



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Shelach 5783

### Does It Pay To Be Good?

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered June 10, 1972)

**D**oes it pay to be good?" is a question one often hears – and asks – as a sign of frustration. Usually, it is just an expression of momentary disappointment, and serves a cathartic function. But sometimes, and with some people, and especially if repeated often enough, it is elevated from a query of complaint to a philosophy of life, and from a passing mood to a firm moral judgment. So let us ask ourselves the question rather seriously: does it pay to be good?

We must first divide the question into two parts, by posing a counter-question: "pay" for whom?

"Does it pay to be good?" may refer to the benefactor, to the one asking the question; or it may refer to the beneficiary, the one who is the recipient of my goodness and generosity.

The first question – does it pay for me to be good – probably should be answered, for most cases, in the negative. If you expect dividends from your ethical investments, you are seriously in error. The good life is not necessarily the happy life. John Kennedy, born into a wealthy family, high society, and catapulted into historic political prominence, decided that "life isn't fair." Much earlier, the Rabbis broodingly concluded that שכר מצוה ליכא בהאי עולמא, that the reward for virtue simply is not in evidence in this world. For myself, I am professionally engaged a good part of the time in doing favors for people, and arranging for some people to be kind to others. I long, long ago learned that one thing I must never expect (if I wanted to lead a life free from constant minor disappointments) is – gratitude. I now never expect anyone to show gratitude. Therefore, when, as often happens, I meet people who are possessed of that noble virtue, I am delighted beyond words at the great discovery of – a genuine human being. But ingratitude neither overwhelms me nor surprises me any longer because, truth to tell, and

without the least trace of cynicism, it is the rule rather than the exception. Were a person to be good only because it pays, or because it will be recognized and acknowledged, he would have to stop being good!

But essentially the question does not even deserve an answer for, no matter what the answer may be, our immediate reaction must be to ask: "so what?" Who says that it has to pay in the first place? He who plans to be a moral individual because it pays to be good, will end up either as an evil person or as one who will suffer constant frustration. Judaism taught us אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשים את הרב על מנת לקבל פרס, do not be like servants who serve the master, or employees who work for the "boss," only in order to receive a salary or a wage. Don't be good merely because it pays. Judaism never urged upon us that old maxim: "honesty is the best policy." A Jew must be honest even when it is not a good policy. Morals and goodness are matters of principle, not prudence. Yes, we believe that ultimately there is spiritual reward; but this must never become the motive for being good in the first place.

The real question that is worth pondering is the second one: Does it pay to be good for the beneficiary of my kindness? At first glance, it is a simple matter of definition: obviously it is good for someone if I do him good. Yet it is not that quite simple. We must consider such factors as excess, timing, and short-term indulgence which may lead to long-term damage. And here, there can be no uniform answer. Here, what is required is wisdom and maturity and deliberation in order to foretell whether our benefaction will ultimately prove helpful or harmful.

The incident of Moses and the מרגלים, the spies he sent into Canaan, provides an illustration of a case where it did not pay to be good. God told Moses, שלח לך אנשים ויתרו, send for yourself people to spy out the land of Canaan. But according to the way the Rabbis (Talmud

Sotah, cited by Rashi) interpreted this incident, the relations between God, Israel, and Moses were quite complex, and the role of Moses was anomalous. Thus Rashi states:

לדעתך: אני איני מצוה אותך; אם תרצה, שלח. לפי שבאו ישראל ואמרו: נשלחה אנשים לפנינו, ומשה נמלך בשכינה. אמר: אני אמרתי להם שהיא טובה... חיהם שאני נותן להם מקום לטעות...

God said to Moses, send a delegation of spies if you wish. But do it on your own responsibility. For Myself, I am not commanding you to do so. For the Israelites themselves demanded such a delegation, and when Moses consulted the divine Presence, He replied: but I have already told them that it is a good land? Therefore, if you wish you may let them have their spies, but not without great risk...

In other words, the sending of the spies was a concession, like the permission to appoint a king over themselves (R. Bachya) or the eating of meat to the children of Noah, or the law of יפת תואר. And, while we may be grateful to God for being an understanding Father, it is not always clear that such indulgence is for our own ultimate good.

Obviously, here Moses was being too good. He submitted to pressure by the Israelites, when perhaps he should not have done so. He was too good – and it didn't pay!

The commentators are undecided about the moral qualities of these spies. Some say they were צדיקים (truly just), some say כשרים (merely innocent), and some say they were רשעים (wicked). But I prefer a fourth interpretation, that of Midrash Tanhuma, which declares them כסילים -- a word which means both knaves and fools, primarily the latter. The spies were immature and childish. And Moses over-indulged them, pampered them and babied them, like a father who is too good to his little children.

In Deuteronomy, Moses, in recollecting the story of the spies, said: וייטב בעיני הדבר, which usually is explained as, "and the plan found favor in my eyes." But if Moses admitted that the plan was valid in his opinion, how does Rashi tell us here that Moses did not really want to do so, and that he consulted with the divine Presence, which discouraged him? I submit that, perhaps, the expression of וייטב בעיני הדבר means, in essence: I consider the matter and decided to be good to you. And of course – he erred. For to be good is not always the same as to do good. It is sometimes better to be hard-headed than soft-hearted.

Indeed, Moses already knew the harm that can come from excessive softness. After the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moses acts as the great advocate and defendant of his

people, he tries to shift part of the blame for the making of the calf – on God Himself! He maintains that God helped to spoil this people.

אמר משה לפני הקב"ה: רבש"ע כסף וזהב שהרבית להם לישראל עד שאמרו די גרם להם שיעשו אלהי זהב. (יומא פו:)

Moses said to the Almighty: O God, the gold and the silver which You gave them to excess (when they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea), so much that they had to exclaim, "enough!" – that is what caused them to make a golden calf; You spoiled them and led them to think that such material valuables are a true criterion of greatness, and so they deified them!

So, all of us must learn in our personal and professional and especially family lives: it does not always pay to be good. Sometimes we intend to be kind and generous, and are only inviting trouble later on for the very one whom, out of love, we seek to benefit.

We tend to sin in this respect especially as parents. It is an old Jewish syndrome of which the Bible records numerous examples: Eli with his sons, Samuel with his sons, David with his sons. In our days, we often try to give our children what we did not have, and so we fail to give them what we did have. Our generation of affluence is overpressing material goods on the younger generation, and thereby denying them a sense of discovery, of self-worth, of the achievement of earning and deserving the goods of the world. We think וייטב בעיני הדבר, we are being good to them, when really we are really helping them build עגל הזהב, a golden calf. We send teens on a trip around the world; later there is nothing for them to look forward to other than ennui and boredom. We saturate them with luxuries until they are sated and cry די, "enough!" What else is there left for them to live for, especially since non-material values were never seriously considered? We send our children to the best universities with only the minimal attention to Jewishness, Jewish society, and the opportunity for Jewish observance. And later, even the finest Orthodox families wonder where they went wrong and why they now suffer from the problems of intermarriage.

But this idea of short-term kindness leading to eventual harm, has to do not only with individuals but applies to collectivities as well.

One such case is the problem of the priorities that our liberal Jewish community sets for itself. We are generally a kindly people, and therefore concerned with the well-being of all peoples. And that is as it should be. But we have

sinned in the area of priorities. We have tried to be good to others and denied our kindness from our kin. We have acted politically, socially, and economically on behalf of all the underprivileged – except for the Jewish poor; on behalf of all political causes – except for the Jewish poor; on behalf of all marginal people – except for those of our own people who have not yet “made it.” And so it did not pay for us or for them to be good.

A second such instance concerns the hijackings which now proliferate in the world. The policy of most governments has been to be soft, accommodating, and gentle with hijackers. Most nations told themselves, obviously in sincerity, that they were protecting the passengers on the immediate plane endangered. Yet they failed to see that in this way they were inviting further hijackings and endangering the lives of untold numbers of other, future passengers. Apparently, only the government of Israel took the right attitude: no concessions, no submissions, no negotiations. They realized that it does not pay – even for the passengers of an endangered jet – to submit to the criminals.

In this respect, I wish to single out for special condemnation and censure a recent editorial that was distinguished by viciousness and inanity rolled into one. A week or ten days ago, The New York Times, in an editorial after the Lydda massacre, had the temerity and audacity to suggest that Israel itself must accept part of the blame, because when it decided to storm the Sabena jet some time earlier, this provoked the terrorists to attempt the Lydda massacre.

What unmitigated gall! While the Times was pontificating in its editorial columns, its news columns were informing us that the Lydda massacre had been planned long before the Sabena jet incident. Now we know, factually, that this was the case. Furthermore, this week the airline pilots of the world set June 19th as a deadline

for a new policy against hijackers – one much more in consonance with that of the State of Israel – and that they will strike if this policy is not worked out.

Perhaps it is a consolation for us to recall that The New York Times was usually wrong on Israel, from the beginnings of the Zionist movement until this very day. Thank the Lord that, with all our reverence for the sage advice given to us from the Olympian heights of the Times editorial room, we have been wise enough to disregard it and ignore it. Perhaps it is a measure of the justice and rightness of Israel’s cause that it evoked the displeasure of the Times editorial writer. When we satisfy the Times’ standards, perhaps then we ought to question whether we are on the right track.

To summarize, we respond to the question, “does it pay to be good?” as follows: if the question is asked whether it pays for me to do good, the question is invalid, it is a pseudo question because it really makes no difference what the answer is. It is irrelevant. I do not do good because it pays, but because as a Jew I am commanded.

But if it means: does it pay to be good toward the beneficiary?, the answer is that it depends upon him, upon his maturity and sense of proportion, upon his absorptive capacity for kindness and goodness. It is a question which demands wisdom and knowledge of the particular case in order to know how to act properly.

For, as we indicated, it is so very difficult to know when we are truly doing good and when we are going to excess, that even God was faulted by Moses in this respect. Yet, we must always rely upon Him and pray that He be good to us without overindulging us and causing us eventual harm. So we pray, in the blessing of Rosh Chodesh, *חיים שימלאו, משאלות לבנו לטובה*, give us life in which the desires of our hearts will be fulfilled – but not all of them, not everything we want, not without measure, but only: *לטובה*, for what is truly our real good. *אמן סלה*.

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## Leadership and Diversity

*Dr. Erica Brown*

**D**iversity in groups creates a higher chance of seeing positive change according to Forbes Council Panel in the “14 Important Benefits of a More Diverse Leadership Team” (June 24, 2021). Because society is diverse, diverse leadership means “greater depth and breadth of experience and perspective.”

Diversity increases awareness of different pockets of society, sensitivity to other ways of looking at the same scenario or set of facts, and “pressure-tests assumptions and judgments.” This almost always maximizes learning, innovation and honesty. Diverse groups help create more inclusive decisions and outcomes.

“Every team must be made up of people with different roles, strengths, temperaments and perspectives,” writes Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his essay “The Counterpoint of Leadership” (Tetzaveh, *Lessons in Leadership*). “They must always be open to criticism and they must always be on the alert against groupthink. The glory of Judaism is its insistence that only in heaven is there one commanding Voice. Down here on earth no individual may ever hold a monopoly of leadership.”

Diversity in teams has many positive dimensions, but it’s not always easy to create or navigate. Jon Katzenbach writes in *The Wisdom of Teams*, that, “Teams do not seek consensus; they seek the best answer.” If there is too much consensus, then diversity fails in its value.

This is apparent when reading this week’s Torah portion, Shelach. “Send agents to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people...” (Num. 13:2), we read as we open the parsha. Whereas God generally told Moses what to do, here He imbued Moses with the authority to select leaders for this reconnaissance mission from each of the twelve tribes: “... send one participant (ish ehad, ish ehad) from each of their ancestral tribes, each one a chief (nasi) among them.” The verse stresses both the singularity of each leader within his tribe and the group as a whole who must work together as one.

Rashi explains that “each one was a leader among them.” Seforno adds that the individual selected had to be the best leader from his tribe, one who could recognize the significance of the land. For Rashi, it’s a leader. For Seforno, it’s the leader. Moses needed to think very carefully about the qualities of each person and the composition of the group. Select the wrong people or the right individuals but not a productive combination of them, and the mission would fail. And the mission did fail.

The Torah names each person selected according to his tribe. These men had a historic role. People long into the future would need to know their names. Each of these leaders carried the important task of evaluating the land according to Moses’ specific objectives: “See what kind of country it is” (Num. 13:18), he told them.

*Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many?*

*Is the country in which they dwell good or bad?*

*Are the towns they live in open or fortified?*

*Is the soil rich or poor?*

*Is it wooded or not? (Num. 13:18-20).*

Moses concluded with one request, “And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” It was the grape

harvest season. Seeing is believing. When the people saw the sweet and large fruit, they would be impressed and feel motivated to complete the journey with enthusiasm. The tribal leaders were to figure this out together and present one report.

Nahmanides wonders why Moses sent out the mission in the first place. It was a risk. If the report was negative, was Moses going to take the people back to Egypt? Certainly not. Nahmanides explains that the Israelites wanted a group to reconnoiter the land as a standard procedure of military incursions in other foreign armies so that they could prepare themselves properly for war. Joshua did the same.

These leaders answered the questions and started on a high note: “We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit” (Num. 13:27). But immediately afterwards, they injected their own pessimism into the report, sharing how many enemies lived in the land and how well fortified they were: “The country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers. All the people that we saw in it are of great size; we saw the Nephilim there—the Anakites are part of the Nephilim—and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them” (Num. 13:32-33). Now, closer than ever to the Promised Land, the people lost all hope: “The whole community broke into loud cries, and the people wept that night” (Num. 14:1).

Here is where diversity does its hardest work. Caleb, one of the scouts from the tribe of Judah – the tribe most associated with leadership – protested. He was not prepared to speak with one voice, the voice of fear. Instead, he spoke with the voice of courage and destiny: “Caleb hushed the people before Moses and said, “Let us by all means go up, and we shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it” (Num. 13:30). Caleb met fear with mettle and valor. He spoke these words before Moses to assure the people that Moses’ intentions were good and his judgment was sound. It must not have been easy to contradict the group, who compared themselves to grasshoppers.

Caleb was no grasshopper. He discouraged insect-like smallness and reminded the people of their own power to change their destiny and rise to the occasion. And he left us with a greater understanding of diversity’s importance. Sometimes it’s not consensus that creates greatness, but listening to the still, small minority voice of hope.

What leadership group do you belong to that would benefit from more diversity?

## The Cover-Up

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

This week's parsha recounts the episode of the spies sent by Moshe to tour the Holy Land and bring back a report to the people. The Torah lists the names of the twelve spies, including Hoshea bin Nun, and then tells us that Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua. Rashi explains that Moshe prayed to God, signified by the additional letter 'yud,' that He save Yehoshua from the plot of the spies. The commentators ask why Moshe prayed only for Yehoshua. Rav Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz, in his *Keli Yakar*, explains that Moshe was afraid that since Yehoshua was such a close student of his, people would associate whatever he did with his teacher. Therefore, if he joined in the plot of the other spies, it would give the impression that Moshe, as well, rejected Eretz Yisroel. However, this kind of fear does not seem realistic, because Moshe was always identified by the people as the person who was leading them into the land, so it is unlikely that they would associate any attempt by Yehoshua to dissuade them from going with a similar intent by Moshe.

Another answer, offered by Rabbi Yitzchak Avigor in his work *LiVenei Mitzvah*, is that Moshe was afraid lest Yehoshua, as a devoted student, would want to join the plot of the spies in order to prolong Moshe's life, and he already knew of Eldad and Medad's prophecy that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would bring them into the land. The longer the entrance of the people to the land would be delayed, then, the longer Moshe would live. Moshe, therefore, was afraid that Yehoshua would join in the plot to discourage the people from wanting to go to Eretz Yisroel, but for a reason of his own, namely, in order to prolong Moshe's life and leadership role. That is why Moshe prayed specifically for Yehoshua. This answer, too, seems to take the notion of Moshe's fear for Yehoshua being caught in the plot of the spies beyond a simple fear that he would fall into a plot originated by them into a line of reasoning all his own. However, it is better understood by placing it in the context of an understanding of the reasoning behind the other spies, as well. Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohein, in his commentary *Semuchin LaAd*, provides us with that context.

Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohein suggests there, that the plot of the other spies, also, was motivated by a desire to prolong Moshe's life and leadership role by causing the people

to stay in the wilderness for forty years. He says that this can be seen as another reason for the juxtaposition of the episode of the spies to the section dealing with the *leshon hora* that Miriam and Aharon spoke regarding Moshe. Just as, in that case, the rabbis pointed out that Aharon and Miriam loved Moshe, and only said what they did of him for his own benefit, so too, the spies issued a bad report on the land for Moshe's benefit, in order to prolong his life. This being so, it is easier to understand Moshe's fear that Yehoshua, in his love for his teacher, might somehow be persuaded to join the other spies in their plot to do the same thing. Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohein says, however, that the spies erred on two counts. First, their deviation from Moshe's plan for them to encourage the people to want to enter the land led, eventually, to blasphemy when they told the people that the land is too difficult for even God to conquer (see *Bamidbar* 13:32, and Rashi there). Moreover, the motivation of the spies, according to this explanation, was actually similar to the motivation of King Chizkiyahu. The Talmud (*Berachos* 10a) tells us that Chizkiyahu refrained from marrying because he knew through 'ruach hakodesh,' or divine inspiration, that he would have children who were not virtuous. God punished Chizkiyahu with a severe illness, and the prophet Yeshayahu told him that he would die fifteen years before his time for doing this, because he had no business tampering with God's plans for His world. What business do you have with God's secrets, asked Yishaya. Do what you were commanded to do, and let God take care of His concerns. Eventually, he repented and the divine decree was rescinded. So too, the spies, according to Rabbi HaKohein, tried tampering with God's plans for His world, which is something that people should not attempt to do. Moshe feared that Yehoshua would be caught up in this plot, and therefore prayed to God to save him from doing so.

I would like to add two additional points to the approach of the *Semuchin LaAd*. First, the two reasons that he gives to explain why the spies were mistaken can be seen as one and the same reason. Tampering with God's plans for the world, I believe, may be seen as an act of blasphemy, because it questions God's omniscience, His understanding of the wider picture, and how all events work together in a way that allows for the ultimate

realization of His goals for the world. Thus, when the spies tried to thwart God's plan for Moshe's death and his succession by Yehoshua, they were in effect both tampering with His plans and denying His total mastery of the workings of the universe. I would also like to suggest that when the spies, according to this explanation, were ostensibly trying to prolong Moshe's leadership role and life span, what they were really trying to do was prolong their own leadership roles.

The Zohar says that the spies heard a prophecy that when the nation would enter the land, they would appoint new leaders to replace the current ones. Thus, the spies who were the nesi'im, the princes of the tribes, stood to lose that status once the people entered the land. Therefore, they plotted to turn the people's hearts away

## Against All Odds—You Never Know

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur presented on June 15, 2017)

In this week's Parsha, we have the story of two men—Calev and Yehoshua—who were together with *ha-Eida ha-ra ha-zos*—the Meraglim. Moshe gives Yehoshua a special *chizuk*—*va-yikra Moshe le-Hoshe'a bin Nun, Yehoshua*. And Calev took his own initiative: *Va-ya'alu ba-Negev ve-yavo ad Chevron*. And Rashi points out here: the word *va-yavo* is singular, indicating that only Calev went to Chevron to daven at Me'aras ha-Machpeila—at the Kivrei Avos—to ask Hashem to save him from the influence of the Meraglim. And we later see that Calev gets a special reward for doing the right thing—*ve-lo Etein es ha-aretz asher darach bah, u-le-vanav, ya'an asher milei acharei Hashem*. Calev and Yehoshua are examples of individuals who go against the tide, the chevra, the influence of peer pressure, to do the right thing and stand up for Avodas Hashem and the Truth.

There are two he'aros I have seen about Calev. One is why did he *davka* go to daven at Me'aras ha-Machpeila? On some level, it's the *zchus* of davening at Kivrei Avos. But it could be deeper than that. What was Calev's problem? He knew what was right. His problem was—as Rambam quotes from Aristotle—that we are affected by our surroundings. People around us have a tremendous influence on us—that is the nature of human beings. We are part of our chevra and are influenced by them. And Calev was incredibly afraid of being influenced by his chevra. Yehoshua, however, was less concerned because,

from the land so that they would retain their leadership roles. This is the motivation attributed to them by the Zohar. Following the explanation of the Semuchin LaAd, perhaps we can say that we can view their supposed plot to prolong Moshe's years of leadership as a cover-up for their real, perhaps unconscious motivation, which was to prolong their own years of leadership. This is a problem inherent in any attempt to deviate from God's orders, even when motivated by seemingly good intentions. Anyone who does so, committing what is known in the Talmud as an 'aveirah lishmah,' or a sin for the sake of heaven, must be wary that he is really motivated by his own self-interest. This was the trap that Moshe feared Yehoshua would fall into, and that is why he prayed for his welfare.

unlike Calev, he could picture Moshe Rabbeinu standing behind him, giving him a *brachah*, and sending him off. How did Calev manage to resist the peer pressure of the Meraglim and still do what was right? Perhaps that's why Calev went *davka* to the Kivrei Avos at Me'aras ha-Machpeila. Not just to daven there but to be inspired. Because on the one hand, Calev did not seem to have anyone to tell him to do the right thing. But he did. They just were not physically with him at the time. He had his Avos—Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov—who did the right thing. And that's the *eitza*. When you are in a bad chevra, when you don't have the right friends and influences, what do you do? Sometimes you must take inspiration from our past. He had to say: These ten guys are influencing me the wrong way, but I am also a descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. I think of them and learn from the stories of what happened to them. Seeing himself as part of their family created positive role models and positive peer pressure. And even though they were not with him, he summoned the image of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—the *dmus d'yukno*—to help *mechazek* himself—akin to Yosef, who envisioned his father at the supreme moment of challenge. And not only that, but Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were *yechidim*. There was no Am Yisroel back then. Avraham was the one who smashed all the idols of his father. Yitzchak was a *yachid*. Yaakov was a *yachid*. Eventually, they became an *Am*. But they were *yechidim*.

So Calev went to their graves to be reminded that even when you are a yachid, you could daven to Hashem for help, do the right thing, and resist the peer pressure. And more so, even if there was no tzadik with him now, he could remember righteous people from his mesorah, when he was growing up, from his Torah years, from his Yeshiva experience, as it were—even if they were not physically present. He drew chizuk from that. Calev's trip to Chevron is a great example of how someone remains good and does the right thing, even if people around him are acting wrong. So if you ever find yourself in a similar predicament, use the role models from the past—who were yechidim and stood up for the right thing—to know that it is possible. And if you can't surround yourself with a good chevra, at least surround yourself with good people in your head. And remember all those good people—your rebbeim and our ancestors who were the founders of our Am—and that will give you chizuk to do the right thing.

But Rav Moshe Feinstein makes another he'arah. He says that Calev had another problem, negative peer pressure aside. He was not going to succeed. He was a failure. What did he try? *Va-yahas Calev es ha-am el Moshe*. And he said: *Alo na'aleh ve-yarashnu osah*. Calev tried to do all the right things, but he was outvoted. He and Yehoshua lost, ten to two. It was an uphill battle. They were not going to win. It was nice that they were telling the truth, but truth does not always win. Sometimes sheker wins if it has more powerful, influential, and popular people on its side. Rav Moshe says: Why did the Torah emphasize the reward that Calev gets? *Eikev haita ruach acheres imo va-yimalei acharai, va-havi'osiv el ha-aretz asher ba shama ve-zar'o yorishena*. He says that that's precisely the point. Someone might think: I am trying to do the right thing, to bring the world in the right direction, to influence it in the right way. But I am not going to succeed. There are too many people pushing in the opposite direction. I am wasting my time and will never get anywhere. And you could imagine that in Rav Moshe's

Feinstein's days in America people felt that way. Here I am, standing up for Torah and Mitzvos. I am against everyone. For each one of us, a thousand people say the opposite. We are not going to get anywhere. And Rav Moshe Feinstein says: look at Calev. He got this tremendous reward in the Torah. Hashem was machshiv Calev so much, not because he succeeded. It was davka because he failed. And Hashem said: Nonetheless, I want to hold him up as an example that it's not your responsibility to succeed. Hashem runs the world. Your responsibility to try your hardest to do the right thing. Calev made the right decision; he tried his hardest and got the same reward, whether he would succeed or not, because Hashem does not demand that we succeed. He only demands that we try our absolute best. And Rav Moshe Feinstein adds: It's not even so pashut what's considered success and failure. In the short run, he failed. And Bnei Yisroel remained in the Midbar for 40 years. But who knows what would have been if eleven or all twelve Meraglim would have come back with a negative report? Maybe they would have never made it, even after 40 years. Maybe he really saved the she'eris ha-pleita. And even though it looked like failure at the time, in the long run it led to success and the yerusha of Eretz Yisroel. So even if it doesn't look like you are going to succeed. Even if the odds are against you—there are too many people fighting the other way—look at Calev. Firstly, Hashem judges us by our efforts, not by our successes. And secondly, you never know how you may succeed in the long run.

Look at Rav Moshe Feinstein in America when it was a Midbar, a spiritual wasteland. There were those people who didn't give up and stood up for what's right even though the odds were against them and it seemed hopeless. And in the end, as history would have it, they succeeded in building a tremendous Torah community in America, which is second best in the entire world. Because if you stand up for the right thing, you get your sechar. And you never know—you might succeed in the end!

## Simple Faith, the Key to the Door to Eretz Yisrael

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

**T**his week's parsha deals with the great sin of the meraglim, the spies Moshe sent to investigate the Land of Israel prior to Am Yisrael's entry into the land. The spies brought back a terrifying report, saying how frightening it would be to fight these nations, that the land

is a difficult land to live in, how they saw diseases and death there, and claiming that only giants could withstand the apparently harsh conditions. The people cried and refused to enter the Land of Israel, preferring to rebel against Moshe and return to Mitzrayim. Yehoshua and Kalev, the

two spies who remained loyal to Moshe, tried and failed to convince the people otherwise by extolling the virtues of the land and reminding Bnei Yisrael that Hashem was with them. But the people wouldn't listen, prompting Hashem to pronounce the terrible decree that they would all die in the desert while wandering there for forty years, and only their children would enter the land.

### **Puzzling Denial**

This is a very puzzling episode. As Moshe himself told the Jews, Hashem did so many miracles for them: the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, the miracles at Har Sinai. The nation had survived more than a year of living in a desert without any food or water. They were supernaturally supported by the manna, miraculous bread that fell daily from the sky, and water that came from a rock that Moshe hit. How could the spies and the people feel that Hashem was weaker than the seven nations living in the land of Canaan? How could they deny the reality of Hashem's miracles?

### **Two Kinds of Miracles**

The Shem Mishmuel explains this story based on a fundamental idea developed by the Ramban in Parshas Va'eira. When Hashem first charged Moshe with the mission to speak to the Jews in Egypt, He explained that He was adopting a new approach in dealing with the people. "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as *Keil Shakai*, but I did not let them know My name Havayah (*Yud Kei Vav Kei*)" (Shemos 6:3). Ramban notes, however, that we do find the name Havayah in Hashem's communications with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Clearly, then, Hashem did not mean that He had never before used the name *Havayah*. Instead, He meant that His primary method of interacting with people had changed. Hashem interacted with the avos using the name *Keil Shakai*.

Now, in taking the people out of Egypt, Hashem told Moshe that He would primarily interact with them using the name *Havayah*. What is the significance in the name that God uses to relate to people?

Generally speaking, God runs the world according to the rules of nature, which include the laws of physics, biology, chemistry, etc. Occasionally, though, Hashem will perform a miracle, essentially violating these natural laws.

There are two forms of miracles. One kind of miracle makes a complete break with natural law, the ten plagues being a good example. God changed the molecular

composition of water into that of blood. The dust of the land of Egypt turned into lice. These are miracles wherein the basic laws of nature are broken. When Hashem performs this kind of miracle, He uses the name *Havayah*, which means He is the source of existence and as such He was, is, and will be. He always existed, He exists now, and He always will exist. Just as He created existence and willed the natural laws into existence, He can also break those laws and make existence work in a different way. This type of miracle is rare.

Other miracles function within natural law. These are called hidden miracles. For example, in order to save Lot from being a prisoner of war, Avraham fought a war against a powerful coalition of four kings that had conquered the whole region. He took about 300 people and attacked the great armies of the four kings. With Hashem's help, these 300 people were able to vanquish the kings' much larger armies. Avraham won a battle against the odds, but no natural laws were suspended or broken, making this a hidden miracle.

Miracles in the first category, which Moshe produced in Egypt, are called *nissim geluyim*, revealed miracles. Everyone witnessing one of these events would have to agree that the laws of nature had been suspended. The hidden miracles, the *nissim nistarim*, occur within the rules of nature and seem to be peculiar, coincidental occurrences. A *neis nistar* happens just at the right time to save the Jews.

This is the meaning of the statement, "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as *Keil Shakai*." *Keil* means power, and *Shakai* means the formulator of the rules of nature, *she'amar la'olam dai*. Within the rules of nature, God has the power to manipulate events.

### **Revealed Miracles and God's Kindness**

The exodus of the Jewish People from Mitzrayim stood on *nissim geluyim*, the source of which was *Havayah*, the four-letter name of God that represents His role as Creator and Source of existence.

We also know from the Midrash and halacha that this name is the name of God's mercy, *rachamim*.

Hashem created and runs the world with two pillars. One pillar is *middas hadin*, the rule of justice and law. The basic rules of nature come from *din*, unchanging and unchangeable. The second pillar is *middas harachamim*, the trait of kindness, mercy, and compassion. Different names of Hashem represent different *middos*, different modes of



His interactions with the world.

The name *Havayah* represents rachamim; it is the name of Hashem's chesed. When Hashem created the world, it was an act of pure kindness. Creatures have no demands on Him, no right to request of Him that we exist. The name that signifies His role as Creator and Provider of existence therefore is also the name of *rachamim*, implying that He is full of mercy and kindness.

### **The Motivation Provided by Kiddush Hashem**

The Shem Mishmuel teaches a deeper idea related to this concept based on the writings of the great Chassidic Rebbe the Chozeh of Lublin. The Chozeh said that the greatest motivator for Hashem to do something in this world is kiddush Hashem. This is the process that an open miracle sets in motion. When people see an event and become overwhelmed by the goodness of God, they will praise and glorify Him. Sanctification of God's name may be the most important thing that can happen in this world.

When God performs a revealed miracle, even children and uneducated people see that it is His work and praise Him in response.

In contrast, however, when a miracle is hidden, the event can also be written off as a coincidence. A person must have faith, insight, and sensitivity to realize that an occurrence was God's work concealed within natural law. You need a certain amount of spiritual and religious development in order to realize that an event was, in fact, a *neis*.

The Shem Mishmuel expands on this idea and develops a deeper understanding of the concept of miracles. The mercy of Hashem is more focused on kiddush Hashem; it produces kiddush Hashem. He wants people to realize that He is their Creator and to praise and thank Him. The revealed *neis* achieves this goal very quickly. Therefore, in heaven, the angles do not oppose these kinds of miracles as they, too, want people to appreciate Hashem.

However, when Hashem in His infinite wisdom does not use the trait of mercy, but instead uses the name *Keil Shakai*, the name of hidden miracles within nature, the kiddush Hashem is not so clear. People may not react with adulation, since the miracle is not so obvious. If someone was in a car accident and walked out unscathed, he might just say, "I was lucky." You need sensitivity to see the miracle.

This kind of miracle, therefore, does not get a free pass in heaven. The angels of *din* may express reservations.

They challenge, "Why should you make a miracle for this person? Will he appreciate it? Will he recognize it?" When a *neis nistar* is on the agenda, it is a time of *din* in heaven, and a decision has to be made whether it should take place or not. Some angels say, "Save this person! Make the miracle." Others say, "Don't do it, the person does not deserve it. He will not recognize that he is receiving a miracle." Then God has to decide whether the person deserves the miracle or not. It is a time of divine judgement. This judgement can be tempered by mercy, but it remains justice.

### **Secrets for Successful Prayer**

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the miracles Hashem did for Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were hidden and thus miracles of *din*. Accordingly, the names that Hashem used to communicate with the avos were names of *din*. When the name Hashem uses is *Havayah*, pure mercy motivates the action and an open miracle can take place. Then there is no judgement. When the Jewish People left Egypt, they were on the forty-ninth level of defilement; they didn't deserve any miracles. They were serving idols like the Egyptians. They were doing all kinds of sins, and if *din* had been involved, there would have been no Exodus. In His mercy, though, Hashem took them out of Egypt with great miracles. This is the level of pure kindness of Hashem without any justification or judgement.

This is the difference between the miracles of Moshe, which were supernatural miracles of the chesed of the name *Havayah*, and the deserved miracles of the avos, which were based on the *din* of the name *Keil Shakai*.

Now that we understand this aspect of the inner workings of miracles, we can apply this to our personal davening. When a person has a problem and davens to Hashem, it is important to invoke the concept of kiddush Hashem. When you do this, you will elicit a divine response from the side of chesed rather than of justice. After all, who can say to God, "In all fairness, I am deserving in front of You?" We want our requests to be processed on the chesed side.

The Chozeh proposed a strategy to achieve this goal. Instead of davening for yourself, daven for Hashem Who feels your need. When you are in need and have a problem, you should know that Hashem feels your problem just as you do. When a child cries, the parents cry inside together with the child. When we are in trouble, our Father in heaven feels pain with us. When we daven for a solution,

we can say, “I know that I do not deserve this. But certainly Your holy name is deserving, and You are suffering with me. Have mercy on Yourself and take away the trouble by giving me the salvation that I need.”

Chazal knew this secret. In every Shemoneh Esrei that we pray, we conclude with the words, “*Asei l’ma’an sh’mecha, asei l’ma’an yeminecha*. Do it for Your name, do it because of Your great right hand [of mercy].” We ask that He fulfill our wishes because of His love for the Jewish People, “*L’ma’an yeichaltzun y’didecha*.” We make Hashem’s needs the focus our prayers. This prayer is more powerful because it will produce a kiddush Hashem, the most powerful force in creation.

### The Spies’ Counterargument

When the spies returned with their frightening report, Moshe argued with the people, noting that they were benefiting from revealed supernatural miracles. Why didn’t the people accept Moshe’s claims?

In Beha’aloscha, we read about Eldad and Meidad, the two mysterious prophets who uttered a terrible prophecy: “Moshe will die, and Yehoshua will bring the people into the land.” As punishment for Bnei Yisrael complaining about the mann, Hashem decided that Moshe would not be the one to bring Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael.

Eldad and Meidad pronounced this prophecy in the camp. This decree occurred before the sin of the spies, but no one ever told Moshe because they were afraid. Moshe remained unaware of this prophecy. During the forty years of wandering in the desert, Moshe dreamed of entering Eretz Yisrael. Just before he left this world, Moshe prayed 515 prayers to enter the land, unaware of God’s decree that he would die.

The people therefore knew that Yehoshua would be the one to bring them into Eretz Yisrael. As great as Yehoshua was, he was not Moshe. They thought that Yehoshua would not be able to merit the same miracles that Moshe did. With Moshe gone, Hashem would deal with them not with the name *Havayah*, with pure kindness, but rather with *Keil Shakai*, as the powerful God Who works within nature, only making hidden miracles.

In this case, there would be a *din* in heaven about whether we are deserving or not. If we were to go with Moshe, then even if we didn’t deserve the miracles, Hashem would save us. But if we would go in without Moshe, we would revert to the limitations of nature. We would have a judgement in heaven about whether we are

deserving of these hidden miracles or not.

The people felt that they were not deserving. They knew their weaknesses. Recently, they had worshiped the golden calf. They had complained about the mann and were carried away with hysteria about the lack of meat. They worried, “We questioned Hashem and Moshe for taking us into the desert. We don’t have the level of faith necessary to deserve hidden miracles. God will expect too much from us, and God forbid we will be destroyed.”

### Fear of Our Own Worth

This is the reason the people were not impressed with Moshe’s arguments about the miracles of Mitzrayim and the desert. Moshe wanted these miracles to give the people more faith that Hashem would be able to take them into Eretz Yisrael just like He had cared for them in the desert. The people agreed, but felt that only Moshe was worthy of such miracles. At the lower level they perceived themselves to be on, the level of *din*, they were afraid that they would fail.

This argument has merit. How can a person expect miracles based on judgement and justice in a heavenly court? The people’s terrible mistake was that Moshe, who was God’s messenger, told them to go to Eretz Yisrael. Even if Moshe didn’t realize that he would not go with them, he still conveyed this message from Hashem. If God tells you to go, you will succeed.

Sometimes, we feel unworthy or incapable of performing a certain mission. However, when God gives you a commandment, even if you feel that you are incapable or unworthy of this mitzva, you must know that you can succeed. Some people feel, “I don’t deserve to succeed in this mitzva.” Even if you feel the mitzva is too difficult for you, you have to do your best. This was our commitment at Har Sinai when we said *na’aseh v’nishma*, we will do it and try to understand. Even if our current understanding tells us that it is impossible to do this mitzva now, we try to do it anyway.

### Faith in the Promise

Avraham had this thought process as well. In Bereishis 15:6, the Torah says that Avraham believed in Hashem, and Hashem considered this belief *tzedaka*, an act of charity. In other words, Avraham said to himself, “Eretz Yisrael will indeed be given to me, even though I think it is impossible, because God said that He will give it to me.”

In the Torah, sometimes Hashem tells us things that we think cannot happen. But we must have faith that they will

indeed happen.

Everything that Avraham received was with *din*, judgement, not with pure kindness. Nevertheless, there was *tzedaka* in the *din*. The Shem Mishmuel says this is the idea of the pasuk, “*Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha*. You have to be simple with Hashem” (Devarim 18:13). When Hashem tells you to do something, be simple—just do it. Don’t start calculating whether it makes sense or not.

Bnei Yisrael’s problem at the time of the *meraglim* was that they didn’t have simple faith. With their sophisticated faith, they underestimated their own abilities.

### Impossible Mitzvos

We live in a time when many people think that various mitzvos are impossible. People express this feeling using many different phrases. “It’s above us.” “We’re not on that level, we can’t do it.” “How can we succeed in certain things that the Torah expects us to do?” When it comes to being honest in business, some people say, “I can’t do it. There are so many crooked people around me, and I have been so dishonest until now. How can I be as honest as the Torah wants me to be?” The question is mistaken. Just do it; try, and you will see success. Have simple faith in Hashem’s commandments.

Many people fight with others, speaking *lashon hara* and feeling *sinas chinam*. People say, “I’ve done so much to hurt others. My relationships with certain people have been ruined. How can I straighten this out?” Have simple faith; you can work on those relationships. Try it, and you’ll see it will work.

People say, “I have children to raise. I myself am flawed in character. Can I possibly make a child better than me? They are rebellious, I don’t know what to do!” God said you must try to raise your children. Have simple faith. Don’t fret too much, just do it. *Tamim tihyeh im Hashem Elokecha*. Hashem will help you even if you think you can’t do it.

### Whom Do You Trust?

At the time of the *mergalim*, the Jewish People used human estimations of their abilities. They didn’t understand that Hashem knew them better than they knew themselves. He knew that if they went into the land, they would succeed. They would merit hidden miracles within nature to conquer the land and fight against the Canaanite nations in Eretz Yisrael.

The Gemara (Chullin 5b) cites a pasuk, “*Adam u’vheima toshia Hashem*. God saves man and animal” (Tehillim

36:7). The Gemara interprets this as a reference to brilliant, sophisticated people who make themselves like a simple animal. We have a lot of sophistication. Sometimes, this sophistication blinds us to simple truths.

Hashem runs this world, and if He tells us to do something, then we can do it. We can be like an animal who has a yoke and does exactly what his driver tells him to do. This is the simple faith that a Jew should have, that we can do it just because Hashem told us to. The Shem Mishmuel adds that this simple faith itself will be the merit for the judgement in heaven to come out in our favor, merit enough to deserve a miracle.

Bnei Yisrael could go into Israel and rely simply on Hashem Himself. He is the greatest thing we can rely on. We like to have *tzaddikim*, great people, family, and friends to rely on. We have to realize that Hashem is our greatest friend. We can rely on Him more than on anyone else. Even when you feel that there is no one upon whom to rely, Hashem is always there, and you can rely on Him. This is a simple truth. Our sophistication sometimes blinds us to simple truths. It is possible to think too much, to the exclusion of having simple faith.

Kaleiv and Yehoshua simply said, “Let’s go!...because we can. *Alo na’aleh...ki yachol nuchal lah... Im chafeitz banu Hashem v’heivi osanu el ha’aretz hazos*. If Hashem wants, He will bring us into this land” (Bamidbar 14:8).

The Shem Mishmuel says that the word “*chafeitz*” refers to the Divine will. It is an important word. In Kabbala, there is a concept called *ratzon elyon*. We do a lot of things that Hashem wants. And we study His Torah and think about the things He tells us. We might think we have it all figured out. But the *ratzon elyon* is above our understanding. There are things that Hashem does because of His inscrutable will.

Even if Bnei Yisrael were right that they didn’t deserve Eretz Yisrael, Hashem can still do things even above the *din*. It can come from the level of *ratzon*. When we have the simple faith to do Hashem’s will despite our logic, then Hashem may do things for us that also go against logic. It may be against the logic of the heavenly court, but Hashem will do it anyway. There are certain secret decisions Hashem makes that no one understands. This was the argument of Kaleiv and Yehoshua.

The great merit of the Jewish People throughout history has been *emuna peshuta*, simple faith. We have so many blessings today. We have the Land of Israel and

Yerushalayim. We have physical and material bounty wherever Jews live all over the world. We haven't had this since the times of Shlomo Hamelech. This is because we have faith. Even though there are so many critics of the Jewish nation around the world, we have a simple faith in our Father in heaven. We do the mitzvos simply. For

## “No We Can't” and “Yes We Can”

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

The Yismach Yisrael of Alexander writes that the meraglim's fear was, in truth, legitimate. They were concerned that although Eretz Yisrael is a good land, full of potential, nevertheless, אפס כי עז העם (13:28) – there are hazards and risks. There are many benefits to living in the land, but there are also dangers. The meraglim, understandably, worried that Am Yisrael were not qualified to meet the challenges involved in living in the Land of Israel, and that instead of deriving immense benefit from the land, they would be endangered by it.

Why, then, were they wrong? What was the spies' sin, if they were legitimately concerned about the risks of living in Eretz Yisrael? After all, the Yismach Yisrael notes, Yaakov Avinu, too, was scared. As Eisav approached, Yaakov feared that he was unworthy of the special protection he would need for this dangerous confrontation (קטונתי מכל החסדים – Bereishis 32:10). Why were the meraglim's fears unacceptable?

The Yismach Yisrael answers that Yaakov Avinu plowed ahead despite his fears, whereas the spies recoiled and despaired.

When Benei Yisrael stood at the shores of the Yam Suf and saw the pursuing Egyptian army, they panicked, and considered turning around and returning to Egypt. But they succeeded in overcoming their fears and proceeded into the sea, placing their faith in God's promise. Now, however, when the meraglim returned with a frightening report, the people decided to return to Egypt instead of defeating their fears and moving forward.

It is perfectly acceptable to be afraid, to entertain doubts, to have concerns. To the contrary, before rushing into something, we need to pause, understand what's at stake, what risks are involved, and prepare accordingly before proceeding. The problem is when we just give up, when we assume that because of the risks and challenges, it cannot be done.

example, we keep Shabbos despite all who make fun of us. With this *emuna peshuta* and commitment to Hashem and His Torah, we are fixing the sin of the meraglim.

We hope and pray that the full rectification of the sin of the meraglim will come speedily in our days, and we will see all of our people back home in Eretz Yisrael.

There are two kinds of people. Some, like Kaleiv, say, לא נוכל לה, כי יכול נוכל לה, וירשנו אותה, – “*Let us go up and take possession of [the land], for we can surely do it!*” (13:30). And others, like the rest of the meraglim, say, לא נוכל לעלות, אל העם – “*We cannot go up against the people*” (13:31). There are people, who believe that they can accomplish even in the face of challenge, even when there are legitimate concerns; and then there are people, who right away assume that it cannot be done, who allow the voice of skepticism to prevail, and just give up before considering ways to overcome the obstacles.

Chazal teach that the name כלב alludes to כולו לב – “*all heart.*” Kaleiv's heart was fully invested in the goal of settling Eretz Yisrael, and this passion and commitment is what led him to firmly proclaim, יכול נוכל לה – that it can be done. If we really want something, we will find a way to make it happen. We will first affirm that it can be done, and then we will work patiently, diligently and responsibly to figure out how. Those whose hearts are not invested in the given objective will see the challenges entailed and immediately conclude, לא נוכל, that it can't be done – not because it can't be done, but because they don't care enough to find a way to do it.

Colleagues in the rabbinate have shared with me that anytime they approach their shul board with an idea for a new project, it is immediately shut down. The funds are there, but the response is לא נוכל, that it can't be done, that there are too many uncertainties, that there won't be enough interest, and so on. I am blessed to work for a shul with an attitude of יכול נוכל לה, that is not afraid of challenges, that is prepared to do what it takes to get things done, to improve, to expand, to grow, and to continue building.

In all areas of our lives, we need to proceed with a mindset, with כולו לב, with passion and determination, firmly believing that we can reach our goals, and then carefully figuring out how to make it happen.

# The Age of Pessimism

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Ever since we were liberated from Mitzrayim, we had heard glowing reports about a land of Hashem, which flowed with milk and honey. Having arrived at the doorstep of this magical land, we secretly dispatched twelve agents to gather intel and to determine the best entry strategy.

Everything our spies witnessed in Eretz Yisrael corroborated our expectations. Israel was not a typical land and everything about this country was outsized, beyond human imagination. The mammoth fruits were so colossal that it took eight men to carry one cluster of grapes. Fearsome giants roamed the land, capable of crushing any would-be trespassers under their boots. Evidently, these gigantic ogres weren't prepared to simply roll over and hand us their country. Life seemed unforgiving in this ruthless land, which appeared to devour its inhabitants. Nothing is ever as easy as it looks on paper, and entering the land of Hashem was no different.

Shuddering at the reports of the returning meraglim, we stood at a historical crossroads. We could optimistically place our trust in a Hashem who had emancipated us from Egypt and had split the ocean. Alternatively, we could take the pessimistic route, assuming the worst and caving to our dark fears. Sadly, we chose the cynical approach, rebelled against Moshe, and rerouted Jewish history for forty years. It all depends on how you spin it.

Our descent into gloomy pessimism was caused by loss of faith- both in Hashem and in ourselves. A year before the expedition of the spies we had betrayed Hashem by bowing to the egel. Though He had forgiven us, perhaps there were limits to His divine clemency. Suffering the lingering trauma of our national sins, we harbored severe reservations about whether would assist us in battling these insurmountable giants.

More significant than losing faith in Hashem, we lost faith in ourselves. In the weeks before this reconnaissance mission the nation was roiled by several jarring controversies, such as our immature complaining about meat and our nostalgic pining for the creature comforts of Egypt. After these controversies subsided, the slandering of Moshe by his own two siblings further eroded confidence in his leadership. Our social fabric was quickly disintegrating and without confidence in our future, we

sunk into dark pessimism, collapsing under the pressure of our fears.

Religious success depends upon delicately calibrating between doubt and optimism. Questioning ourselves and cross-examining our personal behavior enables honest self-introspection and religious improvement. By contrast, inflated self-confidence builds complacency and leads to religious apathy and stagnancy. Doubt preserves religious integrity.

Though doubt and uncertainty are vital for personal religious growth, pessimism and uncertainty about our collective future is religiously unhealthy. Essential to religious belief is an optimistic view of the future. Hashem established a historical covenant with our people guaranteeing our Jewish destiny. We may face temporary or even prolonged adversity, but Jewish destiny is inevitable. Excess pessimism about our future represents a deficiency of faith in Hashem. Emunah isn't meant to glaze over hardship or propose naïve assumptions that "everything will be all right". However, emunah should provide a bedrock of optimism for our long-term prospects.

## The Age of Pessimism

We are currently surrounded by a culture of pessimism. Several anti-humanistic trends are weakening our belief in the future of humanity and are causing widespread pessimism. The first tide of pessimism is based upon environmental concerns about the unlimited growth of technology and how it is causing irreparable damage to our planet. This bleak outlook about the future is infecting modern culture with pessimism, convincing us that tomorrow will undoubtedly be worse than today. Astonishingly, some even assert that it is pointless and selfish to bring children into a world which will soon go extinct. Panic about global destruction is causing widespread anticipatory anxiety and is providing a gloomy outlook about our future on this planet. We obviously must do better to conserve planetary resources, but without demoralizing doomsday prophecies and without falling into pessimism.

Ironically the second current of modern pessimism, often referred to as techno-pessimism, is being driven by overconfidence in human technological prowess. Artificial Intelligence will completely reshape our world

and, potentially will help us transcend many of our human limits. Fusing artificial intelligence to human beings may allow us to increase our intelligence and faculties. Additionally, we may be able to create sentient beings that can travel to parts of outer space which currently lie beyond the limits of human travel. Down the line we may be able to preserve our minds or create new forms of intelligence.

Ironically, this supremely optimistic view of the future cheapens the value of human life. If we create beings of superior intelligence what does that say about human identity and about our future? As robots become more human, humans become more robosized. Perhaps, Darwin was right and, as the world evolves to produce higher beings, humans will be the next in line to go extinct. Perhaps we are creating our own extinction.

Environmentalist alarms and swelled ambitions about enhanced reality, are combining to paint a bleak and pessimistic future for the creature of Hashem we call homo sapiens.

### Israeli Pessimism

Israelis have their own set of reasons to be pessimistic. Over the past year, life in Israel hasn't always been rosy. We have endured terrible internal strife which has shattered our national unity and torn apart our social fabric. In the past, as difficult as life has been in Israel, we always took solace in national unity as the great equalizer. We may have encountered difficult periods, but at least we faced the challenges together, as one family. There is nothing like being at home, even when adversity strikes. However, over

## Tourists or Spies?

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's sedra (in Chutz la'Aretz), Shelach, we learn of the infamous sin of Cheit Ha'Meraglim. On the cusp of entry to the land of Israel, just over a year after leaving Egypt, Moshe sent twelve scouts, one man from each tribe, to investigate the Land of Israel. The pasukim tell us: And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: *שְׁלַח-לְךָ אֲנָשִׁים, וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי נֹתֵן, לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: אִי שְׁלַח-לְךָ אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמַטֵּה אֲבֹתָיו, תִּשְׁלָחוּ--כֹּל, נָשִׂיא בְּהֵם - send for yourself men, and they shall scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel, send one man each for his father's tribe; each one shall be a prince in their midst (Bamidbar 13:1-2) ...*

the past year, it feels as if our home itself is burning. To make matters worse, our enemies have sensed our social vulnerability and have begun rattling the sabers of war. Over the past year, in Israel, there is much to be pessimistic about.

This is precisely where faith sets in. Faith in Hashem, the dignity of Man, and the destiny of Jewish history. Humans are the masterpiece of Hashem's creation gifted with divine image and personal dignity. As part of His concern for human welfare He guaranteed that our planet will not collapse, and that humanity will not go extinct. The divine promise of global sustainability does not absolve us from the moral duty of environmental conservation, but it does provide a baseline of confidence about the future. We may develop advanced technology to create beings of higher intelligence of faculties, faculties but we alone possess a divinely endowed and immortal soul and we alone have been chosen by Hashem for moral experience and conscience.

As Jews we have been chosen not just for moral expectations but for historical covenant. For thousands of years, though dislocated from our homeland, we represented Hashem and His values. Our return to the land of Israel is an event of epic proportions and signals the beginning of the end of history. We know exactly how history concludes.

No one can determine exactly how the future will unfold, but faith belief stabilizes our confidence about the future and should help us repel the dark clouds of pessimism.

*אֵת הָאָרֶץ - these are the names of the men that Moshe sent to scout out the land (v.16), וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה לְתוֹר אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, and Moshe sent them to scout out the land (v.17).*

He gave them specific instructions as to what they should look for: And see the land, what is it? Are the people strong or weak? Are they few or many? And what is the quality of the land? And what about the cities within her? And you shall take of the fruit of the land ... *וַיַּעֲלוּ וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ (v.18-21).*

Four times in this passage, we are told that the men were sent la'tur es ha'Aretz - to tour and scout out the Land!



# Where Did the Spies Go Wrong?

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Shelach, G-d tells Moses (Numbers 13:2): שְׁלַח לְךָ אֲנָשִׁים, וְיִתְּרוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, "Send forth for you men, and let them scout out the land of Canaan that I am giving to the Children of Israel."

As the people of Israel stand on the threshold of entering the land of Canaan, Moses, upon G-d's instruction, sends twelve distinguished men, heads of the Children of Israel, to survey the land and report back to the people.

After forty days in the land, they return.

Two of the twelve men, Caleb and Joshua, urge the people to have courage and march forward. Ten of the men, however, deliver a demoralizing report that causes the people to lose faith of ever taking hold of the land. As a result of the scouts' calumny, the Children of Israel are severely punished. A Divine decree is issued, requiring the people to wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the men who are age 20 and older at the time of this mission, die in the wilderness.

The entire episode of the scouts is rather perplexing. If G-d instructed Moses to send the men, why is He angry at the people when they come back with an evil report? After all, they only reported what they saw. So, why should they be punished?

Rashi citing the sages of the Talmud, (Sotah 34b), suggests that it was at the people's (not G-d's) initiative that the scouts were sent to the land of Canaan. Since Moses was reluctant to do so, he asked G-d, Who said, "I have told them that the land is good. [But since they question me,] I will let them test my veracity at the risk of being misled and losing their chance to enter the land."

While Moses ultimately approved of sending the scouts, he actually hoped that his agreement to send them would dissuade the people from pressing their request.

The Midrash Aggadah (Deuteronomy 1:22) offers the following parable: Someone wishes to buy a donkey, but says that he must first test the animal. The seller enthusiastically agrees. "May I take it to both the mountains and valleys?" "Of course." Seeing that the seller is so confident of the animal's powers, the buyer decides that he has nothing to fear, and forgoes the test. He buys the donkey without testing the animal and is very satisfied. So too, Moses thought that his willingness to let the people

send scouts to survey the Promised Land, would convince them that they have nothing to fear. However, he was mistaken. The people insisted on hearing about the land from their peers. So, he sent the spies.

The Malbim, however, offers a radically different interpretation. The Malbim, once again, astounding in his perspicacity, delves with his keen insight into specific word usage, uncovering textual interpretations that are truly radical, yet faithful to the basic meaning of the text.

In his commentary on parashat Shelach, the Malbim notes that G-d instructs Moses to send for himself people who would tour or scout the land of Canaan. In fact, the word in the Hebrew text is וְיִתְּרוּ--"v'yah'too'roo"--let them tour, not לְרַגֵּל--"l'rah'gel"--to spy! The Malbim notes that there are two types of spies. A nation that seeks a place to settle, first sends out scouts to survey the land, to find out if the land is good or bad. Only when the first set of scouts return and report that the land is favorable, then does the nation send out a second set of spies to conduct a systematic military study of the land to note the vulnerable locations and the strategic fortified areas.

To perform the task of scouting, the nation sends representatives from each tribe to see which part of the land is suitable for each individual tribe. The tribe of Judah, which is involved in grape growing and wine production, will look for the luscious fertile land in the hills of Judea and Hebron. Each tribe must find the location that best suits its own talents and strengths.

On the other hand, the Malbim points out, when military spies are sent to the land, they are sent secretly. After all, what are the names of the spies that Joshua sends from the Sheetim (Joshua 2) to check out the City of Jericho? We don't know, because it is classified information! Joshua does not send out twelve people. Only two spies are necessary, so the mission can be conducted securely, in utmost secrecy. That's why the text in Joshua 2:1 says: וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן נֹון מִן הַשְּׂטִיִּים שְׁנַיִם אַנְשִׁים מִרְגָּלִים, חֲרִישׁ: לְאֹמֵר, And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Sheetim two spies, secretly, saying: "Go view the land and Jericho." The people do not need twelve representatives. They need two skilled intelligence operatives. Their names are unimportant, because they do not represent tribal interests, they are agents who serve in the security services of all the



people of Israel.

So where did the scouts go wrong? Originally, says the Malbim, Moses sent the twelve tribal representatives to check out the land, not as an espionage mission, but rather to survey the land. The Malbim deftly observes that when Moses retells the story in Deutoronomy, scripture notes that the scouts turn and ascend the mountain and arrive in the Valley of Eshkol. Deutoronomy 1:24 reads: וַיִּפְּנוּ וַיַּעַל וַיִּרְגְּלוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד נַחַל אֶשְׁכּוֹל, וַיִּרְגְּלוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ. Says the Malbim: Until the emissaries came to Nachal Eshkol, the Valley of Eshkol, they were scouts. It was only at the valley of Eshkol that they were converted into spies!

Scripture there reports, that the men proceeded to take samples from the fruit of the land. When they saw the giant fruit and the giant people, they were intimidated, resulting in their loss of faith. Instead of serving as scouts, at that point they became spies. They looked at the land of Canaan, not as a place to settle, but rather as a place where they would have to battle with the giants of the land. How will they ever be able to defeat the people who eat such enormous-sized fruits? Despite the fact that G-d had clearly told the people that He would fight the battle for them in Canaan, the people lost faith.

The scouts report upon their return (Numbers 13:33), that they saw the נְפִילִים--“Neh’fee’lim” and the sons of the giants, וַנִּהְיֶה בְּעֵינֵינוּ כַּחַגְבִּים, וְכִן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם, “we were in our own eyes like grasshoppers,” they report, “and so were

we in their eyes.” The scouts’ image of themselves had been so reduced, that they lost faith and courage that they would ever be able to take over the land of Canaan from its fearsome inhabitants.

Every Jew, indeed, every human being, has both a human and a Divine mission to fulfill, a mission that is always Divinely directed. However, we often fail to understand the Divine message that directs the mission. In fact, sometimes we don’t even hear the message! The price we pay for not hearing and/or understanding G-d’s message is often costly. We find ourselves wandering in the desert/wilderness for forty years or more, aimlessly and helplessly.

The Al-mighty has given His people precise instructions. We, His people, must heed them, and abide by them. We must study His instructions (the Torah) carefully so that we know exactly what the Al-mighty expects of us. If we do so, the “Promised Land” will be ours. If not, we will face wilderness and possible oblivion, for a frightfully long period.

One need not be a brilliant or insightful commentator like the Malbim in order to hear the message of G-d. All we need do, is to open our eyes, ears, and hearts to the Al-mighty, and allow His message to penetrate, so that we may conduct our lives, not doing battle with G-d, but rather walking alongside Him..

## What Does Hashem Want From Me?

*Rabbi Jared Anstandig*

The central story of Parashat Shelach is the story of the spies’ exploration of Eretz Canaan and their prediction of certain failure in conquering it. The aftermath of their report, once the people receive their forty year punishment, tends to be discussed much less. After hearing that they will not be allowed to enter the Land of Canaan, a group of Bnei Yisrael, acting without Divine authorization, attempts to take the land by force. Their invasion is immediately crushed by the Canaanites and Amalekites living in the area.

This second story, known as the story of the “Ma’apilim” (from the verb used to describe their actions in Bamidbar 14:44) raises the eyebrows of several commentators. What happened that caused a group of Bnei Yisrael to suddenly change their minds to believe that they could (and should

attempt to) conquer the Canaanites? Where was this zeal when the spies first delivered their report?

Don Isaac Abarbanel suggests that this shift was brought about by the death of the spies. Once Bnei Yisrael see Hashem’s punishment meted out against sinners, they realize that they are in the wrong. Nonetheless, he explains, they ultimately failed in their attempt because they didn’t perform complete teshuvah. Their sin of believing the spies was the result of their disbelief in Hashem’s ability to help them conquer Eretz Canaan. Had they repented from this erroneous belief, they would have sought out Divine sanction before their campaign, an avenue that the Torah states explicitly they did not pursue. We see from here that despite the miracles they had experienced until now, the nation still struggled with complete faith in Hashem.

A related approach is taken by the Or HaChaim. He writes (Devarim 1:43) that Bnei Yisrael's actions are consistent with what they were before. In both scenarios they chose to rebel against Hashem. When Hashem told them that they could conquer the land, they refused to believe it. And, now that Hashem had decreed that they may not enter the land, they attempted to do so anyway. According to the Or HaChaim, the people still consistently pushed back and rebelled against the Divine.

The Netziv (Haamek Davar) offers a startlingly different perspective. He suggests that the people took Moshe's words seriously. They understood that Hashem did not want them to attempt to invade Eretz Canaan. And, they internalized the message that they would almost definitely die in their invasion. Nonetheless, they continued their ill-fated attack so that if they died, they would die in the service of Hashem (literally, so that it would be "mesirut nefesh be'emet"). For the Netziv, Bnei Yisrael were acting with the noblest of intentions.

Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin offers a similar explanation. In Tzidkat HaTzaddik, section 46, he alludes to a concept found in Chazal (Pesachim 86b), "One should do whatever the master of the house says, except leave."

Rav Tzadok understands this as saying that even if Hashem Himself tells us to leave

Eretz Yisrael, we disobey Him. The Ma'apilim believed, according to Rav Tzadok, that Hashem really wanted them to enter the land. Their only mistake, Rav Tzadok elaborates, was their timing; the era of redemption had not yet (and still has not yet) come. Comparable to the Netziv's understanding, the people were operating according to what they believed was in fact Hashem's will for them.

Taking these approaches together paints a mixed message. On the one hand, we see a group of people refusing to fully submit to Hashem's will. On the other hand, we see elements of subverting Hashem's will so as to fulfill its deeper meaning. While we cannot resolve this disagreement, there is a lesson to be learned about meditating on Hashem's will. No matter what they say about the Ma'apilim, all agree that our role is to take the time to ask the question – What does Hashem want from me now? It's not always easy to hear the answer, but if we're able to ask the question, we're already in a better place than where we started.