Providence. A person can be "vomited" out by the Land, but it is Hashgochah Pratis that arranges it.

Sometimes in life God forcibly moves us around. Enemies can walk in and make us leave at gunpoint, God forbid. Other times, He arranges life in such a way that our own preferences and biases, in response to Divine Providence, make us go "up" or "down." We make the choice, but it is a choice that was set up by God Himself based upon a person's merit or demerit.

As Rashi points out in this week's parsha, 10 of the 12 spies came to Eretz Yisroel having already decided that they did not want to make aliyah. Even before they arrived at the border of the Land, they had already completed their mission as they saw it, not as they had been instructed by Moshe Rabbeinu. They arrived lacking sufficient merit to inherit the Land.

They probably thought when they saw what they did, that it was their lucky day. They had, or so they imagined, what they needed to validate their rejection of the Promised Land, and to convince the people to support their decision. Clearly from the arrogance with which they returned, they had felt vindicated and justified.

It didn't occur to them that it was trap that they themselves had set. Their preconceived notions about aliyah and desire for materialistic comfort and political power jaded their vision. As God points out, the spies turned blessing into curse. The vision they saw was a product of their perceptions of reality, presented in such a way as to take advantage of them to their detriment. They tied the "noose" from which they eventually hung.

This is clear from their reaction to God's decision, to execute the perpetrators and to deny those who followed them, the opportunity to inherit the Land. They did a complete 180, as if waking up from a bad dream that just happened to be reality.

"It is what it is," has become a very common expression these days. It says that reality is reality because it is reality, and we can't change that. We have to accept it for what it is, and learn to work with it instead of fighting against it. This makes for a much smoother life, theoretically.

It is, however, only a half-truth. The other half says that it is what it is because of how we approach reality. God paves the road ahead of a person in the direction he chooses to go: "A man's folly perverts his way, but his heart is angry with God." (Mishlei 19:3)

"Harm comes upon him because of his sin, because his folly perverts his way and he commits sins

for which he is punished. When the trouble occurs to him, his heart is angry with The Holy One, Blessed is He, and he questions the Divine standard of justice." (Rashi)

It's a very important lesson about life in general, not just about aliyah. It tells a person how to analyze his decisions to make sure that he is not a victim of his own spiritual shortcomings. Getting what we want may be a short-lived celebration if it is a function of Divine Providence that, measure-for-measure, denies us the good we ourselves first incorrectly rejected.

Turn the situation around and doors to success may open that were never imagined. Teaching ourselves to like what we should results in Divine assistance to eventually love it, and to benefit from it. Dreams only come true when they are God's as well.
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HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

Since Hashem told Bnei Yisrael that He would give them Eretz Yisrael, it is hard to understand why they felt the need to send spies to scout out the Promised Land. In a similar vein, the Ramban (Bamidbar 13:2) writes that although Moshe could have rightfully rejected Bnei Yisrael's request to send spies, nevertheless, he agreed to fulfill their petition in order to satisfy their desire. Why didn't Moshe just say, "Have bitachon in Hashem; He said that everything will be fine"?

Rav Wolbe explains that although in theory they should have had bitachon -- practically they were lacking in this area. There is no way to force bitachon; either one has the necessary level or he doesn't. While it is certainly possible to work on acquiring a greater level of bitachon, until one achieves that goal he must live his life in accordance with his present level of bitachon. It didn't help that Bnei Yisrael should have relied on Hashem's word. The bottom line was that in this situation they didn't, and therefore Moshe responded accordingly and agreed to send the spies.

Rav Wolbe continues that people regularly fool themselves when it comes to the topic of bitachon. For example, one might think, "I have bitachon in Hashem, but now that a competitor opened up across the street how am I going to make a living?" If he had complete bitachon in Hashem, he wouldn't be asking these questions -- and if he is asking questions then he hasn't acquired the ultimate level of bitachon and he must proceed with a standard course of action. Thus, there was a need for spies to be sent to scout out the Promised Land.

There is no purpose in trying to fool anyone else regarding one's level of bitachon since it is an area that is entirely between man and his Creator. Either one has the necessary amount of bitachon or he doesn't --

and Hashem knows exactly where every person stands. The good news is that bitachon (like all middos) can be worked on and acquired. The investment is worthwhile because living with bitachon means living a worry-free existence!

Rashi at the end of the parasha (Bamidbar 15:41) cites Rav Moshe HaDarshan's explanation of why the parsha of the Mikosheish (the man who desecrated the Shabbos by gathering wood) is juxtaposed to the parasha of avodah zara and the parasha of tzitzis. A person who desecrates the Shabbos is comparable to one who worships idols since each of these mitzvos is equivalent to all the rest of the 613 mitzvos of the Torah. Likewise, the mitzvah of tzitzis is also equivalent to all the mitzvos of the Torah.

Rav Wolbe explains the uniqueness of these three mitzvos. Together these mitzvos form the framework of the entire Torah. Avodah zara undermines the Oneness of Hashem which is the most fundamental aspect of the Torah -- that there is but One G-d. Shabbos symbolizes the emunah that Hashem created the world. On the seventh day He rested and thus, we too, refrain from working and spend the day focused on connecting with our Creator. Tzitzis is the constant reminder that there is a Creator and we are His servants.

Constant knowledge that that there is a single Creator Who created the world is the outline of the entire Torah. Indeed, every mitzvah is a reminder of Hashem and an opportunity to connect with Him.
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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Moshe Rabbeinu charged the Spies (13:20): "Strengthen yourselves and take from the fruit of the Land." And so they did. The Gemara (Sotah 34a) relates that eight of the Spies carried the poles from which a huge cluster of grapes hung, one carried a fig, and one carried a pomegranate, and Yehoshua and Kalev carried nothing. The latter two Spies understood that their colleagues' intention was to show Bnei Yisrael that the Land produces "freakish" fruit, and Yehoshua and Kalev wanted no part of this.

However, notes R' Chaim Palagi z"l, Midrash Tanchuma seems to say the opposite, for it records that the Spies did not want to pick fruit. Kalev unsheathed his sword and said, "Either you pick fruit or I will kill you, unless you are able to kill me first." How can these two accounts by our Sages be reconciled?

He explains: One of the ways that real property (land) can be acquired according to Halachah is by picking some of its produce. When Moshe Rabbeinu told the Spies, "Strengthen yourselves and take from the fruit of the Land," that was his intention--that they pick fruit to symbolically acquire the Land, which would

make Bnei Yisrael's conquest of the Land easier when the time came. Moshe Rabbeinu never intended that the Spies bring any of the fruit back to show Bnei Yisrael.

Picking fruit to acquire the Land is what the Spies refused to do, until Kalev forced them to. They did want to bring fruit back to show off; but, for that purpose, they could have bought fruit in the market or collected abandoned fruit. Showing off the fruit was what Kalev and Yehoshua wanted no part in. (Birkat Mo'adecha L'Chaim: Drush L'chodesh Shevat p.578)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"They arrived at the Valley of Eshkol and cut from there a vine with one eshkol / cluster of grapes, and bore it on a double pole... He named that place the Valley of Eshkol because of the eshkol / cluster that Bnei Yisrael cut from there." (13:23-24)

Midrash Tanchuma teaches: Thus it is written (Yeshayah 46:10), "From the beginning I foretell the outcome, and from earlier times, what has not yet been." Everything is visible to Hashem. Eshkol was Avraham Avinu's dear friend (see Bereishit 14:24). He was named Eshkol because of the cluster that Bnei Yisrael would, in the future, cut from his land. [Until here from the Midrash]

R' Chanoch Zundel z"l (Eishishok, Lithuania; died 1867) explains that the Midrash is answering two questions. First, if the Spies named the place "Valley of Eshkol," how can the verse say, "They arrived at the Valley of Eshkol"? When they arrived, it was not the Valley of Eshkol! Second, why does the verse say, "He named that place"? If the Spies named it, the verse should say, "They named that place"! The Midrash answers these questions by stating that someone named Eshkol had lived there hundreds of years earlier. (Etz Yosef)

The word "Eshkol" is spelled without a "vav" the first time it appears in our verses, i.e., when "they arrived at the Valley of Eshkol," and with a "vav" all the other times. The absence of one letter hints that, when they arrived, the naming of the place was not yet complete, because the event to which its name refers had not yet occurred. (Peirush Kadmon)

R' Yehosef Schwartz z"l (1805-1865; Germany and Eretz Yisrael; Torah scholar and geographer) writes: The above Midrash suggests strongly that the Valley of Eshkol is in the vicinity of Chevron. [Chevron is where Avraham lived, and his friends presumably lived nearby.] (Tevuot Ha'aretz p.91)

There are many wadis (dry river beds) near Chevron, and there is no agreement which one is the Valley of Eshkol. (Note 244 to Kaftor Va'ferach ch.11)
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