

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

It was perhaps the single greatest collective failure of leadership in the Torah. Ten of the spies whom Moses had sent to spy out the land came back with a report calculated to demoralise the nation.

"We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large... We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are... The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height... We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." (Num. 13:27-33)

This was nonsense, and they should have known it. They had left Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world, after a series of plagues that brought that great country to its knees. They had crossed the seemingly impenetrable barrier of the Red Sea. They had fought and defeated the Amalekites, a ferocious warrior nation. They had even sung, along with their fellow Israelites, a song at the sea that contained the words: The peoples have heard; they tremble;

Pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;

Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;

All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. (Ex. 15:14-15)

They should have known that the people of the land were afraid of them, not the other way round. And so it was, as Rahab told the spies sent by Joshua forty years later: I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two Kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our

hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. (Joshua 2:9-11)

Only Joshua and Caleb among the twelve showed leadership. They told the people that the conquest of the land was eminently achievable because God was with them. The people did not listen. But the two leaders received their reward. They alone of their generation lived to enter the land. More than that: their defiant statement of faith and their refusal to be afraid shines as brightly now as it did thirty-three centuries ago. They are eternal heroes of faith.

One of the fundamental tasks of any leader, from president to parent, is to give people a sense of confidence: in themselves, in the group of which they are a part, and in the mission itself. A leader must have faith in the people they lead, and inspire that faith in them. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter of the Harvard Business School writes in her book *Confidence*, "Leadership is not about the leader, it is about how he or she builds the confidence of everyone else." (*Confidence*, Random House, 2005, 325) *Confidence*, by the way, is Latin for "having faith together."

The truth is that in no small measure a law of self-fulfilling prophecy applies in the human arena. Those who say, "We cannot do it" are probably right, as are those who say, "We can." If you lack confidence you will lose. If you have it -- solid, justified confidence based on preparation and past performance -- you will win. Not always, but often enough to triumph over setbacks and failures. That, as mentioned in our study of parshat Beshallach, is what the story of Moses' hands is about, during the battle against the Amalekites. When the Israelites look up, they win. When they look down they start to lose.

That is why the negative definition of Jewish identity that has so often prevailed in modern times (Jews are the people who are hated, Israel is the nation that is isolated, to be Jewish is to refuse to grant Hitler a posthumous victory) is so misconceived, and why one in two Jews who have been brought up on this doctrine choose to marry out and discontinue the Jewish journey. (National Jewish Population Survey 1990: A Portrait of Jewish Americans, Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013.)

Harvard economic historian David Landes, in his *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, explores the

question of why some countries fail to grow economically while others succeed spectacularly. After more than 500 pages of close analysis, he reaches this conclusion: In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and that is the way of achievement, correction, improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right. (David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London, Little, Brown, 1998, 524.)

I prefer the word "hope" to "optimism." Optimism is the belief that things will get better; hope is the belief that together we can make things better. No Jew, knowing Jewish history, can be an optimist, but no Jew worthy of the name abandons hope. The most pessimistic of the Prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, were still voices of hope. By their defeatism, the spies failed as leaders and as Jews. To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope.

The most remarkable by far of all the commentators on the episode of the spies was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. He raised the obvious question. The Torah emphasises that the spies were all leaders, princes, heads of tribes. They knew that God was with them, and that with His help there was nothing they could not do. They knew that God would not have promised them a land they could not conquer. Why then did they come back with a negative report?

His answer turns the conventional understanding of the spies upside-down. They were, he said, not afraid of defeat. They were afraid of victory. What they said to the people was one thing, but what led them to say it was another entirely.

What was their situation now, in the wilderness? They lived in close and continuous proximity to God. They drank water from a rock. They ate manna from heaven. They were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory. Miracles accompanied them along the way.

What would be their situation in the land? They would have to fight wars, plough the land, plant seed, gather harvests, create and sustain an army, an economy and a welfare system. They would have to do what every other nation does: live in the real world of empirical space. What would become of their relationship with God? Yes, He would still be present in the rain that made crops grow, in the blessings of field and town, and in the Temple in Jerusalem that they would visit three times a year, but not visibly, intimately, miraculously, as He was in the desert. This is what the spies feared: not failure but success.

This, said the Rebbe, was a noble sin but still a sin. God wants us to live in the real world of nations, economies and armies. God wants us, as He put it, to create "a dwelling place in the lower world." He wants

us to bring the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, into everyday life. It is easy to find God in total seclusion and escape from responsibility. It is hard to find God in the office, in business, in farms and fields and factories and finance. But it is that hard challenge to which we are summoned: to create a space for God in the midst of this physical world that He created and seven times pronounced good. That is what ten of the spies failed to understand, and it was a spiritual failure that condemned an entire generation to forty years of futile wandering.

The Rebbe's words ring true today even more loudly than they did when he first spoke them. They are a profound statement of the Jewish task. They are also a fine exposition of a concept that entered psychology only relatively recently -- fear of success. (Sometimes called the "Jonah complex" after the Prophet. See Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1977, 35-40.) We are all familiar with the idea of fear of failure. It is what keeps many of us from taking risks, preferring instead to stay within our comfort zone.

No less real, though, is fear of success. We want to succeed: so we tell ourselves and others. But often unconsciously we fear what success may bring: new responsibilities, expectations on the part of others that we may find hard to fulfil, and so on. So we fail to become what we might have become had someone given us faith in ourselves.

The antidote to fear, both of failure and success, lies in the passage with which the parsha ends: the command of tzitzit (Num. 15:38-41). We are commanded to place fringes on our garments, among them a thread of blue. Blue is the colour of the sky and of heaven. Blue is the colour we see when we look up (at least in Israel; in Britain, more often than not we see clouds). When we learn to look up, we overcome our fears.

Leaders give people confidence by teaching them to look up. We are not grasshoppers unless we think we are. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l 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 Shelach. 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, "the Lord God who walks before you, He will do battle for you...to seek out [latur] for you a place in which you may settle your encampment" (*ibid.*, 1:23).

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. © 2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he land of Israel has always posed a problem for the Jewish people. On one hand, it is and always has been our national homeland, the land promised to us by the Lord from the days of our forefathers. It is the Holy Land, the most special place on earth. On the other hand, the record of the Jewish people in the land of Israel, and their behavior and attitudes, has often been a spotty one.

The Law makes demands upon those who live here. It has, to speak, a very delicate digestive system, and the land rejects, after a period, behavior that is detrimental to creating a viable and moral society. Yet, the attachment of the Jewish people to the land of Israel is so strong that it has been able to survive

centuries of separation, conquest, and exile.

Whatever period of history you choose, Jews always lived in the land of Israel, and some Jews lived there even vicariously. The Jews never forgot that they were strangers in alien countries, and if some of them did forget, the societies that they lived in eventually reminded them that they were, after all, only strangers and outsiders. All this serves as a backdrop to the spies who appear in this week's Torah reading.

Over the centuries, there are many reasons given by the commentators as to why the spies returned with such a negative report, with twisted positive facts into potential calamities and disasters. But one of the main and cogent reasons for this behavior was the ambivalent fear that has always existed within Jewish society, i.e., to commit to national existence in the land of Israel, independent of the blandishments and seeming advantages of physical life under different circumstances.

The fear and trepidation exhibited by the spies, when Moshe confidently said to bring back a report about the land of Israel, did not die with that generation of doubters in the desert. I am not speaking here of immigration to the land of Israel today, or entering the process of Aliyah. Rather, I am addressing an attitude that exists in almost all sections of the Jewish world outside of the land of Israel. That attitude is the commitment involved in living in the land of Israel, a justified concern regarding the spiritual and social commitment necessary to successfully live as a Jew in the land of Israel.

It is this challenge, more than anything else, that shook the spies and turned them into slanderers. There are many of these same personalities, unfortunately, that still exists today in the Jewish world. There are Jewish organizations as well as individuals who are in the forefront of anti-Israel movements and programs, not politically driven, but rather an expression of the ambivalence that prevails within the souls besetting Jews in our time. The results of the behavior of the spies should be a sobering reminder regarding the dangers of slandering the land of Israel and the Jewish population. ©2021 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**W**hile the sending out of spies results in the Jews wandering in the desert for forty years, it sets the stage for Israel's ultimate entry into the land of Israel. Indeed, Joshua and Caleb, who returned with a positive report, ultimately lead the Jews into the holy land.

Maimonides points out that the holiness of

Joshua's conquest continued for as long as we remained sovereign in the land. Once Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians, the holiness ceased. When we reentered 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 (Yad, Hilchot Beit Habechirah 6:16).

Why was the first holiness finite and the second eternal?

Maimonides suggests that the distinction lies in the methodology of taking the land. Kibbush (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. Chazakah (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.

Perhaps it can also be suggested that the difference lies in evaluating a principle of love. After all, entry into the land of Israel deals with our relationship with the land, our love for the land of Israel.

When does one know love is real and will last? Loving when one has never been disappointed – when one doesn't see the imperfections in the other, when the love has never faltered, when one has never been let down – is untested love. But loving after being disappointed – after seeing the imperfections, after it has faltered, after being let down – is different. If I can love you then, if I've not given up on you, if I resolve to love you no matter what, that is a love that endures forever.

This is the power of the second entry into Israel. If the Jews, after being exiled, still believe in the land and return, that love of the land, the holiness of the land, can never be shaken.

This is a concept that has contemporary meaning, especially when considering the establishment of the modern State of Israel after two thousand years of exile. To paraphrase Theodor Herzl, the great Zionist visionary: If you love it, it is no dream. ©2021 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 AVROHOM LEVENTHAL**

## Get Back to Where You Once Belonged

I have just returned Home from a visit to the United States. During this short trip, I met people of all stripes.

I feel that in general, people are inherently good and want only the best for themselves and their loved ones. I enjoy meeting people for the first time and finding common denominators about which to

converse.

Within the Jewish community, I was particularly inspired by the sheer number of people desiring to come “Home”. The pandemic and closing of borders has kindled the longing for our Land.

Some people wish to come for a visit, others are interested in buying real estate and there are more than a few who are seriously discussing aliyah.

The common thread: a love and longing to connect to Eretz Yisrael. In any way whatsoever.

There can be no better way to approach Parshat Shelach than experiencing the palatable thirst of Jews wanting to attach themselves to our Home.

The meraglim all started out as good, upstanding people. Their downfall began when they lost the vision and understanding of the essence of Eretz Yisrael. When God promised us this Land He included His unique protection for us there. Yes, there would be challenges and yes, if we would persevere we would see how special and unique Eretz Yisrael and merit the blessings within.

The mistake and ultimate sin of the spies was not appreciating the role of Eretz Yisrael in the establishment and foundation of the nation. They were concerned that the high spiritual level reached in the desert would suffer with the physical work demanded in conquering and settling the Land.

How could they trade the protection by the Clouds of Glory for weapons of battle? Would the spiritual sustenance represented by the Manna now be replaced with produce farmed by hand?

Rather than inspire and encourage the people, the meraglim chose to disparage the Land and cast doubt in the ability to possess it and the level of holiness within.

They just didn't get the relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel.

That fruit grown in the soil of Eretz Yisrael, lovingly harvested by a Jewish farmer and properly tithed and maasered, reaches a level of holiness far beyond the manna itself.

Because they didn't grasp the connection they chose to belittle the land.

What should have been joy and anticipation turned to sadness and mourning. So much so that the unjustified crying was the catalyst for centuries of justified mourning on Tisha B'av.

As the Talmud in Sanhedrin relates, the Jewish people cried for nothing on that Tisha B'av in the desert. God therefore gave us what to cry for in the generations to come.

For 2000 years the events that led to the first tears of Tisha B'av in the desert have been overshadowed by real pain and suffering of galut.

As Rav Kook teaches, to a Jew, Eretz Yisrael is not simply a Jewish Disney world or even just a land of Jews.

Eretz Yisrael is part and parcel of the essence of each member of our people.

The “Dibat Ha'aretz” (disparaging words) of the meraglim and their acceptance by most of the nation was an attack on our foundation and an affront to the special covenant between HaShem and His people.

Hence the seriousness of the baseless mourning.

Our generation has the opportunity to counter the words and actions of the meraglim with the realization of the ingathering of the exiles and the opportunity to praise, support, visit and resettle the Land.

Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi said לְבִי בְּמִזְרַח וְאֲנִי בְּסוּף מְעַרְב. No matter where they find themselves physically, the heart and soul of a Jew should be drawn toward the Land.

I return home encouraged by the wonderful Jews that I met with in the diaspora. Jews who might physically be in Chutz La'aretz but whose hearts beat with the love of our Land.

Unlike their ancestors the meraglim, these wonderful people speak highly of Eretz Yisrael and eagerly await the opportunity to come.

The galut is rooted in the negativity spoken about Eretz Yisrael by the meraglim. May the yearning and desire for our nation to return to our home bring the end to suffering and the Geula Shleima. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai [lemaanachai.org](http://lemaanachai.org)

#### 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-nikdashti 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

**T**he Children of Israel shall lean their hands on the Levites. And Aharon shall wave the Levites as an elevation offering before Hashem...” (*Bamidbar* 8:10-11) Originally, the first-born of each family was supposed to serve in the Mishkan and the Bais HaMikdash, but, with the sin of the Golden Calf, they lost that opportunity and it passed to the tribe of Levi, in the form of Kohanim and Levi'im.

As part of the Levi'im's preparation, the Torah tells us that the Yisraelim were to lay their hands upon the Levi'im, much as the owner of a korban leans all his weight upon it. Then, they were lifted up by Aharon and waved in all four directions, as well as up and down, symbolizing their service of Hashem Who is master of everything in every direction, and of Heaven and Earth. While some say Aharon elevated them with words, others take it at face value that he physically lifted and waved 22,000 Levi'im that day!

There is an interesting juxtaposition here. First the Jews, or presumably a contingent of the leaders representing the nation, leaned on the Levi'im, pushing down on them. Then, they were lifted up, off of the ground. What is the meaning behind these opposing acts?

The purpose of the Semicha, the leaning, was for the Jews to show the Levi'im that they were depending on them, investing them with all their strength and all their hope that they be good agents on the Jews' behalf. This was a message to the Levi'im about the responsibilities they now bore.

But then, they were lifted, and moved here and there, without their own control. That's because in order to properly serve Hashem and represent Klal Yisrael,

one cannot keep his feet planted firmly in one place. Rather, one must be ready to serve Hashem in whatever capacity is warranted and necessary at the moment.

North or South, Up or Down, the place you are in is where you need to act, and you do not get to choose where you will serve Hashem. You only get to choose THAT you will serve Him, and this is what the Tribe of Levi expressed when Moshe cried, “Mi LaShem Alai, Whoever is for Hashem, come to me!” They didn't know precisely what Moshe would ask of them, but they knew they were ready to do whatever it took, and that's why they merited to inherit the role that had previously been ordained for the bechorim.

This is why it was an elevation. When we don't see things through purely physical eyes, but through the spiritual eyes of our minds, we can rise above and free ourselves from the surly bonds of Earth, to touch the face of G-d.

*The Gemara in Taanis (21a) tells the famous story of Nachum Ish Gamzu, a Tanna and teacher of R' Akiva. The Jews wanted to send a gift to the Caesar, and felt the best messenger would be Nachum, who was “well-versed in miracles.” They gave him a chest full of jewels and off he went. On the way, he stopped at an inn, where the jewels were stolen and the chest was refilled with soil. Upon seeing this, Nachum didn't get scared or return home. Instead, he said, “Gam Zu L'Tova, Hashem has a good reason for this,” and he continued to the palace.*

*When the king opened the box, he exclaimed, “The Jews are making fun of me!” Calmly, Nachum said “Gam Zu L'Tova.” Eliyahu HaNavi appeared as a Roman officer and suggested that the earth might be the miraculous earth that Avraham used. Taken to the battlefield, the thrown dirt turned to swords and the straw to arrows. The king rewarded Nachum handsomely.*

*Because Nachum actively believed there was good in all Hashem did, he was able to continuously move forward. Perhaps that's how he was able to accept a 40-year-old ignoramus as a beginner student – and we all know how that story ended.*

*When you see Hashem behind every action, then miracles are perfectly natural. ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

### The Spies' Sins

**M**oshe was reluctant to send spies into the land because he feared that this action would be seen as doubting Hashem and His promise. Still when the people expressed doubt and concern, Moshe acquiesced and appointed leaders from each tribe (except the Leviim) to search out the land and bring back a report of their findings. Moshe did three things which he hoped would influence the outcome of their

report: (1) He gave specific instructions which limited the responsibilities of the report, (2) He appointed his sister's husband, Calev ben Yephuneh, as one of the spies, and (3) He sent his most trusted assistant, Hoshea bin Nun, and added a letter to his name (the letter yud being a designation of Hashem's name) which now became Yehoshua, Joshua. In spite of Moshe's precautions, the other ten spies went beyond the parameters of his instructions and gave negative interpretations to their factual findings.

The Torah gives us the language of their report. "They went and they came to Moshe and Aharon and to the entire assembly of the B'nei Yisrael, to the wilderness of Paran at Kadesh, and brought word back to them and to the entire assembly, and they showed them the fruit of the land. They reported to him and said, 'We arrived at the land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.'" Had the ten spies (excluding Calev and Yehoshua) stopped at this point of their presentation, they would have fulfilled their total responsibility correctly. The rest of their speech went beyond their responsibility by offering an interpretation of what they saw. "But (for naught)– the People that dwells in the land is powerful, the cities are very fortified and large, and we also saw there the offspring of the giant. Amalek dwells in the land of the south, the Hittite, the Jebusite, and the Amorite dwell on the mountain, and the Canaanite dwells by the sea and next to the Jordan.... We cannot ascend to that people for it is stronger than us.... The land through which we passed, to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants! All the people that we saw were men of measures! There we saw the Nephilim, the sons of a giant from among the Nephilim; we were like grasshoppers in their eyes."

There are several keys within the words of our paragraphs which help explain the sins committed by the spies. Rashi questions the first words, "they went and they came." He understands from this that just as they came back with an evil intention, they went out to spy with that same evil intention. One could understand that this is reflected in the actions that Moshe took prior to their leaving and the appointment of Calev and Yehoshua as part of the spies. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin disagrees with Rashi's premise since the Torah tells us that they were all righteous men when they began. They saw in the prophecy of Eldad and Meidad that if the people would enter the land immediately, there would be a joint leadership, equal crowns, for Moshe and Yehoshua. The ten spies were influenced by the fact that Yehoshua would be a leader over them even though he was significantly younger. They viewed this as an insult to them because of their seniority over Yehoshua. Their actions indicated that they lacked faith in Hashem's choice, and that choice was compounded by Hashem's "misjudgment" in rushing the people into the land before they were

ready.

One could also question why the spies chose to speak to all the people when Moshe was the one who sent them. It is logical that the report should have been given privately, but the spies had different intentions. Had they given the report privately, Moshe could have spoken harshly to them and admonished them for speaking beyond the scope of their mission. In public, this rebuke would have to be stopped for fear of embarrassing the spies before everyone. The spies understood this limitation and used it to their advantage.

HaRav Sorotzkin reminds us that the end of last week's parasha involved the punishment of Miriam for speaking lashon hara, gossip, about Moshe and his wife. According to Rashi, this proximity indicates that the ten spies each saw the punishment given to Miriam, yet they did not learn from this and spoke evil about the land that Hashem had designated for them. HaRav Sorotzkin, however, indicates that the sin of the spies in their report was even worse than the lashon hara of Miriam. A person can forgive someone who speaks badly about them. It is still a terrible sin, but there can be an opportunity to gain forgiveness. A holy land does not have the power to forgive negative gossip said about it. HaRav Sorotzkin quotes the Midrash, "one who is not thankful in his land will not be buried in his land." The land will spit out those who speak badly about it. The insult of the spies was so great as to punish them even more harshly than had they spoken lashon hara as Miriam had done.

The spies began their report with a positive statement on the beauty of the land. The problem for them occurred in two phrases within their report. By using the word "efes, but (for naught)," the spies questioned Hashem's promise to bring the people into the land. The spies spoke of the strength of the people, the fortifications of the cities, and the unlikelihood of success in conquering the land. Hashem had already demonstrated His strength and His prowess in battle against the Egyptians. The song that Moshe sang at that time and that the people repeated spoke of Hashem as an Ish Milchama, a warrior. The spies chose to cast doubt on Hashem's strength in the eyes of the people. The second phrase was worse; they described the land as "a land that devours its inhabitants." This phrase was an insult both to the land and to Hashem. They had witnessed many funerals but that was part of Hashem's plan to weaken the inhabitants. The spies questioned Hashem's judgment in choosing this difficult land as the inheritance for the Jewish People.

We hear many arguments concerning the land of Israel among the nations of the world. Many of these arguments, even from our fellow Jews, are an insult to Hashem and to the Land of Israel. One must dismiss some as simply ignorant or misguided. Their leaders,

however, should study our parasha more carefully so that they truly understand the consequences of their actions. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

### RABBI AHRON LOPIANSKY

## TorahWeb

This week's parsha marks one of Israel's two low points, i.e. the sin of the megalim: the other being the sin of the golden calf. At first glance there seems to be no comparison between the two sins; the latter is a sin of some form of idolatry (however we explain it), which is the worst sin in the Torah, while the former seems to be part of the usual bickering of Klal Yisroel, not so different than many other such episodes in the midbar. And yet, the sin of the megalim is the one that has become the "night of crying" for Klal Yisroel, and was the root of the churban, the most difficult of our national experiences. What was it that made this grumbling so different?

The passuk in Tehillim (106:24) describes the event as "they despised (vayimasu) the desirable land." We note two elements in that description: that Eretz Yisroel is a "desirable" land, and that it wasn't Klal Yisroel's grumbling per se that was the core issue, rather it was the "despising" of Eretz Yisroel that was the sin. Let us ponder this point a bit.

Halachically, a marriage takes place when a man and wife enter the chuppah or, more specifically, a private space (yichud), or alternatively into the husband's dwelling (hachnassa lirishuso.). In other words, a true union takes place in a common exclusive space. At Har Sinai Hashem designated us as His beloved one, and one can compare this to kiddushin/erusin. At this point of betrothal, the woman is prohibited to all other men but is still not together with her husband. At the time of nissuin, when they enter that common space, they are in a total union. If Sinai is compared to erusin then it stands to reason that Eretz Yisroel is the nissuin, i.e. the common space shared by Klal Yisroel and the Divine Presence. It is not accident that the Gemara which deals with the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisroel is found in Kesuvos, the mesechta focused on nissuin.

Now let us look at the two terrible sins of Klal Yisroel. At Sinai we became betrothed to Hashem, so to speak. The main manifestation of this status is being prohibited to "other men". Indeed, the sin of the golden calf consisted of straying to a false god. This was a terrible sin, not unlike adultery. Adultery is, from one perspective, a betrayal of one's spouse, but it is not a complete rejection. However, if a woman despises her husband, this is not a mere breach in the relationship, but it means that, in effect, there is no marriage and no hope.

At the sin of the megalim, Klal Yisroel were not merely complaining about the difficulties of conquering Eretz Yisroel, rather they were expressing a disinterest

in it. It wasn't that they thought the land wasn't fertile or pleasant; the word "despised" wouldn't have described such a feeling. Rather, it was what the land meant that they spurned. They were not interested in "living with" Hashem, and that means that the union has no chance. "Living with Hashem" demands an extraordinary refined standard of morality, and they just weren't interested in that.

Eretz Yisroel is an eretz chemda, a land the needs to be craved. Its physical qualities are extraordinary, but that is not the focus of this craving. Rather it is a craving for an Eretz Yisroel as the place in which we "live with" Hashem, in which one lives with a sense of the immanence of Hashem, and in which our own behavior must bear testimony to this reality.

When the day comes that we once again crave that "living with" Hashem, the redemption will have begun. © 2021 Rabbi A. Lopiansky & TorahWeb.org

### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Lelamed Weekly Dvar

As Calev (Caleb) and Yehoshua (Joshua) try to convince the people to trust G-d that His land is perfect for them, they claim that the people of that land "are [as] our bread" (14:9). Aside from its not being accurate, how would that argument be used to reassure the people that G-d is on their side and that they will prevail?

G-d's ultimate goal for us is our acceptance of His plan and letting Him take care of our needs, especially during transitional periods such as this. Extending this logic, it would follow that even people who seem to be in opposition to us, or larger than us, or more powerful than us are actually perfectly placed by G-d to prompt us to overcome our fears and settle into a plan that G-d has neatly laid out for us. When the threats and dangers that the people originally feared are ultimately overcome, it becomes evident that G-d has actually been supporting us all along. Because the people did not allow G-d to prove His loyalty, the result was that they perished in the desert. The story serves up "bread" for us today, as we benefit from its message to have faith in G-d's guidance for our success. © Rabbi S. Ressler and Lelamed Inc.

