



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Shelach 5774

### Challah as an answer to the Meraglim

Rabbi Eli Baruch Shulman

**A**fter the episode of the מרגלים, the Jews are given 2 mitzvot: חלה and נסכים. Chazal say this was by way of reassurance that they would eventually reach ארץ ישראל. But why these particular מצוות?

As far as נסכים: Associated with שירה, אין אומרים שירה אלא נסכים. Promise of joy; even they now they are נזופים למקום, in a state of גידוי לשמים, eventually their relationship with ה"ק will again be characterized by joy and song.

What about חלה? What was motive of מרגלים? One answer, suggested by R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the ענני הכבוד in שירה, Wanted to stay in dessert, under ענני הכבוד in spiritual Utopia, eating מן and בלטה לא שמלתם etc., no need to occupy themselves with physical needs. (מרגלים were leaders of that generation, apparently men suited to that utopian milieu).

But - purpose of Torah not for Utopia, but to be learned and observed in this world, and to infuse it with רוחניות, make it a place fit for the resting of the Shechina.

חלה - unlike other מצוות התלויות בארץ which did not go

into effect until 14 years after the Jews entered ארץ ישראל, when it acquired the קדושת ארץ ישראל as recognized by halachah - went into effect as soon as they entered ארץ ישראל. Also - שיעור of dough required for חלה is identical to the amount of מן that fell to each Jew in the dessert - one עומר. Apparently, חלה expressed our gratitude that we no longer need מן, because we can take the מן הארץ, the מן הארץ, and transform it into מן השמים, back into מן.

So חלה teaches the lesson that the מרגלים failed to learn; and it represents the reassurance that the people, or at least their children, would learn that lesson.

No one of us lives in utopia. Everyone has hardships and difficulties. It is always tempting to say: If I had more - time, money, peace of mind - I would learn more, involve myself more in Yiddishkeit. But Torah is meant to be learned and lived in just those difficult situations, and to transform our lives thereby into something meaningful, and if we do that then our lives will be infused with joy and song.

### The Problem of Sending the Spies

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

**T**he majority of parashat Shelach deals with the cheit hameraglim. When we examine the pesukim on the level of pshat, several questions arise: In our parasha, the Torah indicates that the idea to send the meraglim came from Hashem: "Vayedaber Hashem el Moshe leimor shelach lecha anashim v'yaturu et Eretz K'na'an, And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Send men, that they may spy out the Land of Canaan'" (BaMidbar 13:1-2). In parashat Devarim, however, the Torah indicates that the idea to send the meraglim came from B'nei Yisrael: "Vatikrevun eilai kulchem vatomru nishlecha anashim l'faneinu v'yachperu lanu et ha'aretz v'yashivu otanu davar et haderech asher na'aleh bah v'et he'arim asher navo aleihen, And you all approached me and said,

'Let us send men before us, and they will search the land for us and report back the way we must go up and the cities to which we must come'" (Devarim 1:22). These pesukim seem to contradict each other! Rashi at the beginning of our parasha resolves the contradiction, explaining that the original idea came from B'nei Yisrael. Moshe Rabbeinu was unsure whether to grant their request or not, so he consulted HaKadosh Baruch Hu. HaKadosh Baruch Hu replied that He did not think it was worthwhile, but that if Moshe wanted to send spies, he could - "Shelach lecha - l'da'atcha, as you wish." Our first question: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu go ahead with the plan to send the spies after HaKadosh Baruch Hu indicated that it was not worthwhile?

This question is strengthened by Rashi at the beginning of parashat Devarim, where he writes that Moshe also thought it was a bad idea, and he agreed so readily only in the hopes that they would abandon their request when they saw how confident Moshe was that the land was truly as good as Hashem promised. If Moshe thought it was such a bad idea, why didn't he nix the plan himself after he saw that B'nei Yisrael still wanted to go through with it?

Furthermore, at the beginning of parashat Devarim, the Torah says that the nation wanted to send the spies only to find out the most strategic way to enter the land and ultimately conquer it. The information they wanted was entirely of a strategic nature. In our parasha, however, Moshe adds a list of other things the spies should check: the richness of the land, the strength of its inhabitants, the strength of its cities, among others. Why did Moshe add to the original mission of the spies, when arguably these are the questions that caused the meraglim to speak poorly of the land?

When B'nei Yisrael approached Moshe to determine the best way to conquer the land, Moshe saw that finally the nation had come to truly believe in Hashem and rely upon Him, ready to enter the land even though once they got there they would lose the easy lifestyle they had enjoyed in the desert. After all of the whining and griping, the nation finally understood that everything is in the Hand of Hashem, and when they trust in Him and fulfill His Word, they will readily merit everything they need. Moshe took great joy in this display of emunah and believed the nation could now handle the entire picture, so he added a list of questions for the meraglim report back about – even though the inhabitants of the country are mighty and the cities within it well-fortified, even though the giants live in the land, Moshe was convinced that B'nei Yisrael would truly rely on Hashem despite the apparent dangers and difficulties.

This was Moshe's mistake. He did not realize that the nation's emunah was in fact too weak to withstand these challenges. Their nature was to complain constantly, an indication of a lack of emunah, as the Torah says, "*Uvadavar hazeh einchem ma'aminim baShem Elokeichem*, Yet in this thing you do not believe in the Hashem, your L-rd" (Devarim 1:32), and, "*Uvishloa'ach Hashem etchem... leimor alu urshu et ha'aretz... v'lo he'emantem lo v'lo shematem b'kolo*, And when Hashem sent you ... saying, 'Go up and inherit the land'... and you did not believe Him and you did not fulfill His Word" (Devarim 9:23).

When the nation's emunah is weak, the ability to conquer

the land is lost. The passuk in Tehillim demonstrates that trust in Hashem must precede dwelling in the land: "*B'tach baShem va'aseh tov, shechon eretz ur'eh emunah*, Trust in Hashem and do good, dwell in the land and cherish faith" (37:3). For this reason, the first time emunah is found in the Torah – when Avraham trusts in Hashem that he will have offspring at the brit bein habetarim – Eretz Yisrael follows immediately, with Hashem's promise that Avraham's offspring will inherit the land. Where there is emunah, there can be inheritance of the land.

R' Yehuda HaLevi explains in the first ma'amar of the Kuzari (ot 24) that in the time of Ezra and Nechemiah, the potential existed for the nation to return to the land and remain there forever and ever, as Zechariah says, "*Roni v'simchi bat Tzion ki hineni va, v'shachanti v'tochech ne'um Hashem*, Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion, for here I come, and I will dwell in your midst, says Hashem" (2:14). Ultimately, we lost the opportunity because the majority of the nation was complacent in the exile, and only 42,360 Jews returned home to the land.

The cheit hameraglim comes to teach us that the more we increase our emunah in and partnership with HaKadosh Baruch Hu, meaning combining emunah and action, the closer we will come to meriting the land. Perhaps this is also the reason why the three mitzvot that close our parasha are nisuch hayayin on the Mizbe'ach, separation of challah, and tzitzit. Each of these mitzvot is performed in partnership with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. In the desert, we were accompanied by the be'er, which provided water with no effort on our parts. The nisuch hayayin corresponds to the be'er – unlike the water, however, we take part in the winemaking process. In the desert, man fell and provided sustenance with no effort on our parts. The separation of challah corresponds to the man – unlike the man, however, we are partners in making bread. In the desert, the ananei hakavod, the Clouds of Glory, surrounded us with kedushah. With tzitzit, we surround ourselves with kedushah, taking part in making the garments and the tzitzit. The gemara expounds that the tzitzit have a law of ta'aseh v'lo min ha'asu. These three mitzvot allow us to make the transition to action with emunah, to partnership with Hashem. The parasha closes with these mitzvot in order to indicate that the more we believe and the more our actions are inspired by our belief, the greater the opportunity to inherit the land.

There are three events from the past which we are commanded to experience as if they are happening currently: Yetziat Mitzrayim – "*B'chol dor vador chayav*

*adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza miMitzrayim*, In every generation, a person must see himself as if he left Egypt” (Haggadah shel Pesach); *Kabbalat haTorah – “B'chol yom yih'yu b'einecha kachadashim*, Every day they must be in your eyes as new” (Rashi, parashat Yitro); and *Eretz Yisrael – t'hei b'einecha k'ilu n'tanah lecha bo bayom v'al t'hei b'einecha kirushat avot*, Consider it as if it was given to you today, not as an inheritance” (Rashi, parashat Bo). As we

grow to realize that Eretz Yisrael is given every day anew, and that that netinah is dependent upon our emunah and our actions, so will we grow to merit the speedy fulfillment of “*Ufaratzta yamah va'kedmah v'tzafonah va'negbah v'nivrech v'cha kol mishpechot ha'adamah uv'zarecha*, And you shall spread to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south, and in you and your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Bereishit 28:14).

## Challenges Enable Greatness

*Rabbi Zev Reichman*

**T**his week's parsha tells of the spies that Moshe sent to the Land of Israel. When the Torah describes the path of the spies it seems to include extraneous information. In chapter 13 verse 22 we are told “*Vayaalu banegev vayavo ad Chevron visham Achiman Sheishai viTalmi yelidei ha'anak viChevron sheva shanim nivnasa lifnei Zoan mitzrayaim.*” “And they (the spies) went up from the Negev (which is in the south) and he (according to Rashi this is referring to Calev - one of the righteous spies) arrived in Chevron, the children of giants - Achiman, Sheishai, and Talmi were there, and Chevron was built seven years before Zoan of Egypt.” This verse seems dedicated to mentioning the route the spies took to enter Israel, if so, why was it necessary to mention the presence of giants in Chevron and the date when Chevron was built? I think there is a simple reason for telling us of the giants. Later in the parsha the spies will report to the Jews about the giants so the Torah tells us where these giants were first found. However the question as to why the Torah mentions the date of Chevron's construction is more difficult. Rashi suggests that it is to enlighten the reader to the exalted nature of Israel. Chevron was not built before Zoan rather it was greater than Zoan: “There is no more terraced and hilly area in all of Israel than the city of Chevron. This is why it was used to bury the dead. In all of Egypt, there is no more luscious and fertile area than Zoan, this is where the kings lived, and Egypt is compared in scripture to the Garden of Eden. Chevron was seven times greater than Zoan.” The words of Rashi are difficult. How could he tell us that Chevron is seven times nicer than Zoan? Zoan is luscious and fertile while Chevron is a rocky graveyard, in what way is Chevron superior? The Chassam Sofer offers the following explanation. Imagine a king who has two sons. One has the potential to be a future ruler, the other is too immature and irresponsible to ever rule. The

king decided that the son who will never be a ruler need not suffer the rigors of a difficult lifestyle. He gave him many presents and he rarely rebuked him. However the son who was destined to rule was treated strictly, his infractions were punished, for a time he was forced to live as a poor subject, and he was taught the rigors of aristocratic living. Only if the Crown prince is a fool would he complain and ask for his brother's lifestyle. Clearly he is given the more difficult upbringing as a prelude to the throne. He is punished for his infractions for he will be the future leader and as a leader he cannot set a poor example. He is made to suffer deprivations to appreciate the lives of his subjects who suffer material need. He is challenged often in order to train him in the rigors of leadership and he must be an aristocrat for all his subjects will eventually respect an individual with a royal bearing. This son will inherit the king's entire kingdom, and therefore he must prove himself to his father and his future subjects. So it is with the land of Israel. Israel is a tough land. Chevron, the initial seat of king David, is a hilly and rocky area. Yet, Chevron is greater than the luxuries of Egypt. The luxuries of Egyptian rulers and the ease of their life is a tell tale sign of their filling the role of the prince who will not rule. Israel with its challenges and trials is the place where the crown prince is tested. In Israel he proves his mettle, and eventually merits inheriting the entire kingdom of Heaven. This is why the Torah includes this information in this verse. When seeing giants in Israel, one is reminded of the difficulty life in Israel entails. That is the time to remember that Chevron is greater than Zoan. A place of hardship- the land of trying climate and difficult neighbors is greater than a land of ease and comfort. In Chevron the crown prince of the Ultimate King, the Jewish nation, will prove that it can shoulder hardship and maintain faith. Through such trials we will merit to inherit the entire kingdom - the rewards of the world to come.

## Bad Projections

*Rabbi Yitzchak Korn*

**A**ntigones (In Avos 1:3) teaches that we shouldn't be like slaves who serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward, rather we should be like servants who serve their master without such a condition.

Rambam begins by interpreting this Mishna as coming to teach us what it means to serve Hashem out of love, but then goes on to explain what can happen if this teaching is taken out of context.

Rambam tells the story of two disciples, Tzadok and Baitus, who heard this teaching and put forth their own warped interpretation. They understood that the Mishna is teaching us that if the ideal Avodat Hashem is not for the sake of reward, then it must be that there is no system of Sechar V'Onesh (a system of reward and punishment).

Tzadok and Baitus went on to form two seceding factions called the Tzedukim and Baitusim. They would have gladly rejected the entire Torah (chas v'sholom), but that wouldn't fly. Instead, they were able to promulgate the rejection of our Mesorah, the oral law.

In truth Baitus and Tzadok were simply looking for an excuse to drop Torah and Mitzvot. They began with a dishonest starting point which justified their (mis) interpretation of the Mishna. It began with a single Mishna and spread to the entire Torah. This wasn't a matter of intellectualism of ideals, rather this was a matter of rationalizing an escape from responsibility.

The Gemara in Makot - which the Yeshiva as a whole

was recently completed - teaches us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu leads people down the path that they seek to follow. This is based on Bil'am, who we will read about next week. He opens up doors to lead everyone in the direction that they want to go. Tzadok and Baitus were trying to find an excuse - and that door was opened for them.

Perhaps we can suggest that this dishonest projection lead to the downfall of the Meraglim as well. What happened with the Meraglim? How was it possible that Kalev and Yehoshua saw one thing and the rest of the Meraglim walked away with a completely different impression? The answer is that their report was influenced by their perspective. They were looking at the land with a slant that lead to their downfall.

The Zohar, as explained by Rav Goldvicht, ZT"l writes that the Nesi'im/Meraglim didn't want to lose their positions as leaders of Am Yisrael. Every generation is given the leaders that it needs. The generation of the desert was completely spiritual, constant Torah and Ruchaniut. Going into Eretz Yisrael would mean that the role of the people - and automatically their leaders - would change. Their fears of entering Eretz Yisrael which were completely personal, were projected on to the Land itself - intellectually justifying something that was simply not true.

Our role, as taught in the Parsha of Ztitzit, is to follow the right path, without the subjective (mis)interpretations that our heart and eyes are wont to lead us astray.

## Raid!!!

*Rabbi Josh Hoffman*

**T**his week's parsha relates the mission of the twelve meraglim- spies, or scouts- who were sent to scout the land of Canaan before the nation entered it.

Ten of the meraglim came back and told the people they would not be able to conquer the land. Only two of those sent- Yehoshua and Caleiv- insisted that they would be able to conquer the land. How were they able to withstand the pressure of the other meraglim, and act independently? Rashi mentions a midrash which says that Moshe prayed that Yehoshua should not be influenced by the evil plans

of the other meraglim. Caleiv, however, managed, on his own, to withstand the meraglim's plans. The rabbis tell us that during the mission, Caleiv went to Chevron and prostrated himself at the graves of the forefathers. We need to understand why Moshe felt a need to pray for Yehoshua, and, also, in what way the preventative measure of Caleiv related to the challenge which the meraglim posed to the success of the entire mission.

When the meraglim returned with their report, they referred to the inhabitants of the land as giants, and added,

“We were like grasshoppers in their eyes, and we were in their eyes” (Bamidbar, 13:33). How did the meraglim know what these giants thought of them? Rashi, citing the Talmud (Sotah, 35a) says that they heard them saying to each other that there were ants in the vineyards which look like men. Rabbi Abraham I. Twerski noted the change in the identity of the insect between the remark of the giants and the report of the meraglim, and explained that a certain psychological process had occurred. The meraglim, seeing the size of the inhabitants of the land, viewed themselves, in comparison, as grasshoppers, and thus projected their inner sense of low self-esteem. As a result, the giants saw them as an ever lower life form, and said that they were ants. We thus learn that if someone projects a sense of low self-esteem, others will see him as even lower than he sees himself. This explanation is somewhat difficult, because it assumes that ants are on a lower level of existence than grasshoppers, simply because they are smaller. One could argue, however, that ants are more productive, and, thus, on a higher level than grasshoppers, which can be quite destructive, as the Egyptians of the time of the exodus learned. I would, therefore, like to present a different explanation of the switch from grasshoppers to ants.

My teacher, Rav Aharon Soloveichik, zt”l, explained the remark of the meraglim concerning viewing themselves as grasshoppers in a way that is exactly the opposite of the way in which Rabbi Twerski explained it. He said that the meraglim viewed themselves as grasshoppers because of the way that they were viewed by the giants, and we learn from here a general principle that a person views himself the way others view him. Rav Aharon, however, did not comment on the Talmudic explanation, which says that the giants referred to the meraglim as ants. I believe that a comment of Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev can help us understand this change, from ants to grasshoppers, following the explanation of the verse given by Rav Aharon. Rav Levi Yitzchak, in his *Kedusas Levi*, explains the imagery of the ants in a very interesting way. He mentions the statement of the rabbis that, had the Torah not been given, we could have learned various character traits and moral standards from the animals, and even from insects. For example, we could have learned from the ants that it is wrong to steal, because ants are careful not to take that which does not belong to them. The midrash tells us that King Ptolemy told the Jews that they did not have a right to the land of Canaan, because God, who created the

world and could give it to whomever He wished, had given that land to its local inhabitants. This is, therefore, what the meraglim heard the giants saying, that the people they saw in the vineyards would not try to capture the land, since that would constitute theft, and the ants teach us that one should not steal. The giants, of course, were wrong, since God had also taken the land from its previous owners and given it to someone else, as Rashi in the beginning of parshas Bereishis says. However, the meraglim, after hearing the comment of the giants, referring to them as ants and saying that they did not have a right to the land, began to doubt the morality of conquering Eretz Yisroel from the Canaanites, and began to view themselves as grasshoppers, about to launch a destructive war of conquest against the people they were now convinced were the rightful owners of the land.

Based on our analysis of the imagery of the ants and the grasshoppers, we can now understand why Moshe prayed specifically for Yehoshua before the meraglim went out on their mission. Moshe knew that Yehoshua would be the person who would lead the nation in its war of conquest once it entered the land. However, a military commander who does not believe in his nation’s right to the land that he is supposed to conquer will not make a very effective leader. Therefore Moshe was especially worried that Yehoshua may be effected by the attitude the meraglim were open to adopt after scouting out the land and hearing what its inhabitants thought about the nation that intended to conquer it. For this reason, Moshe prayed that Yehoshua would not be influenced by their attitude. Caleiv was able to resist the attitude of appeasement that developed among the meraglim even though he did not have the benefit of Moshe’s prayers, because he already had strong convictions about the right of the nation to Eretz Yisroel. This conviction is reflected in the fact that he went to he prostrated himself before the graves of the nation’s forefathers in Chevron. Caleiv’s attachment to Chevron was emblematic of his understanding that the land of Canaan had been promised to the nation by God, and that the argument of the giants that the meraglim overheard was bogus. Unfortunately, the other ten meraglim believed that argument and thus doubted the right of the nation to Eretz Yisroel. It is the development of this attitude among the nation that we mourn each year on Tisha B’Av, when the evil report of the meraglim was issued.

# Miriam and the Meraglim

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb

Parshas Shelach begins with the infamous story of the meraglim. The Jewish people, on the threshold of entering Eretz Yisroel and despite God's promise of a successful conquest, nevertheless wanted to send spies to first survey the land. This initial mistake soon "snowballed" as 10 of the spies returned with a negative report that demoralized the nation and caused them to question the whole enterprise. The result of this upheaval was nothing short of catastrophic: instead of going into the Land of Israel immediately the people were forced to wander in the desert for 40 years during which time the generation that had left Egypt died out.

Of the many lessons learned from this tragic episode, one crucial – and often overlooked – teaching relates to the timing and placement of the story. At the end of Parshas Beha'alo-secha, immediately preceding the spies' mission, we read about Miriam's punishment for criticizing Moshe. The Midrash (Tanchuma 5) is struck by the juxtaposition of these two incidents and suggests that, in fact, they share a common message. Rashi, paraphrasing the Midrash, explains that the spies should have learned a lesson from Miriam who was punished for speaking lashon hara about Moshe and yet, on the contrary, "ra'u ve'lo lakchu musar," instead of learning from her mistake the spies repeated it, as they spoke lashon hara about the Land of Israel.

When considering Midrash's words, however, it is somewhat surprising that there is such an emphasis on this particular point. After all, Chazal (Sotah 35a, cited by Rashi 13:31) maintain that the spies were in fact guilty of heresy because they denied that Hashem was capable of conquering Eretz Yisrael. Given the gravity of their sin, therefore, it is difficult to understand how their punishment could be attributed to something as seemingly inconsequential as not learning a lesson from Miriam.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (Da'as Torah v. 4) suggests that this comment of the Midrash highlights the importance of learning life's lessons. Every person, over the course of his or her lifetime, experiences – and witnesses – many things and each of them has a lesson that can be learned from; there are successes and failures, good things and bad, and each of them has something to teach us. If we go through life with our eyes and minds open we can grow from every encounter and event that we experience. But if we don't

learn from what happens to us – or others – then we are inevitably doomed to repeat previous mistakes.

The spies should have learned from what happened to Miriam and had they done so they would have avoided not only the sin of lashon hara but the transgression of heresy as well. The Midrash isn't claiming that the spies were punished because "ra'u ve'lo lakchu musar," rather, explains R. Levovitz, the crucial point is that because the meraglim didn't learn from what happened to Miriam that oversight led to the other, more grievous mistakes.

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Reflections of the Rav v.1) suggests that there is also a deeper connection between the episodes of Miriam and the meraglim which, if understood, can enhance our appreciation for both Moshe and the Land of Israel.

There is a common practice to recite 6 biblical verses at the conclusion of the daily shacharis prayers, each of which stipulates "zachor," that it should be remembered. Among the episodes recalled, the rest of which touch on major historical events and their respective theological lessons, one is a verse recalling the sin of Miriam (taken from Devarim 24:9). Given the overarching importance of the other events mentioned – such as the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai – it is hard to understand why Miriam's criticism of her brother is included; as bad a lashon hara might be it is not on par with the religious value of the other principles.

R. Soloveitchik suggested that the significance of Miriam's sin was not that she spoke lashon hara per se, but that she didn't appreciate the "segulah quality," the uniqueness of Moshe. While there were, of course, other nevi'im both before and after Moshe, the Rambam explains (Yesodei ha-Torah 7:6) that Moshe's prophecy was unique and qualitatively different than that of all other prophets (see Bamidbar 12:7). As a result of this special relationship with Hashem Moshe was commanded – after coming down from Har Sinai – to separate from his wife. When Miriam observed this ascetic behavior by her brother, she, who herself was a prophetess and yet maintained a normal family life, couldn't understand why Moshe was behaving differently than her. What Miriam failed to appreciate, however, was that Moshe wasn't just superior, he was singular; the rules for other people and

even other prophets were simply not applicable to him. R. Soloveitchik explained that it is really this notion of Moshe as a *segulah* prophet – a truly important theological principle – that we are called on to remember daily.

This notion of singularity is also applicable to the Jewish people, as we were elevated as a “*segulah*” from among the other nations of the world (Shemos 19:5). The Land of Israel, as well, is a *segulah* land, as it is the only place that merits Hashem’s uninterrupted attention (Devarim 11:12 and Rashi) and, consequently, the only land where prophecy can flourish (Yalkut Shimoni, Yona #1).

The plan, and natural progression, was for the *segulah* nation to inhabit the *segulah* land but, alas, the sin of spies made that impossible. The root of the *meraglim*’s mistake, explained R. Soloveitchik, was that they viewed the land

only as a political entity and they completely missed the singular, *segulah* quality of Eretz Yisrael; “With grandeur looking down at them all they could see was the mundane.”

This, then, is the deeper connection between the sins of Miriam and the spies. In both instances they missed the invisible but crucial notion of *segulah* and in both situations they put major foundations of Judaism at risk. Without an acceptance of Moshe’s uniqueness the authority of his prophecy – and of the Torah itself – is compromised and without an appreciation for the singularity of the Eretz Yisrael the holiness and spiritual potential of the land can never be realized. Having already witnessed Miriam’s punishment for her oversight, the spies’ similar mistake is all the more inexcusable.

## We Were like Grasshoppers in Our Eyes

*Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald*

In this week’s parasha, parashat Shelach, Moses sends twelve representatives, one from each tribe, to scout the land of Canaan, the land that the Al-mighty promised to give to the Jewish people as an inheritance. Although all 12 scouts were distinguished people, ten of the scouts lose faith while in Canaan and return with a negative report about the land.

Upon their return, ten of the scouts report to Moses, saying, “We arrived at the land to which you sent us and indeed, it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.” According to tradition, they then show the people samples of the land’s giant fruit, underscoring the size and overwhelming power of the Canaanite inhabitants. They report that the cities they saw in Canaan were powerfully fortified, that they had encountered the offspring of the giants, and that the fierce nation of Amalek dwells in the area of the south together with other Canaanite nations. Of the 12 scouts, only Joshua and Caleb are optimistic about the land and urge the people to maintain their faith in G-d.

Despite Caleb’s efforts to silence and calm the people, the ten scouts declare: “We cannot ascend to that people for they are too strong for us! The land through which we have passed to spy it out is a land that devours its inhabitants! All the people that we saw in it were huge. There we saw the Nephilim, the sons of the giant from among the Nephilim!”

The scouts conclude their report with their memorable

statement (Numbers 13:33), “*Vah’n’hee v’ay’nay’noo ka’cha’ga’vim, v’chayn ha’yee’noo b’ay’nay’hem,*” We were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so we were in their eyes!

Upon hearing the scouts intimidating report, the entire assembly of Israel raise their voices and weep all night. They ask why G-d brought them into this land to die by the sword; after all, it would have been better to return to Egypt. They then demand that a new leader be appointed to lead them back to Egypt.

Despite G-d’s loving-kindness, and notwithstanding the fact that He had forgiven them for the egregious sin of the Golden Calf, G-d’s patience with the people had now worn thin and this time He refuses to forgive the people. G-d decrees that all men who were 20 years old and above shall not enter the land of Canaan and must die in the wilderness. Although G-d wanted to kill them instantly, Moses once again prevails and the sinful people are slowly punished over the next 40 years as they wander in the wilderness.

How could it be that ten highly regarded leaders of Israel had so little faith, and that they truly believed that Canaan was a land that devoured its inhabitants? How could it be that the people of Israel had so little faith and were so quickly intimidated by the negative report of the ten scouts? After all, these were the people who saw the miraculous plagues in Egypt and the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. They had seen the Revelation at Sinai and

G-d had spoken to them face to face. Perhaps a clue can be found in the statement of the ten scouts (Numbers 13:33), “*Vah’n’hee v’ay’nay’noo ka’cha’ga’vim, v’chayn ha’yee’noo b’ay’nay’hem,*” We were in our own eyes like grasshoppers and so we were in their eyes.

A story is told of four doctors’ wives from York, PA, who came to New York City on a shopping spree. Of course, this was before Mayor Giuliani made the city safe, and their perception of a crime-ridden New York instilled great fear in them. They checked into the luxurious Plaza Hotel. The night before their first shopping expedition they were quite desperate. Out of fear, they bolted the door to their room and propped up a chair against the door handle to make themselves more secure. The women tossed and turned the entire night in dread anticipation of what lay in store for them the next day.

When they awoke in the morning and prepared to go down to the lobby for breakfast, they were literally petrified, and sheepishly gathered courage to simply open the door. They listened through the door to make certain that the hallway was clear, then tipped-toed down the corridor and pressed the elevator button. The elevator arrived, the doors opened, and standing in the elevator was a huge, black man with a huge white dog. The black man said, “Sit, Whitie!” and the four women proceeded to sit down on the floor.

Like the fearful women, the scouts, who saw themselves as grasshoppers, were perceived as pygmies by the Canaanites. The scouts were obviously men of great talent, but possessed rather low self-esteem. Not only did they not at all appreciate the fact that they had G-d at their side, they saw themselves as impotent and weak and were consequently unable to muster the courage that was necessary to inspire the people of Israel to march

courageously into the land and assume their rightful patrimony. Despite the numerous miracles that the people of Israel had personally witnessed, when it came to capturing the land of Canaan, they deemed themselves unworthy of G-d’s intervention on their behalf. Perhaps their self-esteem had been beaten out of them by the Egyptian slavery. Perhaps they had become so reliant on G-d’s intervention that they saw themselves as impotent and helpless.

Surely, G-d could have simply steam-rolled them into the Promised Land, doing away with any opposition that they might encounter. But that too would have left the people feeling as if they were powerless without “Big Daddy” taking care of them. Such a people could not survive, and certainly could not flourish in the new homeland. The People of Israel needed leadership that was bold, creative, ready to dig in, prepared to build and accomplish. The current generation, unfortunately, was composed of people who saw themselves as helpless and felt that even G-d couldn’t sufficiently defend them.

The lesson that we must learn from the episode of the failed scouts is a message that should reverberate in our generation. Unless the people of Israel assume the initiative, there can be little hope of Divine intervention. The spark of Divine intervention must be ignited by the people themselves, otherwise there is little hope for salvation or redemption.

Despite the immense challenges faced by our people today, we must gird our loins and gather our strength so that we may prove worthy of Divine assistance. If we perceive ourselves as grasshoppers, others will perceive us likewise. We are giants, and we have every reason to feel confident, knowing that the future is indeed ours.