

Toras Aish



Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The episode of the spies was one of the most tragic in the entire Torah. Who sent them and to what end is not entirely clear. In this week's parsha, the text says that it was God who told Moses to do so (Num. 13:1–2). In Deuteronomy (1:22), Moses says that it was the people who made the request. Either way, the result was disaster. An entire generation was deprived of the chance to enter the Promised Land. The entry itself was delayed by forty years. According to the Sages, it cast its shadow long into the future.¹

Moses told the spies to go and see the land and bring back a report about it: Are the people many or few, strong or weak? What is the land itself like? Are the cities open or fortified? Is the soil fertile? They were also tasked with bringing back some of its fruit. The spies returned with a positive report about the land itself: "It is indeed flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" There then followed one of the most famous 'buts' in Jewish history: "But – the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak ['the giant'] there" (Num. 13:28).

Sensing that their words were demoralising the people, Caleb, one of the spies, interrupted with a message of reassurance: "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." However, the other spies insisted: "We cannot attack those people; they are stronger than we are.... All the people we saw there are of great size.... We seemed like grasshoppers..." (Num. 13:30–33). The next day, the people, persuaded that the challenge was completely beyond them, expressed regret that they

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לעילוי נשמת

Rabbi Dr. Moshe Weiss ע"ה

הרב משה בן הרב דוד הכהן ז"ל

on his 4th yartzeit

נפטר כא סיון תשע"ה

ת נ צ ב' ה

¹ On the phrase, "the people wept that night" (Num. 14:1), the Talmud says that God vowed, "I will make this a day of weeping throughout the generations." That day was Tisha B'Av, on which, in later centuries, the First and Second Temples were destroyed (Ta'anit 29a; Sota 35a).

had ever embarked on the Exodus and said, "Let us appoint a leader and go back to Egypt" (Num. 14:4).

Thus far the narrative. However, it is monumentally difficult to understand. It was this that led the Lubavitcher Rebbe to give a radically revisionary interpretation of the episode.² He asked the obvious question. How could ten of the spies come back with a defeatist report? They had seen with their own eyes how God had sent a series of plagues that brought Egypt, the strongest and longest-lived of all the empires of the ancient world, to its knees. They had seen the Egyptian army with its cutting-edge military technology, the horse-drawn chariot, drown in the sea while the Israelites passed through it on dry land. Egypt was far stronger than the Canaanites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and other minor kingdoms that they would have to confront in conquering the land. Nor was this an ancient memory. It had happened not much more than a year before.

What is more, they were entirely wrong about the people of the land. We discover this from the book of Joshua, in the passage read as the haftarah to Shelach Lecha. When Joshua sent spies to Jericho, the woman who sheltered them, Rahab, described for them what her people felt when they heard that that the Israelites were on their way: "I know that the Lord has given this land to you. A great fear of you has fallen on us... We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt... When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. (Josh. 2:9–11)

The people of Jericho were not giants. They were as fearful of the Israelites as the Israelites were of them. Nor was this something that was disclosed only later. The Israelites of Moses' day had already sung in the Song at the Sea: The peoples have heard; they tremble; Pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; Because of the greatness of Your arm, they are still as a stone. (Ex. 15:14–16)

How was it that they forgot what, not long

² A translation can be found in Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, *Toras Aish*, adapted by Jonathan Sacks (London: Lubavitch Foundation, 1986), 239–245.

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before, they knew?

What is more, continued the Rebbe, the spies were not people plucked at random from among the population. The Torah states that they were “men who were heads of the People of Israel.” They were leaders. They were not people given lightly to fear. The questions are straightforward, but the answer the Rebbe gave was utterly unexpected. The spies were not afraid of failure, he said. They were afraid of success.

Never had a people lived so close to God.

If they entered the land, their lifestyle of camping around the Sanctuary, eating manna from heaven, living in continuous contact with the Shechinah would vanish. They would have to fight battles, maintain an army, create an economy, farm the land, worry about the weather and their crops, and all the other thousand distractions that come from living in the world. What would happen to their closeness to God? They would be preoccupied with mundane and material pursuits. Here they could spend their entire lives learning Torah, lit by the radiance of the Divine. There they would be one more nation in a world of nations with the same kind of economic, social, and political problems that every other nation has to deal with.

They were afraid of success, and the subsequent change it would bring about. They wanted to spend their lives in the closest possible proximity to God. What they did not understand was that God seeks, in the Midrashic phrase, “a dwelling in the lower worlds.”³ One of the great differences between Judaism and other religions is that while others seek to lift people to heaven, Judaism seeks to bring heaven down to earth.

Much of Torah is about things not conventionally seen as religious at all: labour relations, agriculture, welfare provisions, loans and debts, land ownership, and so on. It is not difficult to have an intense religious experience in the desert, or in a monastic retreat, or in an ashram. Most religions have holy places and holy people who live far removed from the stresses and strains of everyday life. About this there is nothing unusual at all.

³ See Midrash Tanchuma, parshat Naso 16.

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

The spies did not doubt that Israel could win its battles with the inhabitants of the land. Their concern was not physical but spiritual. They did not want to leave the wilderness. They did not want to become just another nation among the nations of the earth. They did not want to lose their unique relationship with God in the reverberating silence of the desert, far removed from civilisation and its discontents. This was the mistake of deeply religious men – but it was a mistake.

Clearly this is not the plain sense of the narrative, but we should not dismiss it on that account. It is, as it were, a psychoanalytical reading of the unconscious mindset of the spies. They did not want to let go of the intimacy and innocence of the time-out-of-time and place-out-of-place that was the experience of the wilderness. Ultimately the spies feared freedom and its responsibilities.

But Torah is about the responsibilities of freedom. Judaism is not a religion of monastic retreat from the world. It is a religion of engagement with the world. God chose Israel to make His presence visible in the world. Therefore Israel must live in the world. The Jewish people were not without their desert-dwellers and ascetics. The Talmud speaks of R. Shimon b. Yochai living for thirteen years in a cave. When he emerged, he could not bear to see people engaged in such earthly pursuits as ploughing a field (Shabbat 33b). He held that engagement with the world was fundamentally incompatible with the heights of spirituality (Brachot 35b). But the mainstream held otherwise.⁴ It maintained that “Torah study without an occupation will in the end fail and lead to sin” (Mishnah Avot 2:2).

Maimonides speaks of people who live as hermits in the desert to escape the corruptions of society.⁵ But these were the exceptions, not the rule. It is not the destiny of Israel to live outside time and space as the world’s recluses. Far from being the supreme height of faith, such a fear of freedom and its responsibilities is, according to the Lubavitcher Rebbe,

⁴ Brachot 35b cites the view of R. Ishmael as evaluated by Abaye.

⁵ Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 6:1; Shemoneh Perakim, ch. 4.

the sin of the spies.

They did not want to contaminate Judaism by bringing it into contact with the real world. They sought the eternal dependency of God's protection and the endless embrace of His all-encompassing love. There is something noble about this desire, but also something profoundly irresponsible. The spies demoralised the people and provoked the anger of God. The Jewish project – the Torah as the constitution of the Jewish nation under the sovereignty of God – is about building a society in the land of Israel that so honours human dignity and freedom that it will one day lead the world to say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deut. 4:6).

The Jewish task is not to fear the real world but to enter and transform it, healing some of its wounds and bringing to places often shrouded in darkness fragments of Divine light. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd God spoke unto Moses saying, 'Send out men for yourself to spy out the Land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel; of every tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, everyone a prince among them.'" (Numbers 13:2) As the portion of Shelach opens, we read how God commands the Israelites to send ahead men to spy out and explore the Land of Israel.

And we know the tragic results of this "spy" mission. The report that emerged from ten out of twelve was a negative and discouraging one, which only served to divert the Israelites from their God-given mission of the conquest of the land of Israel. Hence the agonizing question which this portion evokes is: Why did God command the sending of scouts in the first place? Why risk a rebellion in the ranks by requesting a committee report which may well go against the divine will to conquer and settle Israel?

A totally different perspective, not only as to why God commanded Moses to send out the scouts but much more profoundly as to how God operates in the world and why, is to be found in a remarkable interpretation given by Rabbenu Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (1823–1900), a great Hasidic master, in his commentary on the Torah, called *Pri Tzaddik*. He points out a striking analogy between the incident of the scouts and the gift of the second tablets which came as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, both conceptually as well as textually: in both cases the Almighty saw the necessity of involving – even to the extent of establishing a partnership with – the people, the nation of Israel.

In what way were the second tablets an improvement on the first tablets which Moses smashed, and which God congratulated him for smashing (Exodus 34:1, Yevamot 62a)? What was "built into" the second tablets which would be more likely to prevent a fiasco of the proportion of the sin of the Golden Calf, which occurred only forty days after the gift of the first tablets? The fact that the first tablets had been "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18), and were in actuality the very "script of the divine," whereas the second tablets were "hewn out" by Moses (Exodus 34:1) and thereby were created as a result of human involvement, suggests the difference: the first tablets were the product of divine creativity alone; the second tablets involved human cooperation, setting the stage for rabbinical interpretation, decrees, and enactments which are such a major portion of what we call the "Oral Law." The Oral Law not only accepts but requires the direct participation of rabbinical leadership, and even the involvement of the masses of committed Jews (*Pri Tzaddik* on Exodus, Ki Tisa 3, and on Numbers, Shelach 2).

Of course, we believe that the major principles and salient laws of the Oral Torah were also given by God. However, the sages of each generation must actively interpret the Torah and often plumb from its depths great innovative concepts necessary for the needs of that generation. Indeed, in a stunning Talmudic passage, the rules of rabbinical exegesis can even cause the Almighty Himself to accept a decision of the majority of the sages, causing Him (as it were) to cry out "My children have conquered Me" (*Bava Metzia* 39b). The very words with which God commands Moses to "hew out" the second tablets, "psal lecha" (Exodus 34:1), also contain a nuance: lecha – you, Moses, have the authority and the obligation to determine whether an activity or object is *pasul* (improper and invalid). The sages are given the power to add decrees and enactments (*gezerot* and *takkanot*) to the body of the Torah, many of which – such as lighting candles on the eve of the Sabbath and festivals, the kindling of the Chanuka menorah, and the reading of the Purim Megilla – have become major expressions of our Torah commitment and lifestyle (Deut. 17:8–11). Moreover, no such decrees or enactments can become part and parcel of the Torah of Israel without the endorsement of the majority of the committed people who have the right of acceptance or rejection. The masses of committed people, the *hoi polloi* or *hamon ha'am*, have also initiated customs throughout the generations which assume the status of Torah law (*minhag Yisrael din hu*: the customs of Israel are law).

All of this suggests a Torah which is not the product of ossified paternalism – as divinely perfect as such a Torah might be – but is rather the result of a living partnership between God and His people.

Apparently, the Almighty believed – after the tragic trauma of the Golden Calf – that only a Torah which would involve the active participation of the Israelites could survive the seductive pitfalls of idolatry and immorality.

Fascinatingly enough the phrase “psal lecha” (Exodus 34:1) parallels the words God uses to command the scouts, “shelach lecha,” send out for yourselves, in the beginning of our portion. God apparently understood that a mission as important as the conquest of Israel could not take place without the enthusiastic approbation and active participation of the people.

Of course opening up the process – be it Torah interpretation or the appointment of a reconnaissance committee – is fraught with danger. But it was a chance that God understood had to be taken if He desired His nation to be more than marching robots. He didn't want us to receive a Torah on a silver platter or to be brought into the Promised Land on eagles' wings; He realized that despite the inherent risk which came from involving the people, excluding them would be a more likely prescription for disaster. Just as a wise parent and a sagacious educator understand that children/students must be “involved in the process” so that hopefully they will continue the path even after they achieve independence, the Almighty set the stage for our continuous devotion to Torah and our third return to Israel – despite our many setbacks – by insisting on the participation of His people! ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Much has been written and taught regarding the motives of the leaders of Israel, those who Moshe sent to spy out the land of Israel in advance of the Jewish people entering their homeland. After all the explanations, it remains a baffling mystery as to how such great people could have been so wrong on such an important issue. Just as they were able to convince an entire generation to believe as they did, we have found that over the centuries of human history, there have been many instances of such types of situations.

Sometimes these matters are treated as being a symptom of mass hysteria. In the Middle Ages there were many such instances when people were led to believe in the false narratives of leaders, some of whom were even sincere in spreading these narratives. There was a derisive expression in Yiddish that stated that “the masses of the general public are always fools and ignoramuses.” This is a rather harsh assessment and in a democratic society such as ours, which is allegedly run by and subject to the will of the masses, it does not register favorably in our ears.

Though that assessment of public opinion and

belief may be too broad, there is certainly more than a kernel of truth in that saying. And the reaction of the Jewish people to the false narrative stated by the spies who visited Israel, serves as a bitter and eternal reminder of human folly. Such instances are not subject to rational explanation, but they are omnipresent throughout the story of human existence on this planet.

The question always arises as to how to prevent such suicidal mistakes from occurring in Jewish society. Over the past century masses of Jews allowed themselves to be persuaded by false narratives, as was the case with the spies in the desert, resulting in death and disaster. Millions of Jews followed the red flag of Marxism, in all its various forms, only to be devoured by the very beast that they had nurtured.

Others searched for new forms of Judaism they felt would be relevant to their children and to future generations. After all we were in a different world and a different society than that of our ancestors. The old Judaism would somehow prove to be irrelevant and doomed. But just the opposite has seemingly occurred. While all the forms of new, modern and progressive Judaism are teetering on the verge of extinction, the old irrelevant Judaism has revitalized itself and inspired generations with its eternal truths and values granted at Mount Sinai.

The Jewish people traditionally are hasty people. New ideas capture them and to a certain extent, cause a type of mass hysteria that blindsides them. Yet, it is also within our nature, by tradition and history, to be a skeptical people. We should never lose that healthy skepticism when dealing with issues, problems and the possibility of solutions in our current society. ©2019 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

The episode of the spies indicates that the challenges facing the Jewish people after we left Egypt were not merely a temporary phase. They were built into the very fabric of our nation.

As we left Egypt, the Jews complained that they lacked food and water. They were forced to defend themselves against the vicious Amalekites. Even after they received the Ten Declarations, they built the golden calf at Sinai. Despite experiencing the greatest miracles from God, we were a people constantly struggling to believe in the constant presence of the Divine.

Sensing that these problems were simply the natural reactions of a brand new nation, Moshe (Moses) comes to Israel's defense and asks lamah, "why?" "Why, Oh God, should Your anger flare up

against Your people whom You have taken out of the land of Egypt?" (Exodus 32:11) Having just left Egypt, Moshe asks God to have patience with the people who have just come out of an experience of slavery.

Indeed, after leaving Sinai, things improved. The Tabernacle was built, and, in the Book of Leviticus, the laws of the priesthood and Torah ethics are given. And, in the beginning of the Book of Numbers, the Jewish people are counted as they prepare to enter the land of Israel.

Just as they're ready to enter, we encounter the mi'tonenim, the complainers. (Numbers 11:1) For Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, that word comes from ana. It is a cry of woe, a cry of a people that had lost its way.

Here it became clear that the problem the Jewish people faced was no longer a passing one, but it was one that was endemic to its very core. Soon after, in our portion, the spies are sent out. Later, Korach rebels against Moshe. In the end, the Jews wandered in the desert for forty years.

In the incident of mit'onenim, Moshe cries out with yet another lamah, with another "why?" But this time, he does not question God as he did in the incident of the golden calf. Rather, he asks, "why have You done evil to your servant?" (Numbers 11:11) Here, Moshe recognizes that the challenge of the Jewish people would remain for many years and Moshe bemoans that he would have to lead the Jewish people like "a nurse carries a suckling." (Numbers 11:12)

There is an axiom that kol hatchalot kashot – literally, "all beginnings are difficult." One wonders why "beginnings" in the plural, why not "every beginning is difficult." Normatively, the axiom is understood to relate to many ventures. However, the late Dr. Samuel Belkin once shared with me that this axiom refers to a singular venture. The reality is, that often when we begin a venture, there are many beginnings. You start, you fail, you start again, and you fall – but to succeed, one must be tenacious and never give up.

This is true in the institutional setting, it is true in the world of politics, it is true in our own personal family lives. The key is not to let the "why?" paralyze us, but recognize the obligation to do our share step-by-step to overcome. ©2019 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 ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

"**M**oses renamed Hoshea son of Nun, 'Joshua.'" (Numbers 13:16) Prior to the departure of the 12 spies, Moses changed the name of his disciple Hoshea to Joshua. That changed contained within it a prayer that God save Joshua from the plot of the spies. It remains to be explained, however, why

Moses agreed to send the spies in the first place if he was aware of a plot to malign the Land of Israel. In addition, why did he pray for Joshua alone and not for Calev and the others?

The Vilna Gaon (in Emuna VeHashgacha) explains that there are three ways in which God manifests His Divine Providence. The first is called hanhaga nissim, the manifestation of overt miracles. This was the manner in which God related to us during the 40 years in the desert. A Cloud of Glory accompanied us by day and a pillar of fire by night; we ate the Heaven-sent manna; and our thirst was quenched by water from a well that flowed from a rock, which accompanied us on our journey. When we sinned, Divine retribution followed immediately in an unmistakable fashion.

The second type of Divine Providence is called hanhagas nissim nistarim. In this stage, God relates to us through hidden miracles. This describes the manner in which God related to us in the Land of Israel, prior to our exile. At that time, a direct relationship between nature and Torah observance was evident. When we kept the mitzvot and toiled in Torah, the rains fell in their proper times and amounts, health and wealth were our lot; and when we sinned, drought and famine followed.

Since our exile from Israel, we have experienced the third type of Divine Providence, hester panim. In this stage, God hides His face from us and our ability to see God's Divine Providence in the world becomes impaired.

The Vilna Gaon explains that the various manifestations of Divine Providence differ only in our perception. In reality, God controls and guides the world equally in a period when we experience Divine miracles as a matter of course, and in a period where all we see is the workings of nature. God merely hides His face in the latter period.

Our forefathers in the desert were aware that upon entering the Land of Israel, the manner in which God related to us would change from one of open miracles to one of miracles within nature. Manna would no longer descend from the heavens; rather, we would plow and plant and harvest in order to eat. A well would no longer accompany us; rather, we would depend on rainfall to quench our thirst.

Their mistake, however, was to reason that if their lives were apparently subject to the same natural order as the rest of the world, then their ultimate success or failure depended on their own military prowess. This was a grievous error.

It was this mistaken outlook from which Moses prayed that Joshua would be spared. Moses reasoned that he could better prove to the people their mistake by letting them actually see the Land of Israel. He hoped that they would realize the impossibility of conquering Israel with their own might. And yet God had assured

them that they would in fact conquer the land. They should have concluded that God obviously planned to continue aiding them, even if in a less openly miraculous fashion.

Joshua, who was to lead the Jewish people during this new stage of Divine Providence, required a special prayer that he be spared from a distorted perspective on nature. The name Joshua signifies -- Hashem YOSHIAH -- May God save you. The Divine name represents the synthesis between the apparent cause and effect of the natural world and God's intimate spiritual link with man -- the yud represents God's creation of the World to Come, and the heh the creation of this world. Moses prayed that Joshua see nature as nothing more than a veil to God's direct Divine Providence. Hence Nature -- HaTeVah -- and Elokim are numerically equivalent.

Moses told the spies to bring back the fruits of the Land of Israel precisely to drive home the lesson that they would still be completely dependent on God's beneficence. Without water, fruits cannot grow, and in Israel water depends solely on rainfall, which is obviously not in man's hands. Moses wanted them to recognize that even though there would be more effort required to secure a livelihood in the natural setting of Israel than in the desert, the final result would depend no less on God than when the manna descended directly from Heaven.

Unfortunately, only Calev and Joshua grasped this point. The others saw only that it was beyond their "natural" abilities to conquer the land, and concluded that even God Himself, as it were, could not help them since He had chosen to let them be governed by the natural order. This reasoning led to the purposeless crying on the night of Tisha B'Av when the people wept as a sign of hopelessness.

To correct the purposeless tears of that Tisha B'Av eve in the desert, our Holy Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av and we were thrust into exile where we would come to see clearly our dependence on God. But rather than crying over our helplessness, our tears on Tisha B'Av must proclaim: "God, You promised that we would be redeemed from this exile. We cannot achieve this redemption through our own efforts. Therefore You must redeem us."

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, the great Mirrer Mashgiach, explains the Mishnah at the end of Sotah to mean that Moshiach will not come so long as we attribute our successes and failures to "natural" causes. As long as we look for political, economic and sociological explanations of world events, and excuse ourselves from Torah learning on the grounds that we must earn a livelihood, we will not merit an end to our exile.

Let us strengthen our faith and trust in God so that we can finally dry the tears of Tisha B'Av and celebrate it with jubilation, for a Redeemer will have

come to Zion. ©2000 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Minyan of Ten

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

Everything that is deemed "Holy" (Davar Shebikdusha) such as "Kaddish", "Barchu", "Kedusha", the repetition of the Amidah, and according to some the reading of the Haftorah, the reading of the Torah, and the priestly blessing, need ten men to fulfill this task. This law is derived from the sentence in Leviticus (22,32) "And I will be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel" ("v'nikdashti Betch Benai Yisrael"). However where do we derive the number ten? Perhaps it is less or more than ten?

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

To this we arrive full circle to our portion where the Torah, when referring to the ten spies, (not Calev 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 DAVID LEVINE

Against Idol Worship

Parashat Shlach begins with the fateful sending of the spies into Israel, their negative reports, and the B'nei Yisrael believing in those reports more than they believed in Hashem. The end result was the punishment that all adults at that time would perish in the forty years that the B'nei Yisrael would travel in the desert and a new generation would enter the land and possess it. Hashem concludes with a series of mitzvot to the B'nei Yisrael which could only be performed in the land once it was conquered. These mitzvot were a promise that the Land of Canaan would be an eternal gift to them and their children. At the conclusion of these special mitzvot we find an unusual paragraph which warns the people about idol worship. The concept of idol worship was so vile in Hashem's eyes that the term is not specifically mentioned and must be

deduced from the text itself.

The Torah tells us, "If you err and do not perform all of these commandments which Hashem has spoken to Moshe. Everything that Hashem has commanded you through Moshe from that day that Hashem has commanded and onward for your generations. And it will be, if in the eyes of the assembly it was done in error, the entire assembly will prepare one young bull as an olah offering for a satisfying aroma to Hashem, and its meal-offering and its libation according to the rule, and one he-goat as a sin-offering. And the Kohein will atone for the entire assembly of the Children of Yisrael and it shall be forgiven them for it was unintentional and they have brought their offering, a fire-offering to Hashem, and their sin-offering before Hashem for their unintentional sin. And it shall be forgiven to the entire assembly of Israel and to the convert who lives among them, for it happened to the entire people unintentionally."

In Vayikra (Leviticus: 4-21) we find that the offering for this type of sin differs from the offering mentioned here even though the two actions appear to be the same. We find also that there is no typical introduction of this new topic with the words "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying." We have seen on numerous occasions that we always learn something when there is a break in a pattern. These two inconsistencies have led our Rabbis to understand that this section is discussing the laws of idol worship. Rashi explains that we cannot literally be talking about not doing all the mitzvot of the Torah as the Torah would not be discussing all the mitzvot at one time. This is idol worship as it is a negation of the yoke of Heaven and nullifies the Covenant. The Ramban explains that it would be impossible to assume that this is referring to an individual who breaks any of the mitzvot as that would mean that the Torah would require a sacrifice for any sin that man might do. We have already learned that many sins do not require a sacrifice but some form of retribution instead.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch describes this section as a natural flow from the failure of the spies. The spies cast doubt on "whether Hashem's special exclusive care for Israel was sufficient to ensure our earthly existence." When the spies then suggested choosing a new leader and returning to Egypt, their "character formed itself into complete rebellion and complete defection from Hashem." Hirsch also indicates that this is the reason why the sacrifice is a bull, the larger animal which is offered becomes an olah offering, one which raises up the community, as opposed to a chatat, or sin offering which atones for the sin of the offerer.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin answers the question concerning the lack of our usual introductory phrase that was mentioned earlier. The Torah leaves out the phrase specifically to tie this section with the Mitzvah

which immediately precedes it. That mitzvah is the taking of a portion of the challah dough and giving it as terumah, a gift to the Kohein. The Gemarah tells us that "all who observe the mitzvah of taking challah negate the sin of Idol worship." Uppermost in the mind of every individual is the need for parnassah, work which provides money for food and clothing. A person's fear that this will not be forthcoming is the fertile ground on which Idol worship builds. At the time that idol worshipping was common, it was easy to convince a person who lacked food for his family that worshipping an idol representing a god of Heaven was the only way that his food needs would be satisfied. Idol worshippers made it appear as if Hashem was the Creator of the World and their idols were His helpers. The separation of challah was an act of faith that one's gift to the Kohein would bring about his blessing of the giver. Those who gave challah to the Kohein professed a belief in Hashem's repaying of our mitzvah with additional food. That acceptance of Hashem's role in the food that we eat negates the concept of idol worship.

Hirsch explains that there are two factors of the sin: "Here (they) come to be atoned for in separate offerings, the sh'giyah by the olah, the sh'gagah by the chatat, and indeed the general bond of duty to Hashem and His Torah must first be re-attached before one can speak at all of atonement for the one single act." It is appropriate that the olah be the atonement for this sin for it is a lack of our mental energy which causes us to make this mistake. The olah must precede the chatat because the sinner here must first raise himself higher and closer to Hashem before he can understand the fault in his previous thinking. Hirsch explains that the olah sacrifice acknowledges Hashem as the Guide of our deeds, and by giving up the whole of itself and all its efforts to the heights of the altar and the Fire of His Torah to strive to carry out the whole of His Will on earth, and to show allegiance to Him alone with every phase of its existence and its happiness on earth." Only at that time can the people begin to offer the chatat sacrifice in their effort "to resist all attempts to entice us away from our Guide and Leader."

Basically, idol worship is the antithesis of our religion. It is not necessarily that worshipping an object as a god is appalling to us, it is the very idea that something other than Hashem is in control of any aspect of our world. Hashem has established His special covenant with us because we are the nation which understands His true nature and comprehends His uniqueness among all things which Man might think have divine powers. Hashem has promised this special relationship to all of us but only if we, too, recognize Hashem's Oneness and His control of the world. This was the mistake of the spies in assuming that the power of our enemies could compete with Hashem's power. Hashem's power is not shared with men or

idols.

We must learn to trust in Hashem and His guidance. We must have faith that He will continue His promise to return us to our land and proclaim the days of the Messianic Age. May all that which we see today strengthen our belief in that promise. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

YOUNG ISRAEL OF PASSAIC-CLIFTON

The Spy

by Rabbi JB Love

There are quite a few textual problems in this week's *parasha*, *parashas sh'lach*. When the representatives of the tribes are listed, the tribe of Menashe is listed as the branch of Yosef⁶. Everywhere, except in the 17th chapter of Yehoshua,⁷ it is Ephraim whose name is mentioned with its progenitor. Ephraim's representative for this mission was Yehoshua.

Though Yehoshua is not at one with the rebellious spies, only one person goes to Chevron, according to *chazal*, to pray⁸. That person is Calev, not Yehoshua. It is Calev who immediately interrupts the spies and turns the people toward Moshe⁹, Yehoshua is silent. Only the next morning, when the entire population is about to mutiny and return to Egypt, does Yehoshua join Calev in declaring the land, "very very good," and expressing the possibility of conquest with G-D's help.¹⁰

When G-D swears to Moshe that none of the rebels would see the Holy Land, the exception is Calev alone, "since he had a different mind."¹¹ Afterward, when Moshe is told to deliver the message to the people, Calev and Yehoshua are mentioned as the two who would come into the land.¹²

In D'varim,¹³ when Moshe retells the story he too only mentions Calev as the exception to G-D's oath. He quickly mentions the fact that Yehoshua would be his own replacement since he (Moshe) would not be entering the land either.¹⁴

I believe, with G-D's help, that *chazal*, allowed us insight into why Yehoshua was excluded from the story where he was. Rashi *zl*,¹⁵ in comparing the story in B'midbar with the one in D'varim, tells us that we need

⁶ B'midbar 13:11

⁷ v.1

⁸ V Rashi on 13:22 *sv vayavo*

⁹ 13:30

¹⁰ 14:6-9

¹¹ 14:24

¹² *Ibid.* v 30

¹³ 1:36-38

¹⁴ The documentary critics have a heyday with these "contradictory accounts" which have been blended to include and exclude Yehoshua at different stages. None of the problems escaped *chazal*'s thirst for truth in the Torah.

¹⁵ To 13:2 quoting Tanchuma

the two narratives in order to get the whole picture. It was the congregation who suggested that people be sent and Moshe found himself agreeing with the idea. Not wishing to act on his own, he brought the idea to G-D who answered in an unusual manner. "Send people if you wish."

Moshe needed no more of a hint. Something was not right. "If I wish?" But what can I do? The answer was in the G-D given list of candidates. Hoshea, Moshe's faithful attendant and student was to be one of the men. But how does Moshe get across the possibility of danger to Hoshea? If Moshe understood G-D's hint, then Hoshea would understand his. Hoshea became Yehoshua, a prayer, a message; G-D protect you from the plot of the spies.¹⁶

Yehoshua would be the representative of the tribe of Ephraim. But not as a representative of the tribe to the point where that representation could signify the prominent tribe within Yosef. That would fall to Menashe's representative. Yehoshua was representing Moshe. Calev, on his own, saw trouble coming. He left the pack and went of to Chevron to pray. Yehoshua, may not have had to, he had Moshe's prayer to protect him. On the other hand, I don't think he could go off even if he wanted to. His assignment was to spy on the spies for his Master and Teacher.

The spies return. They scare the people. The murmuring begins and someone has to turn the people back to Moshe before it's too late. Could Yehoshua, Moshe's servant get anywhere? Probably not. It was up to Calev. Perhaps it was too early for Yehoshua to "blow his cover." If Calev could bring the people around, it wouldn't be necessary. The next morning, though, when they were talking about going back to Egypt, he could do nothing less than join Calev in making a case for trusting G-D.

When G-D swears to Moshe that no one would enter, Calev, "since he had another mind," was mentioned. No need to tell Moshe about Yehoshua, he never "left the tent." When telling the people of what they had lost, though, the two exceptions were revealed.

And when Moshe relates the story at the end of his days it is Calev who is mentioned as earning the right to enter the land. Yehoshua,¹⁷ though also an exception to the rule, will go in because he is the extension of Moshe, just as he was on the mission of the spies.

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¹⁶ V Rashi to 13:16 quoting B. Sota 34b

¹⁷ I don't know if Moshe ever revealed Yehoshua's secret mission to Yisrael. He could not, in any event, honestly put Calev and Yehoshua together. For the sake of truth, the story had to be told the way it was.