



The Spies' insecurity in God's ability to deliver our enemy, is the same sin that causes Jews to desire Segulas. If you have God, you don't need worthless, idolatrous trinkets.

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Weekly Parsha

Shelach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“Any Yehoshua bin Nun sent from Shittim two men – secret spies – saying: Go and see the land and Yericho. And they went and they came to the home of a harlot. And her name was Rachav. And they laid down there.” (Yehoshua 2:1)

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“Superior Race”:
Doesn't that echo a former European party?

Choose your flag wisely. Our claims must all be Torah-based, and not baseless arrogance.

Jewish Superiority?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I share some final thoughts rejecting the false view of Jewish Superiority:

1) Maimonides appendage to his commentary on the Mishnah: *“I have now finished this work in accordance with my promise, and I fervently beseech the Almighty to save us from error. If there be one who shall discover an inaccuracy in this Commentary or shall have a better explanation to offer, let my attention be directed unto it...”* (The Guide) He was not talking to peers, but to “anyone”. Maimonides admits that even a genius as he will make errors, and that normal men like us can detect these errors. Therefore, when encountering falsehoods in the works of those Rabbis of lesser intelligence than Maimonides, we must not favor the author, in place of truth. Any person – Rabbis included – must err. Their books will contain mistakes. Do not deify the author, and accept his mistake, as Maimonides teaches here.

2) The Rabbis of the Talmud acquiesced to the Greeks, that they were wiser. They admitted that a Jew has no monopoly on perfection, or wisdom.

3) If the Jewish soul is superior, as some erring Jews claim, a fallacy follows: it is not I who does the good and outperforms the gentile, but it is this “superior soul” earning all the credit. Thus, my free will is taken away: a denial of the Torah Fundamentals. And without free will, I cannot earn reward, for it is not I who does the good... it was the

“superior soul” implanted in me. Therefore, I can also do no sin. But we know quite well that we choose our actions... we all sin: *“For there is no man righteous in the land who does good and does not sin.”* (Eccl. 7:20) We must then say that we all have free will. Thus, I can choose the evil path, and live more corruptly than a gentile who chooses the good life. In this case, the claim of a superior soul is meaningless. For we see that any Jew may choose freely to sin, while the gentile may choose to live as Ruth. In the end, reality teaches that the born Jew has no superiority over the gentile. We simply have a different ‘mission’, but our human ‘design’ is identical with all mankind.

All Jews can sanctify God’s name by abandoning false arrogance, and copying Ruth’s humility, which earned her descendants like Kings David and Solomon...and the Messiah. Yes, Messiah descends from a gentile. We are all the same, just as God willed it. Open your minds, and your arms to the gentiles, and teach them God’s truths, which are truly pleasant to those who seek truth. We can then fulfill the verse uttered by admiring gentiles, *“What a wise and understanding people this is.”* (Deut. 4:6)

Think a moment: if gentiles can recite those words of Moses, and they can according to Moses, doesn’t that mean that they understand our laws just as we do? Doesn’t that mean we share identical intelligence? ■

(Shelach cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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This week's parasha discusses the incident of the spies. Moshe sends a group of spies into the Land of Israel. The spies return and report that the land is well-defended. They also question the vitality and health of the land's environment. Only two of the spies, Yehoshua and Kalev, demur. They insist that the land is remarkably fertile and that they would succeed in its conquest.

The nation was persuaded by the report provided by the majority of the spies and concluded that they were doomed. They would not succeed in the conquest. The nation decided that it must return to Egypt.

Hashem punished Bnai Yisrael. The people were condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years – until the members of the generation died. Then, their children would possess the land of Israel.

This week's haftara is taken from Sefer Yehoshua. Forty years have passed and now Yehoshua leads the nation. Bnai Yisrael have arrived at the border of the land of Israel and are prepared to follow Yehoshua into the land. They will vanquish the nations that now occupy it and take possession of the Land of Israel. But Yehoshua makes an amazing decision. He decides that before initiating his campaign, he will send spies into the land.

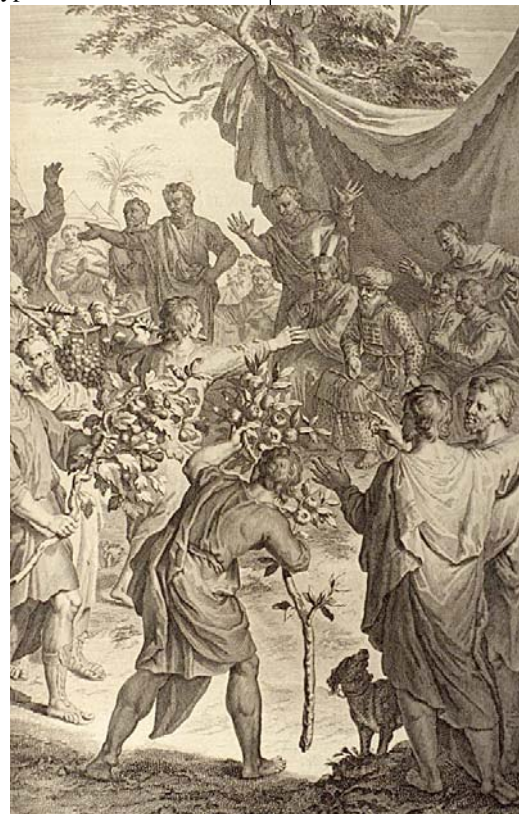
This seems to be a very strange decision. Moshe had sent spies and this had led to disaster. Yehoshua was one of these spies. No one was more familiar with the incident. Why would Yehoshua risk bringing about a repetition of the same catastrophe that Moshe's spies instigated?

“And it was told to the King of Yericho saying: Men from Bnai Yisrael have come here tonight to spy out the land.” (Yehoshua 2:2)

Yehoshua's spies are immediately recognized. The king of Yericho is notified of their presence. He launches a search to find them. Rachav decides to hide them. She bravely protects them

from detection. She helps them to escape from Yericho and return to Bnai Yisrael. In exchange, she asks that Bnai Yisrael spare her and her family.

It seems that Yehoshua's decision was ill-advised. The spies were easily detected. They were only saved through the efforts of Rachav. Without her intervention, Yehoshua's decision would have been disastrous. At best, the spies would have returned with a report of their harrowing experiences and near-deaths. This account would not have been very reassuring.



“Send for yourself men and they should spy out the Land of Cana'an that I give to Bnai Yisrael. You should send one man from each tribe of their fathers. Each of them should be a leader.” (BeMidbar 13:2)

Before we can understand Yehoshua's decision, we must review elements of the incident in our parasha. Hashem authorizes Moshe to create a group of twelve spies. Each shevet – tribe – of Bnai Yisrael must be represented with the exception of Shevet Leyve. This group will be sent together into the land and it

will bring back a report.

Why were twelve spies needed? This seems to be an unnecessarily large group. The larger the group the more likely it will be detected. Yehoshua's two spies were immediately observed. Certainly, only a miracle could protect this large delegation from detection. Why did Hashem authorize a plan that needlessly relied on a miraculous intervention?

But it must be noted that this large group did miraculously avoid detection. Whereas Yehoshua's more stealth strategy was a failure and his two spies were immediately recognized. It seems that Hashem was willing to protect the secrecy of the large group sent by Moshe. But Hashem was not willing to afford the same protection to Yehoshua's spies.

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(Shelach continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

“And look upon the land – what is it? And regarding the nation that dwells upon it – is it strong or weak? Is it many or few?”
(BeMidbar 13:18)

Yehoshua’s directions to his spies are not outlined in detail. However, the Torah provides a detailed description of Moshe’s instructions. It is difficult to determine the overarching mission of Moshe’s spies. Nachmanides argues, that the spies were sent to provide information that would be used in developing a strategy for conquest. He explains that it is inappropriate to rely upon miraculous intervention. Instead, we must make every effort to act responsibly. We cannot conduct ourselves impulsively or recklessly and then rely on Hashem to intervene and save us from our own carelessness.[1]

However, this is not the most obvious interpretation of Moshe’s directions. He instructs the spies to bring back a sample of the fruit of the land. He tells them that they should report on the fertility of the land. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra suggests that the spies had a dual mission. They were to provide information to be used in developing a strategy for conquest. But they were also to provide information to be used to assess the quality of the land.[2]

We can understand the reason for gathering information relevant to conquest. Nachmanides’ comments deal thoroughly with this issue. However, it is more difficult to understand the reason for gathering information relevant to the land’s fertility. Moshe had already communicated to the nation Hashem’s promise that they would be taken to a land flowing with milk and honey. Why was a confirmation of the land’s fertility required?

The composition of Moshe’s spies and their strange mission can be explained by a single consideration. In his recounting of this event in Sefer Devarim, Moshe explains that the original impetus to send these spies came from the nation. The nation came to Moshe and requested that he send spies.[3] In our parasha, Hashem responds to this request and authorizes Moshe to send the spies.[4]

The origin of the suggestion to send the spies explains the composition of the group and its assigned mission. The nation’s suggestion apparently reflected uncertainly and fear. They were not confident in their ability to confront and defeat the inhabitants of the land. Neither were they convinced that the land’s fertility and richness merited the danger they perceived in its conquest. The spies’ mission was designed to address both of these doubts. The composition of the group reflected that these spies were selected in order to address the concerns of the entire nation. Their success in addressing the fears and



doubts of the nation would depend upon their credibility. The representative composition of the group would assure its credibility.

This explains an interesting nuance in the behavior of the spies. Upon their return, they presented their report. We would have expected them to report to Moshe. Moshe would then decide how to best use the information the spies gleaned. But instead, after reporting to Moshe and Aharon, the spies immediately presented their report to the people.[5] This is understandable given the origin of the suggestion to send these spies. The spies were sent in response to the urgings and anxieties of the nation. They were sent as the nation’s representatives. Therefore, when they returned, they reported to the entire nation.

We can now better understand Yehoshua’s behavior. He did not send spies in response to a popular request. The spies he sent were not a national delegation. Two individuals were sent. They were sent in secrecy. Rabbaynu David Kimchi – Radak – explains that the nation was unaware of the mission.[6] The spies were selected by Yehoshua; he sent them; and they reported only to him.

But what was Yehoshua’s objective in sending these spies? As noted above, the narrative does provide an account of exact instructions provided by Yehoshua. Perhaps, the objective of the mission can be deduced by its outcome. As

explained above, Rachav hid the spies and then assisted them in their escape. She did this in exchange for a promise that she and her family would be spared during the conquest. But she also explained that she and all of the inhabitants of the land had heard of the destruction of the Egyptians and the other nations that had opposed Bnai Yisrael in its march towards the Land of Israel. The nations of the land were terrified. She was eager to win the favor of the spies because she was fully confident that Bnai Yisrael would conquer the land. The spies brought back this message to Yehoshua: nations of the land are demoralized and disheartened.

This suggests a new perspective from which we must consider the detection of the spies. This detection was an essential step in their success in gathering the intelligence that they reported. Once they were detected, Rachav was forced to choose between here allegiance to her own king and the opportunity to forge an agreement with these representatives of Bnai Yisrael. She chose to create an agreement. In the process, she explained her reasoning and the fear and desperation of the nations of the land. This was the very intelligence that the spies were sent to gather. In other words, the detection of the spies was not the result of an absence of providence. It was an expression of providence.

Now, we can easily understand why Yehoshua was not concerned with a repeat of the disaster brought about by the first spies. These spies were sent by Yehoshua and reported only to him. They were not a delegation. They were two people. Their absence would not be immediately noticed. But most important, these spies were not sent to perform an evaluation of the land or to gather strategic information. Their sole purpose was to report back on the morale of the nations of the land. Yehoshua could not predict the details of the report but he has confident of its general tone. Radak explains that he knew that the spies would bring back a report that he could share with the people and that this report would build their confidence.[7] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:3.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 13:18-20.

[3] Sefer Devarim 1:22.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 122.

[5] Sefer BeMidbar 13:26.

[6] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Yehoshua 2:1.

[7] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Yehoshua 2:1.

RABBI REUVEN MANN
CONGREGATION RINAT YISRAEL
PLAINVIEW, NEW YORK

THE SWORD OF PEACE



My Dear Friends and Fellow Americans,

Every year in the Hebrew month of Nissan, which generally falls sometime in April, Jews gather to celebrate Passover and recount the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The Jews had been enslaved by Pharaoh, the wicked king of Egypt. G-d sent Moses to confront Pharaoh and tell him, "Let My People Go and worship me in the wilderness." When Pharaoh defiantly refused G-d intervened with a mighty Hand to bring down his evil regime and grant physical and spiritual freedom to the former slaves. We recount this story and teach it to our children, although it happened about three and a half thousand years ago because its eternal lessons are relevant to every generation. They are that we must recognize our Creator, respect the dignity of all people who are created in His Image and emulate G-d's ways by confronting evil and defeating it. History teaches that evil can only triumph because of the silence and moral indifference of the bystanders and the failure of good people to come to the aid of their brethren in need.

I believe that no country embodies the ideals of freedom and compassion more than America. And yet, America is such an underappreciated country. What would the world be like today if not for America? In the 20th century the evil empires of Fascism, Nazism and Communism were crushed and dismantled because of American leadership of the free world. Yet I am concerned that too many people who enjoy the freedoms of our country fail to appreciate its greatness. Many have nothing but unconstructive criticism for America, disdain for its leaders and hatred for our President.

This would be contemptible at any time, but have we forgotten that we are at war against a brutal enemy who despises freedom and the dignity of man? I am appalled by the lack of patriotism which afflicts the land. This is the time to remember that in war there is no substitute for victory. Nothing would be more disastrous than a U.S. defeat in Iraq, Heaven Forbid. Our brave troops have fought magnificently to secure the downfall of one of the most odious regimes in history. It is almost a year since justice caught up with Saddam Hussein and he met the fate he so richly deserved. A new opportunity for a better life in Iraq was created as millions of people were saved from tyranny, thereby joining the hundreds of millions of people who were liberated from the evil "isms of the 20th century by the steely determination and freedom loving spirit of the American soldier.

Ladies and Gentlemen: We have gathered here today to pay tribute to those who fought and died for our country throughout its history. I ask you to honor and reaffirm, for ourselves and our children, the eternal ideals of freedom and human dignity that they fought for and which America represents.

I ask you to join me in prayer for the men and women who are right now in harms' way in far flung battlefields around the world. May G-d be with them to shelter and protect them and give them the strength to prevail in their monumental mission.

And I call on each and every American never to lose sight of the evil nature of the enemy. Never forget 9/11 – when thousands of ordinary Americans engaged in productive lives were suddenly and viciously destroyed. Never forget the merciless beheadings of innocent civilians. Remember always the horrific brutality which the enemy regularly and casually visits on innocent men, women and children.

Remember also this critical distinction: The enemy fights for glory, conquest and the destruction of advanced civilization. We fight for freedom and the dignity of man. Theirs is a sword of war and destruction. Ours is a sword of liberation and peace. Almighty G-d, may the sword of peace be triumphant and may the prophecy of Isaiah be soon fulfilled. "They will beat their swords into ploughshares. Nation will not lift sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more. For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea. Let this be thy will. And let us say, Amen. ■

Presented at the Annual Memorial Day Parade and Service – At Veteran's Memorial Park Hicksville, New York May 28, 2007

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student



the Spies

In order to understand the story of the Meraglim we must first examine the nature and cause of their sin. A careful analysis of the story raises many perplexing questions that demand explanation. A proper appreciation of the story will teach us some very important lessons, which can help us in perfecting our own behavior and our relationship with our Creator.

We must first investigate the motivation behind the mission of the Meraglim. Rashi remarks that Bnei Yisrael initially proposed the mission. Moshe was ambivalent about this proposition. On the one hand he understood Bnei Yisrael's need to scout the land, but apparently recognized a latent danger in the operation. Moshe was perplexed, and accordingly sought counsel from God. What was Moshe's concern? A strong case could be made that the mission made absolute sense. Judaism demands that a person be proactive and behave in accordance with his intellect. To sit back and expect God to take care of one's needs is a distorted, infantile idea of bitachon – trust in God. True bitachon demands the individual utilize his tzelem Elokim, his mind, to act rationally and to take security only in his recognition of the ultimate reality. The people wanted to know about the land that they were going to conquer. The spies were the nobility of the Jewish people, men of distinction and leaders of the people. They felt that a scouting mission was essential to properly plan an attack. Did not Yehoshua ultimately send scouts prior to entering the land 40 years later? How was the action of the Meraglim any different? What bothered Moshe about this mission and what was the nature of his concern?

In order to identify and properly understand the dangers of the mission we must scrutinize the entire sequence of events. A thorough analysis, based on the comments of Chazal, gives rise to many questions, the resolution of which may help us comprehend the underlying sin of the spies.

The spies, upon returning, reported their findings to the entire Jewish people. One of their conclusions was that Eretz Yisrael was "eretz ochelet yosheveha," (Bamidbar 13:32) a land that consumes its inhabitants. Rashi explains that the scouts reported that wherever they went they encountered an inordinate number of funerals. This, they felt, reflected the fact that it was a difficult and treacherous land to settle. Rashi explains that the spies failed to perceive the good intent of God's actions. God chose to distract the inhabitants so that they would not pay any heed to the spies, thereby removing any element of danger from the mission. The Gemara in Sotah 35a adds that the residents of the land were at the funeral of Iyov, who protected that generation. Nevertheless the spies did not appreciate this Divine assistance. Calev and Yehoshua, on the other hand, recognized and appreciated this kindness of God. They reported to the people, "sar tzelem me'aleihem" (ibid. 14:9) God has removed his shade, his protection, from the peoples of the land. Rashi tells us that Calev and Yehoshua were referring to Iyov, their protector, whom God had killed. As such, the inhabitants of the land were now vulnerable to being destroyed.

We must pause and ask: what do the Gemara and Rashi mean? Are they positing that Iyov lived at this time? Furthermore, why were the other spies so blinded to God's helpful hand?

After reporting their findings the spies rallied the people and incited them to complain against Moshe and Aharon. The people said, "let us appoint a new leader to and return to Egypt" (ibid. 14:4). The Gemara in Sanhedrin 107b states that the language of, "nitnah rosh – appoint us a leader" is "lashon avodah zarah – an expression that connotes idolatry." This comment is difficult to understand. What is the connection between Bnei Yisrael's fear of entering the land and idolatry?

Calev and Yehoshua did not participate in the sin of the other spies. In order to help us understand the ramifications of the sin we must first analyze the behavior of Calev and Yehoshua to understand why they didn't participate. The Gemara in Sotah 34b tells us that Calev went to kivrei Avot – the graves of his forefathers – in order to plead for God to have mercy on him. The Baalei Tosafot cite the Gemara in Brachos 18a which states that the dead lack knowledge of worldly events. If that is the case, the Baalei Tosafot ask, what was the intent of Calev in visiting their graves? How could such a visit possibly help Calev in asking for mercy from God? Furthermore, what was the intent of Calev in asking for mercy and

what did this have to do with not succumbing to the advice of the spies? The Gemara also tells us that Yehoshua did not join Calev in his journey to kivrei Avot because Moshe had already sought God's compassion on his behalf when he changed his name from Hoshea to Yehoshua. This was done so that God would save him from the bad counsel of the spies. How does a name change or a visit to a cemetery protect one from becoming falling into a bad crowd?

The question that is most basic to the whole story is: why were the spies and the rest of the nation terrified about attacking the inhabitants of the land? Where was their trust in God? As God asked Moshe, "How long will [this nation continue] not to have faith in Me, despite all the signs I have performed in its midst?" (ibid. 14:11). This nation witnessed the most miraculous of plagues and watched as most powerful nation in the world was rendered powerless. This nation observed the total annihilation of the Egyptians at the splitting of the Red Sea as they marched through walls of flowing water. This was nation that God personally brought out of Egypt and sheltered and sustained in the wilderness. What could possibly cause them to suddenly question God's ability to lead them into the Promised Land? Could they have doubted His ability to protect them? Such a possibility seems absurd.

In order to answer these questions we must first understand the state of mind of the Jewish people at this fateful time in history. The Gemara in Sotah 34b states that we have a tradition that the names of the various spies allude to their actions. "Setur ben Michael" was so named because "setur ma'asav shel haKadosh Baruch Hu," he distorted the actions of God. His father's name connotes "mach E-I," he portrayed God as weak. Rashi explains that his hatred of God caused him to lie in his report. He portrayed God as weak by comparing Him to a homeowner who is unable remove his furniture from his house, the underlying accusation being that God is unable to drive the inhabitants out of the land. "Nachvi ben Vofsi" was named because "hechvi d'varav shel Hashem," he concealed the words of God." His father's name alludes to "pise'ah al midotav," he ignored God's attributes. Rashi explains that he concealed things by not reporting things the way he actually observed them. He also ignored the good things that God did for Bnei Yisrael by not reporting them accurately, for example, by reporting that the land consumed its inhabitants and giving Bnei Yisrael impression that the land was undesirable and impossible to conquer. He distorted and concealed the fact that God caused these deaths in order to prevent their destruction.

An analysis of the Gemara poses several considerable difficulties. What does it mean that the spies' hatred of God made them liars? Why would these spies hate God? At the inception of the mission they

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Weekly Parsha

were considered ha'sarim – the leaders. These were individuals that personally experienced the great beneficence of the Creator. How could such noble individuals stoop to the base level of lying about the God Who took them out of Egypt? What was the cause of this behavior?

The Gemara, by citing the tradition that the spies' names allude to their actions, provides great insight into the nature of the spies' sin. This Gemara sheds light on the psychological underpinnings of the actions of the spies. These men were faced with an internal conflict. On the one hand they were the nobility, the leaders and guides of the nation. But at the same time they, like all of Bnei Yisrael, had all of their needs provided for by God. He liberated them from slavery, defeated their masters, protected them in the wilderness, and presently led them into their new homeland. Consequently these leaders felt impotent. They felt as though they, the would-be leaders of the Jewish people, had no role in their salvation. With this underlying, unconscious motivation, the leaders roused the people to demand that Moshe send spies to scout out the land. They did in order to play an active role in the process of entering the land, thereby satisfying their need to feel proactive and important. Moshe was cognizant of this psychological need but was caught in a dilemma. On the one hand he recognized that this request was a deviation from the God's set course of action, for God had not commanded Moshe to send the spies. On the other hand he recognized that were he to deny Bnei Yisrael's request their feelings of inadequacy would only intensify, generating feelings of resentment and possibly rebelliousness. After consulting with God, who left the decision up to Moshe, he reluctantly agreed to send spies in an attempt to satisfy the psychological need of the people and the leaders in a healthy manner. The Gemara in Sotah is informing us of the psychological mindset of the spies. Obviously they didn't hate God. However, they resented the fact that God did everything for them, especially since they were supposed to be the leaders of the people. Their pride would not allow them to accept the fact the state of being completely passive and powerless. It is this unconscious resentment that the Gemara refers to as "hatred" of God. It was this resentment which caused the spies to be terrified upon seeing the mighty inhabitants of the land. Rather than attributing this reaction to their own failings, their inability to confront their own inadequacy led them to project their weakness onto God, comparing Him to a homeowner who is unable to move his furniture. Unconsciously, they could not tolerate the notion that God would have to take care of them again because they were totally helpless.

But the question still remains: how did this resentment prevent them from recognizing and appreciating all of the good that God had and continued to do for them? Why did they unconsciously project their

own weakness onto God and blind them to the display of providence they had been subject to thus far?

An understanding of the Klal Yisrael's response to the spies' report is quite revealing. They did not cry out to God to assist them in conquering the inhabitants nor did they demand that Moshe explain God's actions. Rather their immediate reaction was, "appoint us a leader and we will return to Egypt" (ibid. 14:4). Our Sages teach us that this reaction stemmed from an idolatrous emotion. Bnei Yisrael viewed God as a Father in heaven Who took care of their every need because they were special. All of the miracles, care, and sustenance provided to them throughout the Exodus caused them to feel like spoiled children. They failed to recognize the mission with which they were charged at Sinai, that they were chosen to act as a moral light unto the world. They were destined to enter the land of Israel, not because God wanted to fulfill their desires, but in order to live at the highest spiritual and intellectual level and serve as a role model for the nations of the world, causing them to exclaim "surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation" (Devarim 4:6). It was only because of this mission that God watched over them and supervised them. God's providence functioned solely for the purpose of enabling them to achieve spiritual perfection. However, like rebellious children, they could not tolerate the fact that God had to take care of all their needs. They could not tolerate this because the idolatrous emotion pervaded their relationship with God. They acted as though God existed for the sole purpose of caring for their needs as helpless children. The hatred the Gemara describes is the unconscious

resentment that a child encounters when he realizes his own inadequacies. The child cannot tolerate his total dependence on the parent. That is why there is no answer to God's rhetorical question to Moshe, "How long will [this nation continue] not to have faith in Me, despite all the signs I have performed in its midst?" (Bamidbar 14:11). It is interesting to note that the word "b'tocho," "in their midst," is used instead of a word indicating that the miracles were done for them. The reason why God wanted to destroy them at this point in time is that the people had totally corrupted themselves and their mission by adopting this selfish view of their relationship with Him.

We can now also understand Chazal's interpretation of Calev and Yehoshua's response to the accusation of "it is a land that consumes its inhabitants." They responded by assuring the people that, "God removed the protection of the inhabitants." Chazal state that this refers to Iyov who had died and was the protector and strength for the inhabitants of the land. Chazal are again underscoring the basic sin of the Meraglim. Iyov typified a person whose experience taught him the proper perspective of one's relationship with the Creator. God does not exist merely to help a person fulfill his desires. His providence is based upon man's perfection as a spiritual being. The spies totally misconstrued the events they witnessed in the land of Israel in the same fashion, which distorted their entire relationship with God.

Yehoshua and Calev did not participate in the sin of the Meraglim but instead gave an accurate description of what they witnessed. They told the people not to worry about the inhabitants of the land, assuring them that God would destroy them and

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MESORA

Talk LIVE

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8:30am - Rabbi Reuven Mann: Rambam Laws of Blessings

11:15am - Rabbi Ben-Chaim: Worthlessness of Longevity

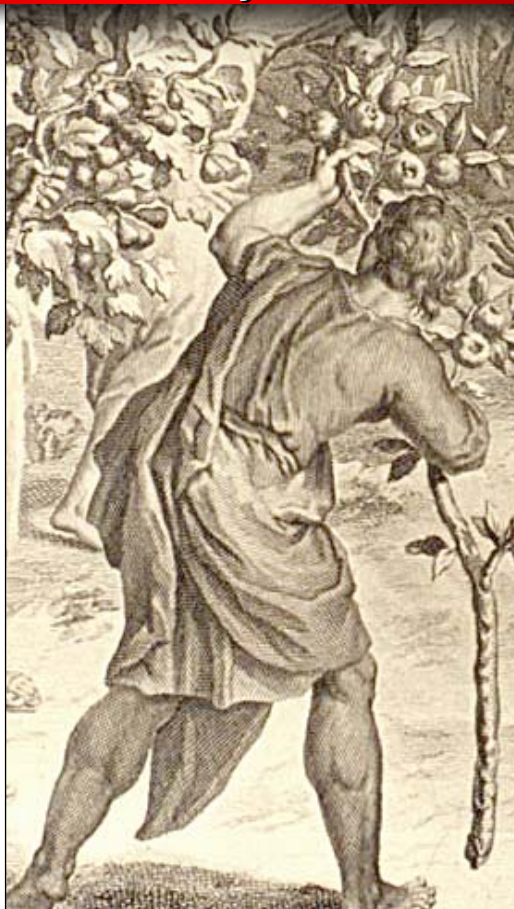
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Weekly Parsha

allow Bnei Yisrael to enter the land. They were aware of the true character of Bnei Yisrael's mission and their relationship with God. Yehoshua and Calev were capable of maintaining their security in this relationship and were not overwhelmed by the hysteria of the other spies. Moshe changed Yehoshua's name. By adding the name of God, "Yah" to "Hoshaya" creating "Yehoshua", Moses told Yehoshua that God would save him from the bad counsel of the Meraglim. Moshe was a rebbi to Yehoshua, a teacher and guide. He recognized the dangerous attitude of the other spies and warned his pupil. As Chazal tell us, the act of changing Yehoshua's name was a way of requesting compassion from God. Compassion from God is evoked when man realizes that his sins result from the frailties of the human condition. He seeks God's guidance to give him the opportunity and ability to act in accordance with his tzelem Elokim – his intellect, that which allows him to approach God. By changing his name Moshe secured this message, ensuring that Yehoshua would constantly remain aware of the dangers and maintained steadfast in his relationship with God. Our Sages tell us that Calev had to go out to kivrei avot – the graves of his forefathers – to seek compassion. He was not Moshe's main disciple and Moshe was not his personal rebbi, as he was to Yehoshua. Calev recognized the dangers of his mission and he went to kivrei avot. He sought inspiration from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, the great forefathers of our nation, men who had the proper perspective of man's relationship with God. The Avot symbolized the mission and destiny of Bnei Yisrael, for they were the origin and cause of our existence as the chosen people. Tosafos is accurate in pointing out that the dead are unaware of worldly events, however, Calev desired that the Avot be a source of compassion for him in a different sense. They were his teachers. They had the proper perspective of the Jewish people's relationship with God and their destiny. At this critical time, as the Jewish people were entering into the promised land, Calev sought inspiration from the fathers and mothers of our nation to save him from the negative influence of his peers. He sought God's compassion because he recognized the frailty of man and sought and resolved to resist those weaknesses. The Torah teaches us that Calev retained his strength of character because he had a "ruach acheret," a different spirit than the others. Calev possessed the true "ruach Elokim," the true spirit which is line with God's will.

Upon hearing the distorted report of the spies, the people did not discount the strength of the inhabitants. They failed to recognize that God would destroy their enemies and allow them to enter to the land to achieve their destiny. On the contrary, "vayivku – and they cried," Bnei Yisrael cried like helpless children. They were incapable of taking



security in their relationship with their Creator. Chazal teach us that God responded by stating that they were crying for no reason and responded by promising, "I will give them reason to cry." That night was Tisha b'Av, a day indelibly etched into the calendar of our people as a day of tragedy. Tisha b'Av represents hester panim – the total concealment of God's special providence for the Jewish people. Throughout the generations Bnei Yisrael would mourn on Tisha b'Av, a day which reflects the distance between God and His chosen people. The Meraglim lacked the proper perspective of the relationship between God and Klal Yisrael. They failed to recognize their true mission. This resulted in distancing the Jewish people from God, establishing a chasm which will only be bridged in the Messianic Era. In the end of days, Bnei Yisrael will again cleave to God, with the proper perspective of their mission, and then will be worthy of being a moral light unto the world.

Another reflection of God's justice as being midda k'neged midda – measure for measure – was Klal Yisrael's punishment for sympathizing with the Meraglim. Those alive at the time were incapable of entering into Eretz Yisrael. Their relationship with God was marred by the idolatrous notion that they were special and that God would take care of them as helpless children. They did not appreciate the true character of their relationship with the Creator and

were thus incapable of entering into the land. This generation had to do Teshuva and totally reappraise their role as the Chosen Nation. What was their punishment? They had to dig their own graves and lie down in them, not knowing who would get up again. This was not a cruel or unusual punishment. It was midda k'neged midda. It allowed Klal Yisrael to reflect upon their relationship with God. God was not there simply to take care of their needs. God is the Borei Olam – the Creator of the world and source of all reality, as Iyov had recognized. Only by facing their own mortality as emanating from the Borei Olam could their idolatrous notions be shattered.

The entire story of the Meraglim is followed by a strange sequence of events. It tells us of a group of Jews, the mapilim, who immediately after God ravaged the spies with the plague attempted to enter into Israel. What were they thinking? Had they not personally witnessed God's punishment of the spies? Did they fail to recognize that they were not worthy of entering the land? The Torah teaches us that Moshe and the Ark of God did not budge as this group attempted to proceed into Eretz Yisrael. However, these people persisted, "v'yapilu la'alot el rosh ha'har – but they were stubborn [and proceeded] to ascend to the mountaintop" (ibid. 14:44). Rashi tells us that "v'yapilu – and they were stubborn" is "lashon choshech," an expression connoting darkness. Alternatively, Rashi suggests it is a language of azut – audacity. These people were still in the dark. They failed to perceive the true sin of the Meraglim and the character of their relationship with God. They were audacious and arrogant. They felt they were punished because they simply doubted God. They were like children, incapable of recognizing reality and persistent in achieving a goal beyond their grasp. They felt that God would take care of them simply because they were special. This was azut, arrogance. They felt that the Meraglim were punished because they doubted God but felt that God was on their side. They felt that they were capable of entering the land. Moshe and the Ark of God did not budge. Moshe recognized that these people were doomed to failure. The Ark of God also did not budge. This represented that they were not worthy of God's intervention. The failure of the Meraglim was a failure of the greatest degree. It went to the core of their very existence as a nation and demanded a generation of time to cure. These people still suffered from the same malady. They were not worthy of God's providence and they were totally destroyed.

A careful analysis of the story of the Meraglim affords us an excellent opportunity to reflect upon our relationship with God as the Chosen Nation. It is only when we have a proper perspective of our relationship with the Borei Olam and rid ourselves of any idolatrous notions can we be worthy of redemption. ■



Segulas: *an Open Letter*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

An open letter to Rabbis, email list moderators, and concerned members of the Jewish community. As long as Jews comply with clearly prohibited practices; Jewish email lists promote prohibitions, and leaders offer no rebuke, the need to address the problem exists, and demands response.

The Torah teaches that Hashem punishes the wicked, and rewards the righteous. It does not say that challah baking or any other activity will help address our needs, as those practicing “segula” suggest.

When the matriarchs were barren, they did not resort to segulas, but introspected and prayed. On Devarim 10:17 “Hashem does not take bribes”, Sforno wrote the following commentary:

“The punishment of a sin will not be removed at all due to the reward of a mitzvah that this sinner performed. As the Rabbis taught, ‘A mitzvah does not extinguish a sin’. And all this teaches that one should not be confident that if he sins, that his sin is removed at all...except by complete repentance.”

Sforno was a great thinker, Rabbi, and a true Torah commentator. He remained loyal to Hashem’s Torah words, and did not follow practices that violated Hashem, unlike proponents of Segulas. And it matters none how popular segulas have become, if they are in direct opposition to Torah and our Rabbis. Sforno taught that our mitzvahs cannot remove our personality flaws, which may deserve a punishment. The only way we are forgiven for our sins and remove Hashem’s wrath, is when we identify the cause of our sins, recognize the error, and abandon our poor behavior forever. But, ignoring our flaws, even by occupying ourselves with many great mitzvahs, in no way removes our flaws. “Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem”. (Megillas Eicha, 3:40) Eicha teaches what we must do, and it does not say segulas are the Torah’s approach. No pasuk says so.

Nothing in Torah supports this concept of segula; Torah sources reject the idea of a segula. If we deserve a punishment, and we don’t address our shortcomings, baking challas with brachos cannot help. And if we have no sin, then the correct approach to infertility is medical treatment. In either case, segulas are useless, and violate the Torah prohibition of Nichush. Nichush in common day terms, are good luck charms. It does not matter if the charm is a rabbit’s foot, a horseshoe, a challah, key or a red bendel. The practice assumes that forces exist, which do not, and it is idolatrous. Tosefta Shabbos chapter 7 prohibits red bendels openly. It refers to bendels as “Emorite practices” which are idolatrous. This applies to all practices where we assume a causal relationship, which does not exist. Separating challa so that we remove infertility, find a shidduch, etc., assumes a causal relationship that does not exist. Hashem gave us sechel -- intelligence -- precisely because He desires we use it in all areas, especially in our Torah lives. Hashem prohibited many idolatrous rites since they were not supported by natural law. That is why He wiped out so many people, since they worshiped stone gods, or believed in demons, spirits, and other forces that defy natural laws. Hashem wants us to follow what our minds tell us is true, and not what our emotions “wish” to be so. Our actions must be based on Torah and the reality of how God’s natural laws operates.

Please help to remove false practices from Jewish culture, and instead of supporting segula, we should spread these Torah sources to our friends, for whom we desire to help. We must adhere meticulously to Hashem’s Torah...the Torah He said, “not to add to or subtract from”. (Devarim, 4:2)

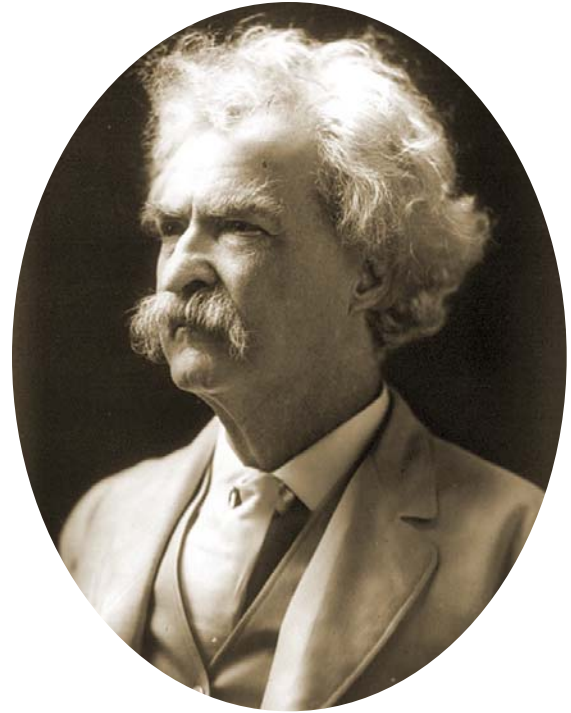
It is time to use our minds as God desires, and realign our path of life with Torah sources and God’s will, not what’s popular among many religious Jews...that is no barometer for truth. Share these sources. Make a personal move for positive change, and help teach what is authentic Torah. **God will only help those who follow Him. ■**

MATT SCHNEEWEISS

Mark Twain

Olam

Haba



I can't help but smile whenever I chance upon a fundamental Torah idea eloquently expressed by a non-Torah thinker. I'd like to share with you an idea from the uncensored collection of Mark Twain's writings entitled Letters from the Earth.

In The Lowest Animal (Part V of the The Damned Human Race, p.232 in the Google edition) Mark Twain cynically portrays man as the most inferior and corrupt creature on earth:

"I have been studying the traits and dispositions of the "lower animals" (so-called), and contrasting them with the traits and dispositions of man. I find the result humiliating to me. For it obliges me to renounce my allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals; since it now seems plain to me that the theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one, this new and truer one to be named the Decent of Man from the Higher Animals."

In the last paragraph, after his cynical diatribe against human nature, Mark Twain makes a single concession to Man:

"He has just one stupendous superiority. In his intellect he is supreme. The Higher Animals cannot touch him there. It is curious, it is noteworthy, that no heaven has ever been offered him wherein his one sole superiority was

provided with a chance to enjoy itself. Even when he himself has imagined a heaven, he has never made provision in it for intellectual joys. It is a striking omission."

Interestingly enough, the vision of the afterlife of which, according to Mark Twain, has never been envisioned by man is precisely the notion of the afterlife promised by the Torah. The Rambam (Laws of Repentance 8:2) writes:

"In Olam ha'Ba (The World to Come) there are no physical bodies, but only the souls of the righteous - bodiless, like the ministering angels. Since there are no bodies, there is neither eating nor drinking nor any of the other bodily needs of Olam ha'Zeh (This World), nor are they subject to any bodily occurrences, such as sitting, standing, sleep, death, sadness, frivolity, or the like. Such was stated by the Early Sages: "There is neither eating nor drinking nor sexual intercourse in Olam ha'Ba; rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and derive pleasure from the radiance of the Divine Presence" . . .

"The statement "the righteous sit" was said metaphorically, meaning that the intellects of the righteous exist there [in Olam ha'Ba] without exertion or toil. Likewise, the statement "with their crowns on their heads" means that the

knowledge which they know, in merit of which they attained life in Olam ha'Ba, will exist with them . . .

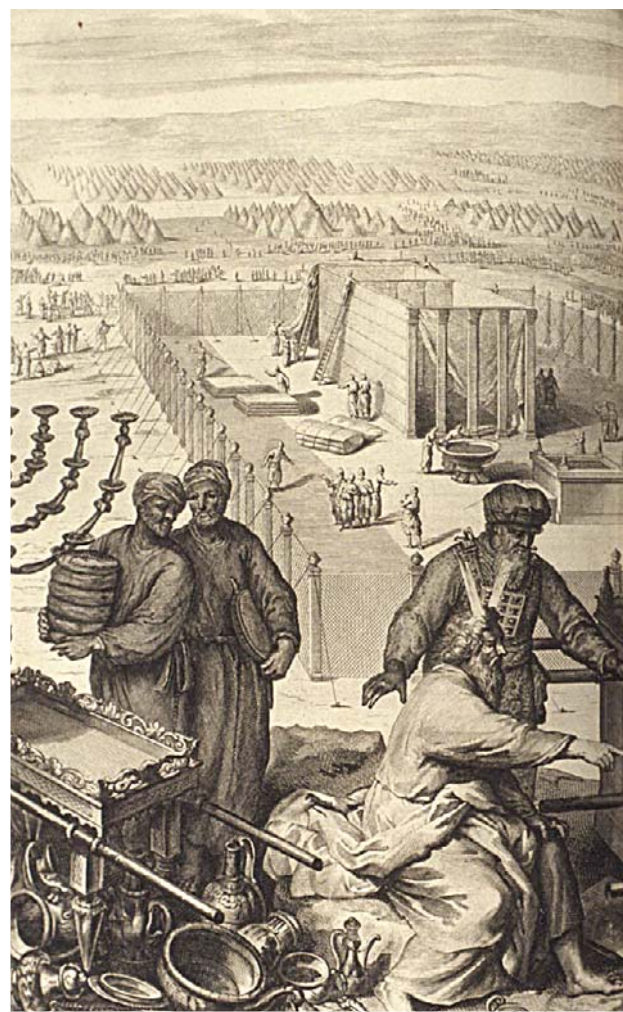
"And what was meant by "and they will derive pleasure from the radiance of the Divine Presence"? - That they will know and apprehend some of the reality of the Holy One, Blessed is He, which was unknowable when [encased] in a dark and lowly physical body."

According to the Rambam, the ultimate reward promised by the Torah is Olam ha'Ba: an entirely non-physical afterlife in which disembodied intellects derive pleasure contemplating the reality of Hashem.

Even the Ramban, who argues with the Rambam and maintains that Olam ha'Ba is physical, nevertheless maintains that the essential reward is the intellectual contemplation of knowledge of Hashem (see Shaar ha'Gmul 357).

Mark Twain was right: Religious Man never envisioned an intellectual afterlife. But, as is often the case, Religious Man was wrong. ■

*Matt Schneeweiss authors the blog:
<http://kankanchadash.blogspot.com>*



MESORA

Mesora will soon be launching a new outreach campaign and site feature entitled "TorahIOI". Our intent is that those of you with the background and time, direct those with less Jewish identity and/or education towards a more observant, Torah lifestyle. Stay tuned for more details.