

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In Philadelphia there lives a gentle, gracious, grey-haired man, by now in his late-90s, whom Elaine and I have had the pleasure of meeting several times and who is one of the most lovely people we have ever known. Many people have reason to be thankful to him, because his work has transformed many lives, rescuing people from depression and other debilitating psychological states.

His name is Aaron T. Beck and he is the founder of one of the most effective forms of psychotherapy yet devised: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. He discovered it through his work at the depression research clinic he founded in the University of Pennsylvania. He began to detect a pattern among his patients. It had to do with the way they interpreted events. They did so in negative ways that were damaging to their self-respect, and fatalistic. It was as if they had thought themselves into a condition that one of Beck's most brilliant disciples, Martin Seligman, was later to call "learned helplessness." Essentially they kept telling themselves, "I am a failure. Nothing I try ever succeeds. I am useless. Things will never change."

They had these thoughts automatically. They were their default reaction to anything that went wrong in their lives. But Beck found that if they became conscious of these thoughts, saw how unjustified they were, and developed different and more realistic thought patterns, they could, in effect, cure themselves. This also turns out to be a revelatory way of understanding the key episode of our parsha, namely the story of the spies.

Recall what happened. Moses sent twelve men to spy out the land. The men were leaders, princes of their tribes, people of distinction. Yet ten of them came back with a demoralising report. The land, they said, is indeed good. It does flow with milk and honey. But the

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לעלוי נשמת

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Weiss ע"ה

הרב משה בן הרב דוד הכהן ז"ל

on his 3rd yartzeit

נפטר כא סיון תשע"ה

ת נ צ ב' ה

people are strong. The cities are large and well fortified. Caleb tried to calm the people. "We can do it." But the ten said that it could not be done. The people are stronger than we are. They are giants. We are grasshoppers.

And so the terrible event happened. The people lost heart. "If only," they said, "we had died in Egypt. Let us choose a leader and go back." God became angry. Moses pleaded for mercy. God relented, but insisted that none of that generation, with the sole exceptions of the two dissenting spies, Caleb and Joshua, would live to enter the land. The people would stay in the wilderness for forty years, and there they would die. Their children would eventually inherit what might have been theirs had they only had faith.

Essential to understanding this passage is the fact that the report of the ten spies was utterly unfounded. Only much later, in the book of Joshua, when Joshua himself sent spies, did they learn from the woman who sheltered them, Rahab, what actually happened when the inhabitants of the land heard that the Israelites were coming: "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you... As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you." (Josh. 2:9-11)

The spies were terrified of the Canaanites, and entirely failed to realise that the Canaanites were terrified of them. How could they make such a profound mistake? For this we turn to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and to some of the types of distorted thinking identified by Beck's student, David Burns.

One is all-or-nothing thinking. Everything is either black or white, good or bad, easy or impossible. That was the spies' verdict on the possibility of conquest. It couldn't be done. There was no room for shading, nuance, complexity. They could have said, "It will be difficult, we will need courage and skill, but with God's help we will prevail." But they did not. Their thinking was a polarised either/or.

Another is negative filtering. We discount the positives as being insignificant, and focus almost exclusively on the negatives. The spies began by noting the positives: "The land is good. Look at its fruit." Then came the "but": the long string of negatives, drowning out the good news and leaving an overwhelmingly negative impression.

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A third is catastrophising, expecting disaster to strike, no matter what. That is what the people did when they said, "Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us die by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder."

A fourth is mind-reading. We assume we know what other people are thinking, when usually we are completely wrong because we are jumping to conclusions about them based on our own feelings, not theirs. That is what the spies did when they said, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we seemed to them." They had no way of knowing how they appeared to the people of the land, but they attributed to them, mistakenly, a sentiment based on their own subjective fears.

A fifth is inability to disconfirm. You reject any evidence or argument that might contradict your negative thoughts. The spies heard the counter-argument of Caleb but dismissed it. They had decided that any attempt to conquer the land would fail, and they were simply not open to any other interpretation of the facts.

A sixth is emotional reasoning: letting your feelings, rather than careful deliberation, dictate your thinking. A key example is the interpretation the spies placed on the fact that the cities were "fortified and very large" (Num. 13:28), or "with walls up to the sky" (Deut. 1:28). They did not stop to think that people who need high city walls to protect them are in fact fearful. Had they stopped to think, they might have realised that the Canaanites were not confident, not giants, not invulnerable. But they let their emotions substitute for thought.

A seventh is blame. We accuse someone else of being responsible for our predicament instead of accepting responsibility ourselves. This is what the people did in the wake of the spies' report. "They grumbled against Moses and Aaron" (Num. 14:1), as if to say, "It is all your fault. If only you had let us stay in Egypt!" People who blame others have already begun down the road to "learned helplessness." They see themselves as powerless to change. They are the passive victims of forces beyond their control.

Applying cognitive behavioural therapy to the story of the spies lets us see how that ancient event

might be relevant to us, here, now. It is very easy to fall into these and other forms of cognitive distortion, and the result can be depression and despair -- dangerous states of mind that need immediate medical or therapeutic attention.

What I find profoundly moving is the therapy the Torah itself prescribes. I have pointed out elsewhere that the end of the parsha -- the paragraph dealing with tzitzit -- is connected to the episode of the spies by two keywords, ure-item, "you shall see" (Num. 13:18; 15:39), and the verb latur, (Num. 13:2, 16, 17, 25, 32; 15:39). The key sentence is the one that says about the thread of blue in the tzitzit, that "when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes" (Num. 15:39).

Note the strange order of the parts of the body. Normally we would expect it to be the other way around: as Rashi says in his commentary to the verse, "The eye sees and the heart desires." First we see, then we feel. But in fact the Torah reverses the order, thus anticipating the very point Cognitive Behavioural Therapy makes, which is that often our feelings distort our perception. We see what we fear -- and often what we think we see is not there at all. Hence Roosevelt's famous words in his first Inaugural Address -- stunningly relevant to the story of the spies: "the only thing we have to fear is...fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance."

The blue thread in the tzitzit, says the Talmud (Sotah 17a), is there to remind us of the sea, the sky, and God's throne of glory. Techelet, the blue itself, was in the ancient world the mark of royalty. Thus the tzitzit as itself a form of cognitive behavioural therapy, saying: "Do not be afraid. God is with you. And do not give way to your emotions, because you are royalty: you are children of the King."

Hence the life-changing idea: never let negative emotions distort your perceptions. You are not a grasshopper. Those who oppose you are not giants. To see the world as it is, not as you are afraid it might be, let faith banish fear. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l © 2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd you shall strengthen yourselves, and you shall take from the fruits of the land. And the days were season of the first grapes." (Numbers 13: 20) Between the lines of the Bible, we glimpse the profound difficulties -- and even tragedy -- of Moses the greatest prophet in history, as a leader who sees himself losing the fealty of the Hebrew nation. Moses feels that he is failing to direct the people he

took out of Egyptian bondage toward the very goal of their exodus; the conquest of and settlement of the land of Israel. Where has he gone wrong, and why?

From the very beginning of his ministry, when the Hebrews were at the lowest point of their Egyptian oppression, Gd instructs Moses to raise their depressed and despairing spirits with five Divine promises: "Therefore say to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord. I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt, I will save you from their slavery, I will redeem you with an outstretched arm..., I will take you to Myself as a nation... and I will bring you to the land which I have sworn to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; I shall give it to you as a heritage; I am the Lord.'" (Exodus 6:6-8).

Now Moses has already succeeded – thanks to the Divine miracles – in fulfilling the first four Divine "redemptions". Only the final one is lacking: the entry of Gd's nation into His land. What causes the Israelites to delay and even demur in fulfilling this final stage of redemption? It cannot only be that the ten scouts – each princes of their respective tribes were frightened by the superior strength of the Canaanite residents (Numbers 13:31 "We cannot go forward against these people... they are too strong for us"), since a war against the Canaanites was no greater trial than standing up to the superior power and might of Egypt, or diving into the Reed Sea? If Gd (through Moses) had demonstrated His ability to deliver them from the hands of the Egyptians, why do they now balk at taking on the Canaanites?

Apparently, something has changed during the intervening year between the splitting of the Reed Sea and the proposed conquest of the Promised Land. As we have seen in last week's commentary, the Hebrews have intensified their complaining – not only asking for water – an existential need – but now by lusting after a more varied menu, from meat to fish and from cucumbers, to garlic! (Numbers 11:4, 5).

Moses is at his wits' end; can it be that the Hebrews – after all the trials that they have successfully overcome – are now whining for the stinking sardines which they used to gather at the foot of the Nile during the period of their persecution and enslavement? (ibid 11:5) He feels totally inadequate to deal with them, preferring death at Gd's hands to responsibility for leading such an ungrateful people (ibid 11:11-15).

Gd commands Moses to assemble seventy elders in the Tent of Communion, appointing them as his assistants in leading the people. Gd will cause some of Moses' spiritual energy to devolve upon them, enabling the greatest of prophets to share his awesome responsibility of leadership (11:16,17). At the same time, Gd will send quails to allay the people's lust for meat.

But then, in this week's Biblical portion, Moses seems to make a gross miscalculation by sending out a

reconnaissance mission, either initiated by Gd as an initial foray in order to map out the Israelites route towards conquest (Numbers 13:1, 2), or instigated by the people who wanted a report about what kind of enemy awaits them on their way to Israel (Deuteronomy 1:22). Moses apparently felt that this "new" Israelite mentality of kvetching and lusting was indeed impelled, even inspired, by food. He therefore exhorts them as they survey the terrain of the land and of the nature of the enemy – to "strengthen themselves, and take from the fruits of the land" to show to the Hebrews (13:20). Hopefully, the nation will be so excited by the huge and luscious grapes that they will embark on their conquest with alacrity! Apparently, what is actually now grabbing their attention is a gourmet diet.

What Moses fails to appreciate, I believe, is that the real problem lies not with an Israelite drive for nutritional pleasure but with his own form of "distance" leadership – whether from the lofty heights of Mount Sinai or the inner sanctum of the "Tent of Communion". You will remember that Moses had initially rejected Gd's offer of leadership because "I am a man who is heavy of speech and heavy of tongue" (Ex 4:10). This cannot simply mean that he stuttered and stammered – because Gd immediately answers by saying, "Is it not I who gives (or takes away) speech?" Nevertheless, Moses continues to re-iterate his problem of being afflicted by "stopped up lips" (aral sfatayim). I would maintain that Moses is actually saying that he is a man of heavy speech rather than friendly small talk, a prophet who is in almost constant contact with the Divine in issues of theology and law, morality and ethics. Moses is not a man of the people, a man of small talk and infinite patience who can "sell" Gd's program to the Israelites by sugar-coating it. As the Bible itself testifies, "The Israelites did not listen to Moses because of his (Moses'!) lack of patience (kotzer ruah) and difficult Divine service" (Ralbag's interpretation to Ex 6:9). Moses, the "man (or husband) of Gd" (Deut. 33:1) as well as the "servant of the Lord," remains "distant" from the people; he is a prophet for all the generations more than a leader for his generation.

Indeed, Moses never walked among the people in the encampment; instead he dedicates his time to speaking to the Lord in the Tent of Communion, far removed from the encampment (Leviticus 1:1, Numbers 7:89). It is Eldad and Medad, the new generation of leader-prophets, who prophesy from within the encampment itself – and in the midst of the people (Numbers 11:26). Moses' greatest asset – his closeness to Gd and his ability to "divine" the Divine will – is also his most profound tragedy, the cause of his distance from the people, his remoteness from the masses. A congregation needs to constantly be re-inspired and re-charged with new challenges and lofty goals if they are to be above petty squabbles and

materialistic desires.

The kvetching is not because they really want the leeks and the onions; it is because they don't know what they want. As they prepare to enter the Promised Land, they actually need, as we all need, a mission, a purpose for being. This, however, will have to await a new leader, who may be less a man of Gd but more a man of the people. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In our current democratically oriented mindset we subscribe to the tenet that majority rules. Because of this mentality, many times the opinion of the minority is never taken seriously or properly assessed. Yet, throughout world and Jewish history apparently the majority opinion was not always the correct one, and harmful consequences followed from its adoption.

The Talmud therefore is always careful to preserve the minority opinion even when the normative practice of Judaism does not. It explains that there perhaps will come a time when circumstances will dictate that the minority opinion will be correct and should be implemented. The flaw in always following the majority opinion is patently illustrated for us in the Torah reading of this week.

The majority opinion, by a vote of 10 to 2, rejected the entry of the Jewish people into the land of Israel, despite God's promises and the entreaties of Moshe. Yet, all Jewish history is based on the minority opinion being the correct one and that following the majority only doomed a generation to a seemingly useless death in the desert of Sinai. Apparently, God's will, so to speak, and the trajectory of history is not subject to a majority vote.

A Jewish Congressman famously stated a century ago that God and one constitute a majority. Truth, wisdom, measured action and a vision for the future are not subject to be overturned by a temporary majority opinion. The fact that there it is a Jewish people and a Jewish state in the world today testifies to the eternity of a holy and wise minority opinion.

As human beings who do not have the gift of prophecy and often find it impossible to foretell the future, following the majority opinion is comforting and reassuring. We were brought up on the slogan that 50 million Frenchmen cannot be wrong. Well, they have been very wrong many times over this past century. While we do not want to ignore the wishes of the majority, as there is power and a modicum of truth in numbers, when it comes to matters of faith and historic vision, the rules of majority and minority must be cast aside.

Common sense and historical experience coupled with strong beliefs and traditional faith should move the day when making decisions and policies.

Many a leader has been faced with making unpopular decisions for the preservation and welfare of his people. We are told that King Saul lost his crown because he told the prophet Samuel that he had to bow to popular demand instead of heeding God's commandment. In Saul's case, following the majority opinion regarding the spies in this week's Torah reading, proved disastrous. We, who live in a society where majority rules, should bear this caveat in mind. ©2018 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

A glimpse at the narrative in the book of Numbers reveals an almost parallel pattern of events to that which occurred to the Jews after their leaving Egypt.

In Numbers, the Jews began to murmur that they did not have meat to eat. (Numbers 11:4) This corresponds to the longing of the Jews "for the fleshpots" in Egypt, resulting in the giving of the manna. (Exodus 16:3)

Also, the Numbers narrative states that after the Jews complained that they lacked water, Moshe (Moses) hit instead of spoke to the rock-and water came forth. (Numbers 20:2, 3, 8, 11) So too in the Exodus story, did Moshe hit the rock after the Jews militated for water. (Exodus 17:2, 6)

And the Numbers narrative includes several challenges the Jews faced from nations like Edom. (Numbers 20:14-21) This is much like the battle the Jews fought with Amalek after they departed Egypt. (Exodus 17:8-16)

Finally, the story of the spies which highlights this week's portion is viewed as an episode revealing the Jews' basic lack of faith in God. (Numbers 13, 14) This, of course, is similar in underlying theme to the Golden Calf story which seems to describe the Jews' lack of faith. (Exodus 32, 33)

So similar are the stories in these two narratives that the Bekhor Shor (a medieval French commentator) insists that the water stories are one and the same. The latter is a more detailed account of the former.

But a closer look reveals an interesting pattern. In each of the narratives the consequences escalate in their seriousness in the Book of Numbers.

Unlike the manna story in Exodus, the request for meat in the Book of Numbers resulted in the Lord "smit[ing] the people with a very great plague." (Numbers 11:33) Also, only after Moshe hits the rock in the Book of Numbers, is he given the severe punishment of not being allowed to enter Israel.

(Numbers 20:12) And while Amalek was defeated with no mention of Jewish losses in Exodus, many Jews died when they were forced to go around the land of Edom. (Numbers 21:4, 6) Finally, only after the spy incident - not after the episode of the Golden Calf - does God decree that the generation that left Egypt must die in the desert. (Numbers 14:29)

Why are the consequences greater in the Book of Numbers, when the transgressions seem so similar? First, the events in the Book of Exodus occur either prior to Sinai or, in the case of the Golden Calf, according to Rashi, prior to the construction of the sanctuary. With the Sinaitic teachings and the Tabernacle construction in place the Jews should have known better than to falter again.

Second, to err once is forgivable and even sometimes understandable. The same transgression committed again deserves to be treated much more harshly.

So the patterns of the narratives may be similar, but the message is clear: God understands that we will fall. But we must take the lessons we learn in our mistakes and redeem ourselves. God gives us opportunities for repentance, but we cannot address those opportunities as unlimited. Sometimes one is given just so many chances. ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Among 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. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Hashem's Two Promises

The Gemara Sanhedrin (110b) involves a discussion about the generation of the desert and the sins which they committed. "The Rabbis taught in a Baraita the generation of the desert has no part in the World to Come (afterlife) as it says 'in this desert they will cease to exist and there they will die'. 'They will cease to exist' in This World, 'and there they will die' in the World to Come." This is the opinion of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Eliezer, however, states, "They will come to the World to Come." Though the sin of believing the word of the meraglim (spies) over the word of Hashem is a serious offense, one could question why this offense should be punishable both by the loss of this World and the World to Come. HaRav Zalman Sorotskin, the Aznayim L'Torah, asks how this generation that lost hope for this life and for the life of the Resurrection of the Dead could continue to follow Hashem through the desert. Certainly, those that would not die until the last of the forty years in the desert would abandon Hashem and Moshe's leadership. HaRav Sorotskin explains that it was Hashem's conviction that the generation of the desert would die for their sin of believing in the meraglim and that they would lose the World to Come also because of various other sins for which they would now be held accountable, but when He saw that they accepted their punishment of death and even dug their own graves willingly, He retracted His decree and returned to them the World to Come.

Aside from the concern of those of the B'nei Yisrael who were scheduled to receive their punishment, there was also concern among the younger generation who would become the new leaders of the B'nei Yisrael about their ability to withstand the wrath of Hashem. Would they also be excluded from entering just as their fathers were? In order to understand the reason for the question one must see the sequence of events that took place. The B'nei Yisrael sent spies into the land and accepted the interpretation of the ten spies' negative report. Hashem then punished the B'nei Yisrael with forty years in the desert, one for each day that the spies were in the land and decreed that all males over the age of twenty would die in the desert. The Ramban explains that the new generation might say, "Who knows what will happen in such a long time – after forty years – for maybe the children will also sin?" Hashem did not answer their concern directly but instead taught two laws which could only be performed in the Land of Yisrael at the time of their entering the land.

Hashem spoke to Moshe and asked him to relay His words to the B'nei Yisrael. "When you come

into the land of your dwelling places that I am giving you. And you perform a service to Hashem – an olah offering or a peace offering sacrifice by saying a vow or a free-will offering, or on your festivals to produce a pleasing fragrance to Hashem from the cattle or from the flock. Then the one who brings his offering to Hashem shall bring a meal-offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter-hin of oil. And a quarter-hin of wine for a libation shall you prepare for the olah-offering or the peace-offering sacrifice for each sheep.” The second mitzvah given at this time is the taking of challah. “Upon your coming into the land to which I bring you. It will be when you will eat of the bread of the land you shall set aside a portion for Hashem.”

These two mitzvot were given now to reassure the people that they would enter the land and possess it. We still must understand why these two mitzvot were the ones that Hashem chose to teach at this time. The first mitzvah given here involves the bringing of flour, oil and wine, when one brings an olah or free-will offering. HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the necessity for the meal offering and the wine libation as an accompaniment to each sacrifice “demands that all its adherents shall recognize the fact that for them it is not only the nefesh, the thinking, feeling, striving active life of a person which they are to remember belongs to Hashem and His Torah, but that also all ‘dagan, tirosh, v’yitzhar’ (flour, wine, and oil), all the elements which are necessary for his existence, his well-being and his joy in life are no less belonging to Hashem and His holy Torah, come from Him, are dependent on nothing else but Him, and can only be gained by us by fulfilling His Will by ‘keeping godliness alive on earth.’”

Hirsch explains that the second mitzvah, the laws of taking a portion of challah, “are not so much bound to the land itself, as to our presence in the land as indeed then by ‘upon your coming into’ even the presence of the whole nation in the land is required.” Hirsch continues by informing us that the mitzvah of challah “is imposed on dough made in the land from flour made from grain from outside the land, but dough made outside the land from grain grown in the land” is not subject to the Biblical mitzvah of challah (according to Rabbi Akiva). The challah which we take today (hafrashat challah) outside of the land of Israel is only a reminder of the real mitzvah d’oreitah, according to the Torah. Challah is Hashem’s promise of individual blessing and individual guidance and care. The law of challah is a perfect complement to the national promises of guidance and care shown in the mitzvah of nesachim. It is significant that Hashem’s “care and provision for the individual in his own special position should be attached to the coming in of all of the B’nei Yisrael, to the presence of the whole nation on the soil of the land of Hashem’s special attention.” There is

also within this mitzvah the connection between the individual and Hashem’s Torah and His Temple. The challah is given over to Hashem and His representative on earth, the Kohein. There is no minimum amount of the dough which one is to set aside for his gift, but he must retain some of the challah for himself.” By giving Challah to the Temple an individual “is to remember and take to heart the dedication of his own existence and his household to Hashem and His Torah; his gift of challah only becomes challah if he reserves something at the same time to symbolize his own existence.”

Today we are again in the land and Hashem’s message to us is as relevant today as it was then. All of Hashem’s blessings are here and waiting for us but we must remember to dedicate our lives and our land to Hashem and His Torah. When this happens, we will see that our enemies will not be able to approach us, their missiles and bombs will be useless, and the prosperity and peace that Hashem has promised us will once again flourish in His land. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The ten spies reported back to the Jewish people: "The people who dwell in the land are extremely fierce and the cities are fortified and very great. We also saw the children of Anak (giants) there. We cannot go up to the people because they are stronger than us" (Num. 13:28,31).

The spies were sent to reconnoiter the land and bring back the report. What was their mistake?

The commentary Akaidah explains that the report of the spies was appropriate. They observed and they related what they saw. Their mistake was drawing a conclusion and rendering the decision that they should not attempt to enter the Land. It was not up to them to come to any final conclusions, only to report the facts.

They were wrong about their not being able to conquer the land. The Almighty has the power to help against all odds. Just because in their minds they did not think it was possible for them to successfully take over the land of Israel did not mean that it was not really possible.

What is our lesson? We often see factors in situations and come to erroneous conclusions based on our perceptions. We must be very careful because oftentimes there are factors that we are unaware of or don't take into consideration. It is a special talent to be able to reach correct decisions based on the facts.

This is especially true when having to make judgments about other people. Some people have a strong tendency to reach negative conclusions about others that are inaccurate. Even if what you see about another person is basically true, always keep in mind that your conclusions could be wrong and the other person should still be judged favorably. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2018 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

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. ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

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"Do 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 Gd" (15:40). ©2015 Rabbi M. Willig & the TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

