

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In March 2020, whilst launching a new book, (Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times, Hodder, 2020) I took part in a BBC radio programme along with Mervyn King, who had been governor of the Bank of England at the time of the financial crash of 2008. He, together with the economist John Kay, had also brought out a new book, Radical Uncertainty: decision-making for an unknowable future. (Radical Uncertainty, Bridge Street, 2020)

The coronavirus pandemic was just beginning to make itself felt in Britain, and it had the effect of making both of our books relevant in a way that neither of us could have predicted. Mine is about the precarious balance between the "I" and the "we": individualism versus the common good. Theirs is about how to make decisions when you cannot tell what the future holds.

The modern response to this latter question has been to hone and refine predictive techniques using mathematical modelling. The trouble is that mathematical models work in a relatively abstract, delimited, quantifiable world and cannot deal with the messy, unpredictable character of reality. They don't and cannot consider what Donald Rumsfeld called the "unknown unknowns" and Nicholas Taleb termed "black swans" -- things that no one expected but that change the environment. We live in a world of radical uncertainty.

Accordingly, they propose a different approach. In any critical situation, ask: "What is happening?" They quote Richard Rumelt: "A great deal of strategy work is trying to figure out what is going on. Not just deciding what to do, but the more fundamental problem of comprehending the situation." (Good Strategy/Bad Strategy, Crown Business, 2011, pg. 79) 3] Narrative plays a major role in making good decisions in an uncertain world. We need to ask: of what story is this a

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לעילוי נשמת

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Weiss ע"ה
הרב משה בן הרב דוד הכהן ז"ל
on his 5th yartzeit
נפטר כא סיון תשע"ה
ת נ צ ב' ה

part?

Neither Rumelt nor King and Kay quote Amy Chua, but her book Political Tribes is a classic account of failing to understand the situation. Chapter by chapter she documents American foreign policy disasters from Vietnam to Iraq because policy-makers did not comprehend tribal societies. You cannot use war to turn them into liberal democracies. Fail to understand this and you will waste many years, trillions of dollars, and tens of thousands of lives.

It might seem odd to suggest that a book by two contemporary economists holds the clue to unravelling the mystery of the spies in our parsha. But it does.

We think we know the story. Moses sent twelve spies to spy out the land. Ten of them came back with a negative report. The land is good, but unconquerable. The people are strong, the cities impregnable, the inhabitants are giants and we are grasshoppers. Only two of the men, Joshua and Caleb, took a different view. We can win. The land is good. God is on our side. With His help, we cannot fail.

On this reading, Joshua and Caleb had faith, courage and confidence, while the other ten did not. But this is hard to understand. The ten -- not just Joshua and Caleb -- knew that God was with them. He had crushed Egypt. The Israelites had just defeated the Amalekites. How could these ten -- leaders, princes -- not know that they could defeat the inhabitants of the land?

What if the story were not this at all? What if it was not about faith, confidence, or courage. What if it was about "What is going on?" -- understanding the situation and what happens when you don't. The Torah tells us that this is the correct reading, and it signals it in a most striking way.

Biblical Hebrew has two verbs that mean "to spy": lachpor and leragel (from which we get the word meraglim, "spies"). Neither of these words appear in our parsha. That is the point. Instead, no less than twelve times, we encounter the rare verb, la-tur. It was revived in modern Hebrew and means (and sounds like) "to tour." Tayar is a tourist. There is all the difference in the world between a tourist and a spy.

Malbim explains the difference simply. Latur means to seek out the good. That is what tourists do. They go to the beautiful, the majestic, the inspiring. They don't spend their time trying to find out what is

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bad. Lachpor and leragel are the opposite. They are about searching out a place's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. That is what spying is about. The exclusive use of the verb latur in our parsha -- repeated twelve times -- is there to tell us that the twelve men were not sent to spy. But only two of them understood this.

Almost forty years later, when Moses retells the episode in Devarim 1:22-24, he does use the verbs lachpor and leragel. In Genesis 42, when the brothers come before Joseph in Egypt to buy food, he accuses them of being meraglim, "spies", a word that appears seven times in that one chapter. He also defines what it is to be a spy: "You have come to see the nakedness of the land" (i.e. where it is undefended).

The reason ten of the twelve men came back with a negative report is not because they lacked courage or confidence or faith. It was because they completely misunderstood their mission. They thought they had been sent to be spies. But the Torah never uses the word "spy" in our chapter. The ten simply did not understand what was going on.

They believed it was their role to find out the "nakedness" of the land, where it was vulnerable, where its defences could be overcome. They looked and could not find. The people were strong, and the cities impregnable. The bad news about the land was that there was not enough bad news to make it weak and thus conquerable. They thought their task was to be spies and they did their job. They were honest and open. They reported what they had seen. Based on the intelligence they had gathered, they advised the people not to attack -- not now, and not from here.

Their mistake was that they were not meant to be spies. They were told latur, not lachpor or leragel. Their job was to tour, explore, travel, see what the land was like and report back. They were to see what was good about the land, not what was bad. So, if they were not meant to be spies, what was the purpose of this mission?

I suggest that the answer is to be found in a passage in the Talmud (Kiddushin 41a) that states: it is forbidden for a man to marry a woman without seeing her first. The reason? Were he to marry without having seen her first, he might, when he does see her, find he is not attracted to her. Tensions will inevitably arise. Hence the idea: first see, then love.

The same applies to a marriage between a people and its land. The Israelites were travelling to the country promised to their ancestors. But none of them had ever seen it. How then could they be expected to muster the energies necessary to fight the battles involved in conquering the land? They were about to marry a land they had not seen. They had no idea what they were fighting for.

The twelve were sent latur: to explore and report on the good things of the land so that the people would know it was worth fighting for. Their task was to tour and explore, not spy and decry. But only two of them, Joshua and Caleb, listened carefully and understood what their mission was: to be the eyes of the congregation, letting them know the beauty and goodness of what lay ahead, the land that had been their destiny since the days of their ancestor Abraham.

The Israelites at that stage did not need spies. As Moses said many years later: "You did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go" (Deut. 1:32-33). God was going to show them where to go and where to attack.

The people needed something else entirely. Moses had told them that the land was good. It was "flowing with milk and honey." But Moses had never seen the land. Why should they believe him? They needed the independent testimony of eyewitnesses. That was the mission of the twelve. And in fact, all twelve fulfilled that mission. When they returned, the first thing they said was: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit" (Num. 13:27). But because ten of them thought their task was to be spies, they went on to say that the conquest was impossible, and from then on, tragedy was inevitable.

The difference between the ten and Joshua and Caleb is not that the latter had the faith, courage and confidence the former did not. It is that they understood the story; the ten did not.

I find it fascinating that a leading economist and a former Governor of the Bank of England should argue for the importance of narrative when it comes to decision-making under conditions of radical uncertainty. Yet that is the profound truth in our parsha.

Ten of the twelve men thought they were part of a story of espionage. The result was that they looked for the wrong things, came to the wrong conclusion, demoralised the people, destroyed the hope of an entire generation, and will eternally be remembered as responsible for one of the worst failures in Jewish history.

Read Amy Chua's Political Tribes, mentioned earlier, and you will discover a very similar analysis of America's devastating failures in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.

(A more positive example would be to contrast the Marshall Plan after World War 2 with the punitive provisions of the Treaty of Versailles after World War 1. These were the result of two different narratives: victors punishing the vanquished, and victors helping both sides to rebuild.)

I write these words while the Coronavirus pandemic is at its height. Has anyone yet identified the narrative of which it and we are a part? I believe that the story we tell affects the decisions we make. Get the story wrong and we can rob an entire generation of their future. Get it right, as did Joshua and Caleb, and we can achieve greatness. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"We should go up at once and possess it [the land] for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30) The tragedy of the desert generation is the refusal of the Israelites to conquer the Land of Israel and to realize the main objective for their freedom from Egypt. The scouts give their report, show the luscious fruit with which they have returned and concede that Israel is a land flowing with milk and honey. But they continue to describe a land filled with aggressive giants, and well-fortified cities, concluding that; "we cannot go forward against those people... they are too strong for us." One individual, Caleb, speaks out mightily on behalf of the land: "We must go forth and occupy the land.... We can do it." We will be able to conquer it because we must conquer it; without a homeland, we cannot be a nation. Caleb, however, loses the argument. The nation silences his plea; their desire is either to return to Egypt or to remain homeless in the desert forever. What was the point of this second view which won the day—at least for the desert generation?

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

You will remember from previous commentaries that the Kotzker Rebbe referred to Korah as "the holy grandfather." Korah was deeply religious and he wanted more than anything else to be a kohen-priest and serve God. He didn't want to go to Israel, to get involved in a difficult war, to get his hands dirtied by the politics and arguments about nation-building. He believed, as the majority of scouts apparently believed, that the Hebrews could remain in the desert, focused on the portable sanctuary, pray to God and live off the manna from heaven. If the people of Israel is first and

foremost a religion, then he was right. After all, life in the desert is an eternal Kollel with God taking care of you and no responsibilities to the outside world.

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

This analysis has critical ramifications for our attitudes concerning conversion, especially in Israel where there are approximately 300,000 Israeli citizens from the former Soviet Union who are not yet halachic Jews. Ruth is undoubtedly the most famous convert in Jewish history aside from Abraham our Patriarch. Her formula of conversion begins with her statement to Naomi, her Hebrew mother-in-law: "Wherever you go, I shall go... your nation shall be my nation and your God shall be my God..." (Ruth 1:16). For Ruth, the very first obligation of the convert is to live in the Land of Israel, the land of the Jewish nation; hence, her most important act of conversion is following her mother-in-law to the Land of Israel. When she defines what it means to convert to Judaism, she begins with national terms (your nation shall be my nation) then religious terms (your God shall be my God). She understands that whatever Judaism is, it includes a national as well as a religious aspect.

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

Citizens of Israel from the former Soviet Union, who themselves or whose children serve in the IDF, are

performing the most stringent of our national commands in this generation. This must be taken into account by our conversion judges in addition to everything else these new immigrants will learn about the Sabbath, the festivals and our rituals. Living in Israel is not a sufficient criteria for Conversion, but it is an important aspect of the general criteria of "Acceptance of the Commandments – Your nation will be my nation", to the extent that one will educate his/her children to serve in the IDF! ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Land of Israel has always been a challenge to the People of Israel. There are many reasons for this, both obvious and subtle. The Land of Israel plays a central role in Judaism, in Jewish life, within its laws and world view. Yet, for a great part of Jewish history, the Jewish People itself was absent from the Land of Israel. Because of this absence, the Land of Israel was not a reality in Jewish everyday life. It became a goal, a spiritual value, an imaginary place of perfection and holiness. It adopted a utopian character, a place well nigh impossible to translate into reality.

Though, over the past century the Land of Israel and the People of Israel again began to be joined one to another in actuality, it became difficult for many Jews to accept the reality of the Land and the People as opposed to the imaginary dream that had existed for millennia.

This I think helps explain the attitude of certain sections of Jewish society, interestingly enough both very secular and very religiously observant, that somehow finds it difficult to adjust to the miraculous and unforeseen reunification of the Land and the People that has occurred in our time. Expecting perfection or purely holy behavior, the existing reality is therefore frustrating and even disappointing to them and they reject this miracle of Jewish rebirth and of the great process of the rebuilding of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel in our time.

When the spies that Moshe sent rejected the Land of Israel thousands of years ago, they also did it out of ill perceived but relatively high motives. They saw the dangers inherent in the creation of any national entity and of the potential divisions that would necessarily arise within Jewish society. They realized that they would have to fight wars against strong enemies and work to till the land and develop an economy and a way of life. They realized that all of this somehow had to be compatible with the intrinsic holiness of the Land and of its special qualities.

They were nervous that "the eyes of the Lord their God would be fixed upon them and the Land from the beginning of the year till its conclusion." They would have to combine the sword, the plow and holy learning

in their personal and national lives. This was and is an enormous challenge that the generation of the desert shrank from. It is much easier to retain and be loyal to an image of the imaginary Land of Israel than to the nitty gritty of the actual Land of Israel.

Calev and Yehoshua said "aloh na'aleh" we will be worthy to elevate ourselves to meet that challenge. Our generation is in the midst of the third attempt of the Jewish People to realize its physical and spiritual ambitions in the Land of Israel. It is a difficult process but one that we cannot or should not shirk from attempting to succeed and thereby justify all that has happened to us in our past history. ©2020 *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

After committing the sin of the golden calf, God declares, "I will destroy them (the Jewish people)" – va'achalem. Moshe (Moses) intervenes. Challenging God, he asks, "Why, O Lord, would you do this?"

Responding to Moshe's challenge, God changes His mind. Vayenachem Hashem, "And the Lord renounced the punishment." (Exodus 32:10-14)

Soon after God offers the 13 middot, the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy – Hashem Hashem El Rachum VeChanun – "The Lord! The Lord! a God compassionate and gracious." (Exodus 34:6) Can it be argued that God is telling Moshe, if ever I fail to be true to these characteristics, challenge Me, do everything you can to nullify the decree.

In our parsha, after the spies return with a negative report about Israel and the Jewish people also express their distaste for the mission to enter the land, God declares, a'kenu – "I will smite them." (Numbers 14:12)

Moshe, as per God's request, holds God accountable and invokes the Thirteen Attributes. Hashem, he declares, erech apayim verav chessed – "O Lord," but in the thirteen attributes You said that "You are slow to anger and abounding in kindness." (Numbers 14:18)

Here, Moshe quotes God back to God, making God accountable. He makes this point sharply, insisting slach na la'am hazeh ke'godel chasdecha – "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness" and God responds, salachti ki'dvarecha – "I pardon, as you have asked." (Numbers 14:19, 20) Moshe had impacted God – his challenge produced positive results.

It is extraordinary that this intense give and take between God and Moshe becomes a central part of our liturgy during the selichot services of the High

Holiday season. In fact, these sentences are quoted immediately after the recitation of Kol Nidre on Yom Kippur night. It's almost as if on the very days when we are expected to do better, we respectfully and lovingly turn to God, as it were, and ask that He, too, improve His ways.

Indeed, Kol Nidre itself may not only be a request that vows we've made be annulled, but our serving as a beit din (Jewish court) to annul God's vows. As quoted in the Yom Kippur machzor with commentary adapted from the teachings of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik: "All Jews have acted in error, but they remain fundamentally meritorious. God may initially vow that due to the sinner's repulsiveness, He will have nothing to do with him. The beis din, through their Kol Nidre ruling, abets God, as it were, to absolve His vow." (Before Hashem) ©2020 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 DAVID LEVIN

Clear Instructions

Any teacher knows that many students have difficulty following instructions. One of the key elements in creating a meaningful test is the clarity of the instructions which are given. If one wants to assess accurately the knowledge and skills of a student, one must carefully prepare the questions and instructions so that they are not misleading and confusing. The questions must lead the student to an answer which reflects his knowledge and not his ability to sort through extraneous wording of dubious importance. This is true not only in education but in many other areas as well. If one gives a task to his staff, it should not be clouded with additional instructions which might interfere with the proper performing of that task.

In Parashat Sh'lach we find very specific instructions that were given to the spies who were sent into the Land of Canaan. These instructions were given by Moshe to the twelve "leaders" who were chosen as representatives of each of the tribes except Levi. The twelve included representatives from the two sons of Yosef, Ephraim and Menasheh. Each was a significant person, "all of them heads of the Children of Israel." These men were familiar with the concept of giving clear instructions and following instructions precisely. Yet it is evident that they went beyond their assigned responsibilities as agents of the people.

According to HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsh, there were three basic facts about which the spies were to report. The first question involved a direct report on the physical nature of the land: were there mountains, was there flat land, and was the land well-watered. Even the question of whether they were strong or weak,

many or few was a question about the physical aspect of the land. Did the land support its inhabitants to enable them to be strong and many? It would seem that this first question is the decisive one, for if the inhabitants are strong, that might preclude any conquest of the land. Yet the question is phrased, they were not instructed to separate the tasks but to view all the questions as one. Moshe was not interested in the answer to help him decide what to do, but instead he was focused only on an historical setting. Hashem would conquer the land regardless of the strength of the inhabitants, and the people would be able to tell their children that the enemy was strong yet Hashem defeated them. The condition of the land then would act as a contrast to the land when Hashem would give His blessing on it.

The second question involved the land's effect on its inhabitants "that he lives in it." We speak of "the very air of Israel makes people wise (Baba Batra 158b)." The cities themselves are also an indication of the effect of the land on the people. If the cities are open or if they are closed, we can learn whether the land has made the people confident or frightened. An open city without walls is satisfied with the bravery of its inhabitants, yet a closed city behind a wall indicates that the people live in constant fear and need protection. The open city shows that the people are righteous and earn their living as farmers and shepherds accepting Hashem's blessings on them.

The third question involved the richness of the land and its produce, "is it fat or thin." The question of whether it is a land of "etz, tree" has many different interpretations. According to Hirsh it indicates forested areas which enable industry where farming or shepherding is difficult. Rashi interprets etz as a leader who brings blessing on the place through his merit. The spies were enjoined to bring back with them some of the produce of the land.

The spies were never given the task to interpret what they saw. They were only to bring their observations before Moshe and Aharon. Professor Nechama Leibovitz describes their limits in the following way: If a man sends an agent to report on a piece of material that he wishes to purchase and he says to examine it carefully for quality, size, appearance, and price, the agent has a clear task. If he returns and says that the wool is pure, it is wide and long, greenish and reddish in color and the price is one hundred gold pieces, he has fulfilled his task well. But if he returns and says the wool is pure, long and wide, but it is greenish and reddish, and it is highly priced at one hundred gold pieces, he has added his own interpretation to the facts which was not part of his task. This would only be acceptable if the owner had asked his opinion of the facts that he reported. The agent does not know the purpose of this purchase and is not capable of assessing the merchandise with that

purpose in mind.

But why did Moshe not want the spies to offer their opinions of what they saw? We must remember that Moshe had true faith in Hashem. He knew that Hashem would make the B'nei Yisrael successful against their enemies and reward them, as He had promised, with the blessings of the land. Moshe understood that every interpretation comes with prejudice from within. Fear causes us to view facts negatively. The spies described the land as "eretz ochelet yoshveha, a land which devours its inhabitants." They had witnessed many funerals without realizing that Hashem was ridding the land of those who could defend it and busying the people with funerals so they would not notice the spies. These men saw a wonderful land but their fears led them to reassess the facts and question the value of attempting to conquer it. Moshe understood the nature of Man and knew that the men could not hope but interpret the facts that they reported. But he prayed that they would limit themselves to reporting only what they witnessed without any interpretation. We see that this was not the case.

In our own lives we must realize that our prejudices often reinterpret facts that we see. We tend to prejudge others by their appearance or their religious, political, or social affiliations. We assign motives for their actions from within our own prejudices. This makes it extremely difficult to listen with an open mind and compromise with someone whose view does not coincide with our own. We become anti-hareidi, anti-secular, anti-dati leumi, and we do not realize that our prejudice comes from within. We concentrate so much on our perceived differences that we fail to recognize how much we have in common. We share a history, a religion, and a land on which we can receive the multitude of Hashem's blessings. Let us work together to bring about ahavat chinam, love, among our people and within our land. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Minyan of Ten

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

A *minyan*, the presence of ten men, is required for those parts of the prayer service that are deemed *Devarim She-bikdushah* (literally, words of sanctifying). These include *Kaddish*, *Barchu*, *Kedushah*, the repetition of the *Amidah*, and (according to some) the reading of the Torah, the reading of the *Haftarah*, and the priestly blessing. This rule is derived from the verse, "I will be sanctified **among** the children of Israel" ("*Ve-nikdashiti be-toch Bnei Yisrael*") (*Vayikra* 22:32). How do we know that the number referred to here is specifically ten, neither more nor less?

One way of arriving at ten is through a *gezeirah shavah*. (This is a method of rabbinic exegesis in which a similar word appearing in two different contexts is

used to infer that the details of one context apply to the other.) The word "*toch*" ("among") appears in the verse about sanctifying G-d, and in the story of Korach's rebellion. Regarding the latter, the Torah states (*Bamidbar* 16:21), "Separate yourselves from **among** (*mi-tokh*) this community (*edah*)." However, there the Torah is referring to a group of 250 people. How is it useful for arriving at the number ten?

This involves a bit more exegesis. The word "*edah*," which is used in the story of Korach, is also used in reference to the ten spies who spoke badly of the Land of Israel, as we read (*Bamidbar* 14:27), "How much longer will that wicked community (*edah*) keep muttering against Me?" We see that the definition of a community is ten. Thus, the community within which we sanctify G-d's name must be similar to the spies (not in their sinfulness, of course, but in being free, adult males).

It should be noted that the above is not a combination of one *gezeirah shavah* with another (*toch-toch* and *edah-edah*), which would possibly break a rule of exegesis. Rather, we learn from the case of the spies in Parshat Shelach that the definition of the word "*edah*" is ten everywhere it appears. This includes the verse in Parshat Korach, where the word "*toch*" is associated with ten (through the word "*edah*"). And a *gezeirah shavah* (*toch-toch*) connects that verse with the verse about sanctifying G-d. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And these are their names: for the Tribe of Reuven, Shamua ben Zakur." (Bam. 13:4) When the Jews asked for spies to be sent to scout out Eretz Yisrael, Hashem did not agree. He wanted them to trust Him as we've said in the past, but He allowed Moshe to send scouts of his own volition. The Torah presents the names of the twelve scouts according to their tribe.

Interestingly, the order of the Tribes is different than we have encountered before. Though it begins with Reuven and Shimon, the list does not continue in age order of the sons of Yaakov. Neither does it follow the order of the flags of their encampment in the desert, nor the order of their legions when going to war. The Sforno simply says that they were listed in personal age order since they were all respected individuals. (This is followed today. When two individuals being honored are of similar stature, priority is given to the older one.)

The Ramban's approach is that these men were listed according to personal stature and though they were all respected, some were more honored than others. Rather than mentioning them according to the status of their tribes, they were listed according to their personal greatness.

The Netziv quotes this Ramban and brings a

citation of support for this opinion, but he says there is a major difference here. They were indeed listed in order of their greatness, but it was not dependent on their level of Torah and Yiras Shomayim. Rather, here they were listed in order of their fitness and appropriateness for the mission at hand, to scout out Eretz Yisrael and identify the best cities and areas for the Jews to fight and conquer initially.

We learn from this a valuable lesson about appreciating people. Quite often, when we look at people, we judge them, though that isn't our job at all. We try to quantify their attributes and come up with a value of them as people. We compare them to others and decide if they are more or less worthy. This is wrong.

Though certainly people have different levels of closeness to Hashem, that is not the only way to appreciate them. We should also consider the fact that each has a different life's mission and one is not the same as another. What Hashem asks of each individual is different and the abilities each has been granted to do their jobs is different.

The parsha, here, teaches us to look at people as individuals with a job to do and to appreciate and honor them according to their suitedness for their missions. Since we don't actually know each other's missions, it behooves us to view each person as honorable since they are precisely prepared to do what only they can do.

R' Isser Zalman Meltzer z"l, the great Rosh Yeshiva and sage, was on his way to deliver a lecture in Yeshiva when he was stopped by a beggar asking for tzedaka. R' Isser Zalman gave him a generous amount but the fellow complained that it wasn't enough.

The rabbi gave him more, but the man still had the audacity to ask for more. Once again, R' Isser Zalman gave him another coin. The student walking with R' Isser Zalman was aghast at how the beggar treated the great man, and stunned at the sage's response.

"Why are you shocked?" asked R' Isser Zalman, when they had walked further. "Do you think I'm better than him because I've learned a lot of Torah and I give shiurim? The circumstances of life have led me to be a Rosh Yeshiva and him to be a beggar. I do not feel superior to him so I felt obligated to grant his request, regardless of how he made it." ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Send out for yourself men who will scout the Land of Canaan..." (Bamidbar 13:2) We don't always point out why one section of the Torah follows another, but Rashi does this week:

"Send for yourself men': Why is the section dealing with the spies juxtaposed with the section

dealing with Miriam? Because she was punished over matters of slander, for speaking against her brother, and these wicked people witnessed [it], but did not learn their lesson."

In other words, according to this, one could say that the failure of the spies was the result of not taking to heart the lesson of Miriam and Aharon. They had spoken slander about Moshe Rabbeinu and that had angered God. Wouldn't it have made sense to therefore not speak slander about Eretz Yisroel?

Well, yes and no. Certainly we learn the importance of not slandering someone in last week's parsha, though we were already taught that back in Parashas Tazria. But one could easily think that it is one thing to speak badly about the Torah leader of the generation, even for a "good" reason, and another thing to do so about a piece of land, and a "frightening" mission to take it. The Torah is telling us otherwise.

You can imagine the conversation they must have had.

"We'll go back and show everyone the fruit, and when they think we're doing it to praise the land, we'll give them the scary information. Then they'll want to stay put in the desert like us."

"But if we do that, won't we be slandering the land of God? Remember what happened to Miriam when she spoke loshon hara about Moshe Rabbeinu, and for a good reason too!"

"That was different. She was talking about a person, and the leader of the nation. This is only a piece of land...Besides, it's not like we're saying we don't want to serve God anymore!"

"That's right! On the contrary, we're saying that we can serve God better here in the desert!"

"For sure! If we go up to Canaan, then we'll have to fight for the land, and that can take years...and probably lives too! Even if we are successful, by the time we divide and settle the land, it will be years again!"

"When we will have time to learn Torah?"

"We won't! That's the whole point! That's why it is not really the same as Miriam's loshon hara."

"Instead we're doing a big mitzvah. Certainly God will see our zealously for Torah and mitzvos, and let us remain in these ideal conditions!"

"Not only that, but it is well known that God defends His people only as strongly as they are righteous. I don't think we're that righteous yet. What happens if we go to war against the people of Canaan, and lacking sufficient merits, God does not defeat our enemies for us?"

"Well THAT would certainly be a terrible profanation of God's Name!"

"Terrible!"

"Best to stay here in the desert for now...until we reach the kind of spiritual level to guarantee us success in battle...so we can sanctify God's Name

instead!"

The amazing thing is how ten out of the 12 spies bought into the storyline. How could so many important people be so wrong, and cause so many others so much damage for so many generations!

The answer is "Yetzer Hara 101." No one learns any lessons that fly in the face of their greatest desires and dependencies. It doesn't matter how obvious the lesson may be to others. To the biased, the truth is never accurate and can always be ignored. Even after it catches up with people, they may still have a difficult time admitting their mistakes!

Just take a look at our generation now. Chaos grows continuously. It could just be temporary upheaval, and we just have to find a way to remain safe in the meantime. Or it could mean that the current exile is coming to an end, and we have to work on ways to get out while we can. We don't like change when it means going from what we're used to, and living in ways we do not recognize or desire.

Clearly, we have no choice sometimes. Clearly, God has decided otherwise, and changed life on us. When that happens, we all of a sudden wish we had gone with the changes we could have overseen, as opposed to the ones now imposed on us. You can be sure that the generation of the spies, as they died out, realized that they would have been better off following God's plan and whatever resulted from it.

But has anyone ever learned anything from the spies? Not really. What happened to the spies was their own story, people think, not one we share in our day and age. THEY were different people, with a different set of circumstances, in a unique period of history. It was different then, and because it was SO different we need not take to heart their mistakes or God's responses.

Likewise, what happened in Europe was also unique. The people were more like us, but the situation was very different. Besides, Europe was home to the Nazis, so it was inherently dangerous to live there. In retrospect, we should have taken the threat more seriously and moved out en masse, even if over time.

But America is different. Canada is different. England is different. Every country has its problems, but who says that those problems are specifically Jewish problems, or ever will be? Yes, it may be chaotic in the United States today, but it is for everyone, and therefore it is possible to hunker down and wait for normalcy to return.

But that's like judging the weather only by how it looks outside right now. Yes, it is currently sunny, with only a slight breeze, a perfect day for a run in the park. But if you flip on the news and check the 24 hour forecast, you will see that pressure systems are hard at work changing everything. High winds are on their way, and when you automatically look out the window, you notice the trees blowing a little harder already.

With the winds come the clouds, and before you can even look outside again, you can tell the sun has been blocked by some. They come and go, but you are surprised at how quickly a clear blue sky has become so cloudy in so short a time! "Wow," you marvel to yourself, "how fast the weather changes."

At that point, you still haven't cancelled your run in the park. You just hope you can get it in before the weather becomes too inclement. And even though the weatherman is telling people to stay indoors in the afternoon, you feel that it is a worthy gamble to not miss your daily exercise. Somewhat addicted to that run in the park, you ask yourself, "How bad can it get? I've run through bad weather before," though you decide to move it up an hour just in case.

By the time you get to the park, the winds are severe. Trees are almost bending while leaves and dust are flying everywhere. The sky is dark now with no sign of sun, and rain has begun to fall. Part of you says "Go for the run, and worse come to worst, cut it short." Part of you says, "Run for the car and cancel outdoor exercise for today."

Before you can even decide which voice to listen to, lightening flies across the sky followed quickly by very loud thunder. Now, without too much thinking, you run out of the park, a very dangerous place to be in an electrical storm, and for your car, a much safer place to be. You don't get there fast enough as the winds, rain, and lightning attack your world with a vengeance you have never seen in your lifetime. You barely get into the car when lightning eerily makes the dark day seem sunny for a moment, confusing your brain temporarily.

Once you finally get into the car, slam the door shut after you, you just sit there hugging yourself to get warm as you fumble for the ignition to start your car. It is raining too hard to start driving, so you just sit there asking yourself, "What was I thinking? Why did I take the risk...just to do what I'm used to doing...?"

Storm's coming. The "Weathermen" predicted it thousands of years ago. Clouds are forming and the winds are whipping up. The only question to answer is, "Do we learn from our past and err on the side of caution, or on the side of mistake?" The answer will either save your life, or...that remains to be seen.

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