

JewishTimes

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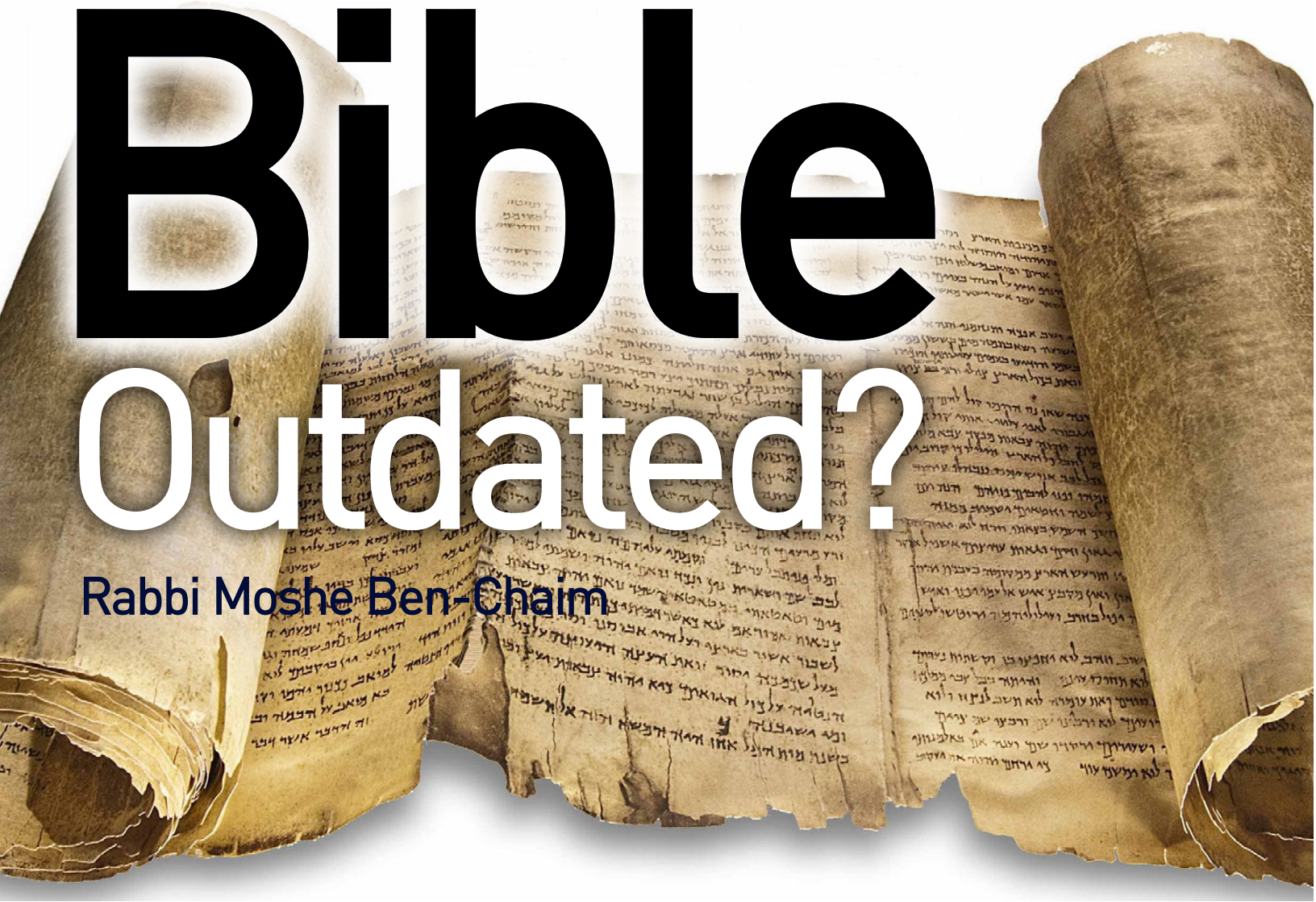
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“Rabbi Yudan said in Rabbi Ayvo’s name, ‘Man does not leave this world with [even] half his desires in his hand. One who has \$100, desires \$200. One with \$200 desires to make \$400’” (The Rabbis).

An old story goes that a young man once sought a position. He named his price of 10x, and he got 10x exactly as he asked...he was fully satisfied. When telling his friend the good news of landing a job, the friend asked, “Did you get 12x for that job?” At which, the young man suddenly felt dissatisfied. Why? The very notion that he could have asked for more awoke his greed, and upset him, although when granted the position, he was completely satisfied with 10x.

Abraham possessed the trait of satisfaction. Emulating him, can avert such feelings in ourselves. And who knows what other wealth God can send our way. Let us be happy with our lot, and trust that God can grant all our needs.

“You open Your hand and satisfy every creature’s desire” (Psalms 145:16).

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Honor/Fear Parents

READER: Reader 1: With regard to the commandment to honor your father and mother, in practical terms, what does honoring entail?

—*Omphile Tshipa, Africa*

RABBI: Maimonides writes:

What is the distinction between fear and honor? Fear signifies that the son must neither stand nor

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sit in his father's place; he must not contradict his father nor decide against him. What does honor signify? The son must provide his father and mother with food and drink and clothing, paid for by the father. If the father has no money and the son has, he is compelled to maintain his father and mother as much as he can. He must manage his father's affairs, conducting him in and out, and doing for him the kind of service that is performed by servants for their master; he should rise before him, as he should rise before his teacher (Hilchos Mamrim 6:3).

To what lengths should the honoring of one's father and mother go? Even if they took a pocketful of gold pieces belonging to him and cast it into the sea right in his presence, he must not shame them or scream and be angry at them; instead, he should accept the divine decree and keep silent.

To what lengths should the duty of fearing them go? Even if he wore costly clothes while presiding over a public assembly, and his father and mother came and tore his clothes, struck him on the head, and spat in his face, he must not embarrass them but keep silent. He should revere and fear the supreme King of kings who has thus commanded him. Had a mortal king laid a more painful restraint on him, he would be powerless to struggle against it; so much the more if the decree comes from him who spoke and the world came into being by His will (Hilchos Mamrim 6:7).

READER 2: In 6:7, honor and fear appear to share the same criteria. Wherein do they differ?
—*Rabbi Moshe Barbanel*

RABBI: Honoring parents focuses on the “parent” as opposed to the self...I will explain. Fulfilling this command is expressed as a child dignifies parents and their reputations through positive acts like feeding and clothing them, and through abstaining from insulting them. This maintains their dignity.

Fear refers to “oneself”: one must ignore the self, not aggrandizing oneself by contradicting a parent. One must not oppose their parents’ character or their words, or impinge upon their honor by dignifying oneself and sitting in their place.

Honor is directed towards the parent; fear is directed towards the self.

Proof that fear relates to the self is seen where a son is in front of an audience and his dignity is tarnished by his parent’s attack. Refraining from defending his reputation is “fear,” not “honor.” In his fear, he restrains his “selfish” goals. Refraining from preserving his dignity, he is acting upon the self. And, unlike honor, fear is tied to the “King of all kings.” Fear of God is an act between ourselves and God, not our

parents. In fear, the focus is on the self.

Reading Maimonides again, we see his distinction more clearly:

“Honor” is even if parents took a pocketful of gold pieces belonging to him and cast it into the sea right in his presence, he must not shame them or scream and be angry at them; instead, he should accept the divine decree and keep silent.

“Fear” is even if he wore costly clothes while presiding over a public assembly, and his father and mother came and tore his clothes, struck him on the head, and spat in his face, he must not embarrass them but keep silent.

Maimonides’ cases contain subtle clues. They illustrate the clear distinction between honor and fear. Carefully analyzing our rabbis’ precise formulations unveils their underlying brilliance. ■

Mystical Lies

READER: I was curious to ask you about the Hamsa symbol. I used to see some Jews using it. But isn’t it considered a pagan symbol? Isn’t it just like the superstition that there exists objects or forces other than God falsely claiming to provide protection?

—*Luciana, Brazil*

RABBI: One lives in reality and follows rationality when accepting observable and detectable forces, and when accepting Torah’s principles of a Creator who created the world and manages it. But other than through God and demonstrable natural law, how can one intelligently suggest there are “other” forces? By what means other than one’s senses and Torah authority does one validate that any entity or force exists, other than God and nature? There are no other means.

Believing in an unverified entity or force is superstitious, and indicates that the believer rejects our God-given senses to act as our validation of what is, and what is not. If accepting any belief is God’s will, He would not have proved His existence at Revelation at Sinai with all those miracles.

God granted man senses as God demands man to accept only what his senses detect, and reject what is not observable. And superstitions are not observable. They are believed only because man is incapacitatedly insecure and grabs onto anything with the promise of hope. But what man should do is grab on to his reason and secure his life with the natural means God created, and by praying to God. But to think that manufactured amulets can override God’s system of Reward and Punishment, one forfeits his soul. To think one can sin, but by wearing a red bendel or a Hamsa he won’t be punished, is heretical and is out of reality. ■

The Dangers of a Pessimistic Outlook

Rabbi Reuven Mann

In this week's Parsha, Shelach, we encounter something unexpected: the rebellion of the Spies against the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Ever since Moshe assumed leadership over the Jews, he made it clear that the mission of liberation included full takeover of the Promised Land.

The purpose of freeing the People was to establish a holy society based on adherence to Torah ideals and Mitzvot; in the heart of which, Hashem would establish His "place of residence."

The time had now come for the invasion of the land, which Hashem had sworn to their forefathers. Agents were chosen from each of the tribes, to spy out the terrain and also report on its agricultural disposition. These were not ordinary citizens, but special people who were looked up to as leaders.

As we know, the spying mission produced catastrophic results. The spies, except for Yehoshua and Calev, issued a gloomy report which sucked the oxygen out of the room and left the people in a state of fear which morphed into panic. They adamantly refused to "go up and conquer" the land. In fact, many were prepared to relinquish the goal of becoming a holy nation and instead insisted, "let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

As we seek to make sense out of this surprising story, we need to understand what it was that made the spies so fearful. It is true that the land's inhabitants were mighty specimens and included giants. It seems, without doubt, that in terms of ordinary human strength the Jews were no match for them and would be roundly defeated.

But this was not the first time that the Jews were facing enemies who were superior in strength. They had prevailed in all of these circumstances only because of unmistakable Divine intervention. Hashem had brought fearsome plagues upon the Egyptians, destroyed their expeditionary force in the Yam Suf and provided Manna for His People in the wilderness. Did they suddenly lose faith that Hashem could wreak similar miracles to defeat the nations of Canaan? How could they fail to see,

that G-d, whose awesome might they had personally experienced, could easily dispose of the current adversary before them? What precipitated the national meltdown?

It seems to me, that the experience of enslavement and the humiliation it imposes, has a profound psychological impact which can leave a permanent wound. Many survivors of situations of horrendous abuses, develop a profound sense of pessimism. They internalize the attitudes of their oppressors and begin to believe that they are not worthy of good outcomes.

They never learn the true lesson of miracles, that Hashem values our existence. Instead of rejoicing, their attitude is one of relief that, at least for now, they've dodged a bullet. But the next crisis is just around the corner.

Many of the Jews lacked an appropriate attitude toward themselves. They did not believe that they were entitled to a good life. They even had the temerity to say, "Because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorite to destroy us" (Devarim 1:27).

It was in the grip of this mindset that they encountered the mighty giants who inhabited Canaan. This aroused their doomsday feelings and produced a conviction that they were facing disaster. A chronic pessimistic outlook, can be a devastating liability in life.

The person of genuine faith, does not allow himself to be consumed by gloomy thoughts. He believes, that if he serves G-d with honesty and faithfulness, He can trust in Hashem's Benevolence. As the righteous spies, Yehoshua and Calev boldly proclaimed; "If Hashem desires us, He will bring us to this Land and give it to us; a Land that flows with milk and honey. But do not rebel against Hashem! You should not fear the people of the Land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, Hashem is with us, do not fear them" (BaMidbar 14:8-9).

This message is very relevant to contemporary Jews. If we correct our ways and faithfully follow His Torah, we can be confident that, "Hashem is with us." May the spirit of this brand of optimism inspire us to confront our challenges and rise to ever greater heights.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

Dear Friends,

My newest book, Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift To Mankind on VaYikra was recently published, and is now available at: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09SHRXS3Q>

I hope that my essays will enhance your reading and study of the Book of VaYikra and would greatly appreciate a brief review on Amazon.com.

—Rabbi Reuven Mann



LETTERS

Bible Outdated?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



READER: Thank you for your publication. I have one question which I would love you to address. A major part of the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli) deals with cases which are either no longer relevant (because they are bound up with a no longer operative reality, e.g. Nedarim based on the language of long ago) or deal with cases that are extremely far fetched, almost all of which will never occur in anyone's life. And yet, we expend a lot of time and energy delving into these subjects. Why? I am looking for some rational explanations why we study Torah like we do.

*Thanks,
Chaim Safren*

RABBI: Talmud study is not for practical purpose. It is studied to appreciate the halachic formulations, svarah: "Tachlis shmaita, svarah; The purpose of learning is definition." One can see deep precision in any halacha, even inapplicable matters. Rav Chaim Brisker, the Rav, and other great minds have presented Talmud's depth and marvelous beauty through their keen analysis. This is called learning "lishma," for the sake of the ideas, not for ulterior motive or practicality. Lishma is the highest level man can attain; he loves the beauty of God's wisdom over all else in life. Wealth, fame, pleasures, and ego all mean nothing to him. Pirkei Avos concludes with praises for this level of love of wisdom.

This also touches on an important point: Will Torah ever be outdated? This question suggests matters will arise of which God was ignorant, and did not provide for in His Torah.

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It is the height of absurdity to suggest God is ignorant of His creations. How can one create something while ignorant of his actions? How can the Creator not know His plan?

This means God knows the future. He planned all creations to act as perfectly aligned watch gears, where each creation and system from meteorology, astronomy, geology, topography, botany, and biology all perfectly complement each other. God understands how all creations function harmoniously throughout all time.

Thus, Bible is an eternally applicable guidebook for human happiness. God foresaw all future generations and scripted His Bible around them. He saw no future consideration that Bible should need even a minute alteration. Man does not change, so the methods through which man finds happiness cannot change: "Don't add to or subtract from the Torah" (Deut. 4:2, 13:1)

So eternally accurate are God's words, that He knew people would suggest the Bible expires or is wrong, following their own hearts and abandoning Bible's words: "When hearing the words of these sanctions, they may imagine a special immunity, thinking, "I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart" (Deut. 29:18).

God also knew devious new religions would suggest God abandoned His original covenant by twisting this verse: "See, a time is coming—declares the Lord—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah" (Jer. 31:31).

But our rabbis hold the true tradition of these words:

Behold, days will arrive, a new covenant. "New" meaning that the original Torah will continue, not that the original covenant will be retracted. Torah from Sinai will never be broken. This covenant will not be broken because I will give my doctrine in their hearts, and on their hearts I will write it that they will never forget them. And the whole matter is as explained further. It is not that new covenant will be a "new" one, rather it will be a fulfillment of that Sinai covenant. And Malachi, the last of the prophets said says, "Remember Moses' Torah my servant whom I commanded in Horeb upon all Israel, Laws and judgments." Similarly it is as other concluding words, "I send you Elijah the prophet..." You see that there will never be a new Torah, but the one He gave at Mount Sinai will endure forever" (ibid., Radak).

In short, God is not ignorant, that is a human misgiving. "He reckoned the number of the stars; to each He gave its name" (Psalms 147:4). This means God is aware of the distinct nature (name) of each of the multi-billions of stars He created. He lacks no knowledge of the innumerable stars, galaxies, human generations, or man's future. ■



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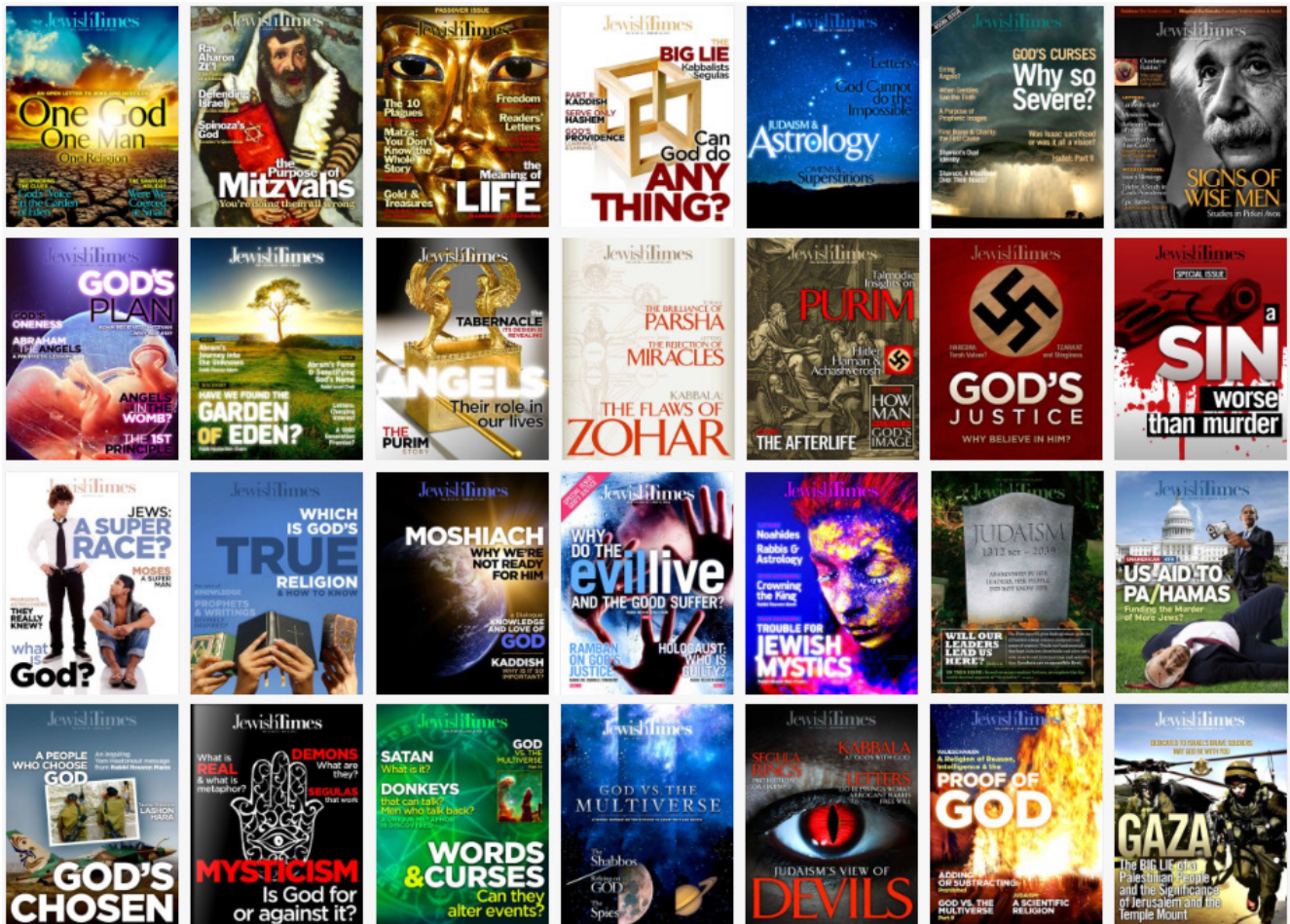
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the Evil of MISREPRESENTATION

Rabbi Richard Borah

to My voice, if they will see the Land that I swore to their fathers, and all who provoked Me will not see it.

Rabbi Soloveitchik ("The Rav"), describes the misrepresentation of these 10 princes in the text "the Rav Speaks" by Abraham R. Besdin. He explains that the 10 princes did not accept the nature of the unique relationship between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. It was this failure that made these princes, and those that followed them, unfit to inhabit the holy land and it was for this that they were condemned to die in the desert. The Rav states:

Jewish destiny is linked with this land; we have no other. Only in this land, our Sages say, does the Shekhinah dwell and only therein does prophecy flourish. This segulah (a unique positive quality-RB) attribute of the land is no more rationally explicable than the segulah of the people. These are qualities certified by our faith, and history has corroborated the singularity of both people and the land. (page 120).

The 12 princes who scouted the land made the error of assessing the land in a standard manner; in a sense, comparing it to other lands for its inhabitability and military characteristics. The Rav explains that since the land of Israel is the unique, singular land for the Jewish people and at the center of purpose role and destiny, the scouting party's function was not to assess or compare the land with other lands, but to only acquaint oneself with the land and experience its qualities in a direct manner. The Rav relates this to the Jewish law that a Jewish man is required to meet and to know one's bride before making the marriage commitment. The Rav explains:

...the reason Moses was told to send scouts into the land (was) not to gather intelligence, but to have the distinguished heads of each tribe explore the land bring back reports of its singular character. The instructions Moses gave them defined their mission, viz. to make the acquaintance of the land. By entering the land, the people were being wedded to it and, despite Divine assurances of its quality, they had to experience it through their princes before the commitment could be deeply rooted and irrevocably assumed. (page 122)

The Rav explains that the sin of the spies was that:

Their report was that of spies, not that of scouts; they balanced debits against credits and declared the entire enterprise hopeless. With grandeur looking down on them, all they could see was the mundane. (page 123)

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The parsha of Shelach describes the report of the twelve princes of Israel (one from each tribe) who went to scout out the land of Canaan. Ten of the twelve who went, returned with a description that brought fear and despondency to the Jewish people. Only Yehoshua and Calev did not participate in this "evil report" and attempted to dispel the negative impact of the others. The Torah states in Bamidbar 13:31-33:

But the men who went up with him said, "We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. They spread an [evil] report about the land which they had scouted, telling the children of Israel, "The land we passed through to explore is a land that consumes its inhabitants, and all the people we saw in it are men of stature. There we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, descended from the giants. In our eyes, we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes.

The evil report of these 10 princes of Israel, and the Jewish people's fearful response to it, was the cause of the Jewish people's remaining in the desert for 40 years until the generation leaving Egypt died, although the journey to Canaan should have only required a few weeks to complete. The Torah states in Bamidbar 14:22-23:

That all the people who perceived My glory, and the signs that I performed in Egypt and in the desert, yet they have tested me these ten times and not listened

The marriage of the Jewish people and the land of Israel was a fait accompli, as an agreed upon union described in the Torah, which the children of Israel had voluntarily accepted. Also, to assess that God's creating of this shidduch (match) was a disastrous one, showed a lack of reasonable faith in God who has so miraculously redeemed and cared for them to this point. The Rav explains that the Jewish people were tasked with experiencing the land directly or at least through their princes before the marriage could be completed. But to now view the bride "under the chuppah" and notice some qualities you find unappealing such that you refuse to marry her is not the proper order of things, to say the least.

Maimonides ("The Rambam") has a very different understanding of the "evil report" of the 10 spies. He views the incident as a necessary event by which God justified to the Jewish people their 40 year journey through the desert. This period of time, according to the Rambam, was required for the inevitably slow development to take place and transform a slave nation into one that was capable of fulfilling its noble role in the land of Israel. The Rambam states in the "Guide for the Perplexed":

It was the result of God's wisdom that the Israelites were led about in the wilderness till they acquired courage. For it is a well-known fact that traveling in the wilderness, and privation of bodily enjoyments, such as bathing, produce courage, whilst the reverse is the source of faint-heartedness; besides, another generation rose during the wanderings that had not been accustomed to degradation and slavery. ("Guide for the Perplexed": Friedlander translation: Book 3: Chapter 32)

The Rambam explains in this chapter that this process of gradual change is found throughout God's interaction with the Jewish people and explains the structures of many Jewish laws by which a people who began as idolatrous slaves were transformed into a courageous, holy nation. The Rambam also brings examples from nature by which organisms develop and grow through gradual steps in development. From the Rambam's explanation we can see the spies' evil report of the land and the mass rebellion it caused as an expected event that revealed that the people were not ready to enter the land so shortly after the redemption from slavery. Had the Jewish nation been denied entrance into the land for

40 years without the incident of the spies, it would have been perceived by them as unnecessary and unjust. However though the incident of the spies, it was made clear that the gradual development of the desert was necessary to prepare the next generation to conquer the land.

Taking Maimonides perspective of the necessity for the gradual transformation in the desert, one could ask the question of why the report of spies and the Jewish people's response was portrayed as such a great sin and one that resulted in the death of the spies and punishment of the Jewish people. One might answer this by saying that although the gradual development of the people from slaves to conquerors is the normal way things occur, with the unique experience the Jewish people had through their redemption from Egypt and the receiving of the Torah, there was an opportunity for them to accelerate this development and take a bold step of total transformation. Our history has many examples of individuals who change it seems, in an instant to a different person. Elisha left all things of his life in a moment of great decision to follow Eliyahu. Rabbi Soloveitchik at the conclusion of his great essay, "The Lonely Man of Faith" describes Elisha's transformation. He states:

While he was engaged in the most ordinary, everyday activity, in tilling the soil, he encountered God and felt the transforming touch of God's hand. The strangest metamorphosis occurred. Within seconds, the old Elisha disappeared and a new Elisha emerged. (p. 112)

The unprecedented revelation of God's might and providence that had brought the people to this point of decision was negated and defeated by the lashon hara of the spies. The plagues, the splitting of the sea, the manna, the awe and the enlightenment of Sinai were all swept away by a few words of discouragement. It is a cautionary tale of the power of speech to destroy and change the destiny of a person or a people. It is certainly true, what the Rambam states in the Guide regarding "gradualism" being the natural course of change. But the Jews had been given a unique opportunity to make a "quantum leap" and transform without the normal course of time and development. This flash of transformation did not occur for the Jewish people and they were relegated to the "normal way of things" by which they would gradually develop over years and generations into the nation that was capable of conquering the land. ■

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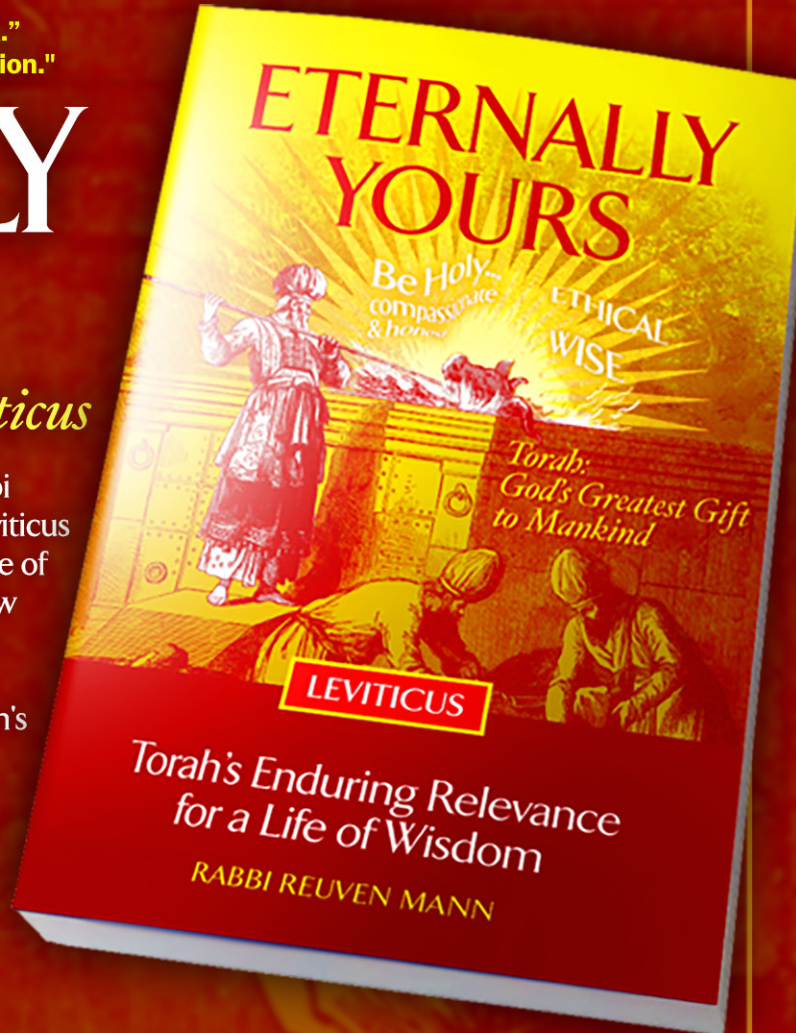
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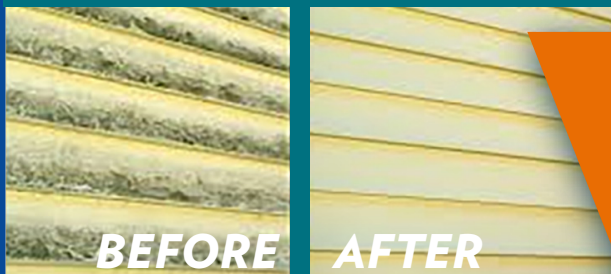
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