

עמקות
התורה

RABBI MENDY FEDER

HOW WE MUST RESPOND TO THE
TRAGEDY FACING OUR NATION



THE DEPTHS OF TORAH THOUGHT

INSIGHTS TO IMPROVE
OUR DAILY LIVES

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DEDICATION

I am honored to dedicate this *sefer* to my Rebbi and Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yisroel Chait. Besides getting my ordination from Rebbi, he has taught me the beauty and depth of our Torah. I have been privileged to sit at his feet listening to his brilliant insights for over 50 years. Rebbi has taught me and my countless *chaverim* the most magnificent way of life. His scintillating teachings in all areas of knowledge have guided all the lives of his students. He has been a beam of light, showing us the way to live in an otherwise Godless society. His vast knowledge in Torah, philosophy, psychology, science and all intellectual pursuits has been a great inspiration for all his students. His many thousands of *shiurim* are all masterpieces of creativity demonstrating the beauty of our Torah. His love of Torah has been imbued in all his students. I do not believe there is even one student of Rebbi whose life has not been profoundly changed because of his teachings. He is truly one of our *Baalei Mesorah*. I speak for all his students when I say that our lives would not have been worth living in such a meaningful fashion as Torah Jews if not for our Rebbi. So many of his students are themselves leading rabbis of synagogues, heads of Torah institutions, and great teachers of Torah. I can say with confidence that his students have had a greater impact in Jewish education than students of much larger institutions.

On a personal level he has inspired myself, my children and my grandchildren. Both my sons also have ordination from Rebbi. I expect in the near future that my grandsons will also be privileged to have ordination from Rebbi. In times of tragedy his teachings always guided us and helped us move forward. To my entire family he is our Rebbi, as I am sure he is to all his students. It is therefore with a great sense of pride and humility I dedicate this *sefer* to Rebbi. Any creative insights that I happened to have stumbled upon in this *sefer* were only because Rebbi has taught me the clear and beautiful creativity of our Torah. He has taught me the עמקות התורה, the creative depth of Torah knowledge.

MICHTAV BRACHA

Tamuz 5784

We live in confusing and dangerous times .The massacre of October 7, the rise of Islamic terrorism ,the ugly resurgence of anti-Semitism even in supposedly-liberal and tolerant societies, the fundamental intolerance and moral perversity of woke culture, the fact that not only much of the world but much of the Jewish people rejects the legitimacy of Israel, are all cause for grave concern. The Jewish “establishment” is groping for responses, looking for answers, seeking solutions; they consider everything but the most obvious that is right before their eyes: urging the Jewish people to return to God and the wisdom of His Torah.

Rabbi Mendy Feder has written an excellent thought-provoking book which not only outlines some fundamental ideas about God, the meaning of life, the purposes of Torah and the unique role of the Jewish people but shows how these teachings can be utilized to respond to the unique challenges of our time .Based on the profound teachings of Rabbi Yisrael Chait (to whom the book is lovingly dedicated) and greatly augmented by Rabbi Feder’s own original insights, this is a book that will be an eye-opener for many as well as a source of inspiration, courage and hope. We owe Rabbi Feder a debt of gratitude for making these teachings available. May they be a catalyst to bring Jews back to Hashem.

With Admiration and Bracha,



Yitzchak A. Breitowitz

Rav, Kehillat Ohr Somayach



FRIENDS OF THE IDF
ידידי צה"ל בארה"ב



FRIENDS OF THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES

THEIR JOB IS TO LOOK AFTER ISRAEL. OURS IS TO LOOK AFTER THEM.

Steven A. Weil

FIDF CEO

In the footsteps of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, who adjured us to understand the wisdom, logic and truth of our Rishonim, Rabbi Mendy Feder guides us through the timeless messages of the Rambam, Ramban, Rashi, Ba'alei HaTosfos and others to a sobering understanding of how to process the tumultuous times we are living in. Having learned with Rabbi Yisrael Chait for over five decades, who himself embodies the seamless blend of the masters of our generation, Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Rabbi Feder perpetuates the depth and intricacies of our mesorah in a way that is simultaneously erudite and highly readable for the layperson. He cites many statements of Chazal that are familiar to us and that we tend to take at face value, then asks probing questions to give us a revelatory insight into the profound methodology our sages employed to understand and articulate the most foundational ideas about our relationship with Hashem, the Torah and our responsibilities that are part and parcel of those relationships.

Rabbi Feder is a man of sincere humility and is only seeking to help us understand how Chazal have already taught us the proper perspective we need to navigate the challenges and tragedies that have befallen our people. He is shining a light on their words in a way that illuminates the depth and clarity of their wisdom. This book is a must read for anyone who is struggling to make sense of what Hashem may be communicating to us in the absence of prophecy, and more importantly, how we are meant to respond.

With Admiration and Bracha,

Rabbi Steven Weil
CEO, FIDF



TALMUDIC UNIVERSITY
ישיבה וכולל בית משה חיים
TRANSFORMING LIVES WITH TRANSFORMATIVE TORAH

STRENGTH & FORTITUDE

24 Tamuz 5784

My esteemed friend and Talmid Chacham Rabbi Mendy Feder in producing this Sefer has embarked on a noble crusade critically important for *עם ישראל*.

Rabbi Feder's passion to help *עם ישראל* through relevant and incisive Torah questions and then providing truthful, clarifying, and hard hitting answers are a true antidote to the travails of our nation in this modern era.

May HaShem bless Rabbi Feder with continued strength and fortitude and may we all see his efforts positively impact and inspire K' lal Yisrael to a true *תשובה שלימה* and the rebuilding of *בית שלישי* במהרה בימינו.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Akiva Zweig'.

*Rabbi Akiva Zweig
Rosh HaYeshiva*

PART I: The Isolation Of Israel Today: How Do We Respond?

1: Time of Tragedy

Chesed of Hashem

The Nation of Israel is facing a grave tragedy. We are facing an existential threat. How is עם ישראל supposed to respond to an עת צרה, *time of trouble*? The Rambam states that we must זועק, *cry out* to Hashem (*Hilchos Taanis* 1:1). However, we must first acknowledge that the tragedy that has befallen the Nation of Israel is the result of הסתר פנים, *God's hidden face*. God is the only Protector of the Nation of Israel.

When tragedy occurs and God does not protect us, it is a result of הסתר פנים. We are not deserving of His protection because of our sins. As such, when we turn to God at a time of tragedy, we must first acknowledge that the tragedy we are facing is a result of our sins. This demands that we articulate that our sins are the cause of הסתר פנים. If not for our sins, God would have protected us and the tragedy would have never occurred.

The Rambam states an amazing insight into Hashem's attribute of רחמים, *mercy* (ibid. 1:2). At a time of tragedy, we must cry out to Hashem and acknowledge it is because of our evil actions that tragedy has struck. The Rambam further states that by simply acknowledging that our sins are the cause of the tragedy, God will remove the tragedy. This is true even if we did not do

teshuvah. Simply acknowledging that the עת צרה came about because of our sins is sufficient justification for Hashem to remove the צרה that has befallen our people.

The חסד of Hashem is profound, even though we did not repent, but merely articulate that our sins are the cause of our tragedy and Hashem's הסתר פנים, we are still worthy of God's providence. This seems to be so because even though the חטא, *the sin*, remains (because we did not repent), by simply acknowledging that sin is the cause of our dire situation we become worthy of God's providence. Through this acknowledgment our relationship with the Creator is raised to a higher level and we are worthy of His attribute of kindness.

It is thus essential that in a time of tragedy the Nation of Israel must articulate that the terrible state that we are encountering is due to our sins. The Nation of Israel is always subject to God's providence, השגחה פרטית. We must thereby recognize that anything that happens to the Nation of Israel is not happenstance, but rather a reflection of Hashem's will, רצון השם.

We thereby reflect that we failed and did not accept the will of our Creator. We appeal to God's attribute of compassion and seek His forgiveness. We express our desire to fulfill all the commandments because it is the decree of our Creator, the King of the universe. Thus, to reach a higher level, we must try to understand what communal sin caused this הסתר פנים.

When we understand the חטא we will be able to do תשובה, *repentance*, and prevent a repeat of an עת צרה. I will attempt to explain what I believe is the sin that is plaguing our nation. I do this with great reluctance because Rambam states that in the past it was

the obligation of the בית דין to determine the sin of the generation so that we can be involved in *teshuvah*. It is not my intention to castigate anyone but rather to help us understand the nature of the חטא so that perhaps we can be worthy of God's providence.

Acknowledging Sin

We must first try to understand the difficulty of acknowledging sin when tragedy occurs. Unfortunately, there are three groups of individuals who respond to a national tragedy in an inappropriate fashion. It is not my purpose to criticize any individuals but rather to delineate their failures so that we can modify our behavior and be worthy of Hashem's providence. They all seem to lack the ability to acknowledge that the tragedy occurred because of our sins.

The Holocaust was the greatest tragedy in modern times that befell our people. Many survivors turned away from religion but others remain committed to a Torah life. We know that the Holocaust occurred because of our sins. We were not worthy of Hashem's protection. However, many survivors never were able to articulate that we were sinners.

We cannot judge anyone who lived through the horrors of the Holocaust. We must just try to understand why they cannot appreciate the metaphysical cause and effect. We were sinners and God did not protect us. Unfortunately, many survivors turned away from religion because they blamed God for the tragedy that occurred. They failed to recognize that the evils that were perpetuated by the Nazis directly resulted from the Nazis' corruption and decadence.

It was **not** the will of God that the Holocaust occurred. It is Hashem's will that we follow the commandments and live the most rewarding life a human being can experience. The Torah teaches us that if we fulfill the *mitzvos* we will be worthy of God's providence and protection. However, when we breach God's will and do not follow the dictates of the Torah we have breached our covenant with the Creator. Unfortunately God will thereby remove His protection from His nation and we will be subject to הַסְתֵּר פְּנִים.

The resulting tragedy occurs because of the depravity of man and is not caused by our Creator. Hashem did not protect us because we failed in our mission to be a light unto the nations of the world. As we say in the פִּיּוּטִים, *liturgical hymns*, on Tisha b'Av, when tragedy occurs it is as if God is mourning with us.

Those survivors who turned away from religion blamed God for the tragedy. They failed to recognize the cause and effect. We breached our covenant with Hashem and thus He removed His protection. The resulting tragedy was because of the depravity of the Nazis. We must try to understand what caused their failure to acknowledge that sin was the cause of the tragedy. I believe that when we identify the communal sin, we will understand their inability to acknowledge חַטָּא.

I also heard the story of the brother of one of the hostages. He explained that his valiant sister was running away from Hamas, but she gave her infant child to her husband, who could run faster. The husband escaped with her child but she was captured by Hamas. Her brother asked everyone in the group to please imagine his sister in captivity and have good wishes for her return. He deliberately, it seemed, neglected to mention prayer. It

was apparent to me that he also blamed God for what happened.

Again, the tragedy occurred because of the evil of Hamas. Hashem removed His protection from Israel because we breached our covenant with Hashem. In the event we fulfill our covenant and observe Torah and *mitzvos*, then God will protect us and the resulting tragedy would never occur. Again, by identifying the *חטא*, perhaps we can understand why they blame God.

The second group which cannot identify that sin is the cause of our current tragedy is made up of many of the military leaders of the Nation of Israel. Unfortunately, these leaders are very confident that we will win the war. However, it is rare to hear them say, *בעזרת השם*, *with the help of God*. They say, “You have woken the lion and now no one can stop us!”

I read a letter written by a general to his troops, in which he tried to give them strength and fortitude to keep up the fight. He said that if we are all united then we will win. None of these statements ever included “God willing.” It seems that their arrogance prevents them from acknowledging that their fate is in God’s hand. Why is this so? Again, I think if we identify the *חטא* we may be able to appreciate their inability to consider Hashem as part of the equation.

The third group, although well-intentioned, seems to believe that by performing more *mitzvos*, we can get God to intervene. They bake *challah* and somehow believe that Hashem will now save our soldiers. Why don’t they build many houses and install *מזוזות*? I think that they are well-intentioned and do not believe that we can affect God. God is not physical and has no emotions

or any physical attributes. Yet, this group also does not look to attribute our sins as a cause of our troubles. There is no introspection and no delineation of any sins. I think when we recognize the sin that perhaps plagues our people, then we may also be able to appreciate why they cannot articulate their sins.

The Twelve Spies

The Rambam explains that recognizing the sin should be our first response when we encounter a tragedy that affects our nation. Once we recognize the sin and acknowledge that **הסתר פנים** was caused by our sins, then we are **זועק** to Hashem and seek His compassion. Therefore, we will first analyze the **הטא** and then we will explain the concept of **זעקה**.

I believe the **הטא** is the sin of the **מרגלים**, the twelve spies Moshe sent to scout out the land of Israel. It is significant that when the spies returned with their report, which denigrated the land of Israel, it was the eve of Tisha b'Av. God said they are crying for no reason and I will give them a reason to cry this evening, for generations.

As we know Tisha b'Av is the saddest day on the Jewish calendar as we mark the destruction of both Temples. The fact that we still mourn on Tisha b'Av is because the Temple has not been rebuilt. This reflects the chasm that still exists in our relationship with our Creator. Since the sin of the spies occurred on Tisha b'Av, a day of infamy, it would seem that the sin of the spies is still with us. It was the **הטא** of the **מרגלים** that established the day of Tisha b'Av as a day designated for **פורעניות**, *tragedy*.

I would like to analyze the sin of the spies by asking a number of salient questions.

The princes of Israel, the **גְּשִׁימִים**, told Moshe that they would like to scout the land of Israel that God said they were about to conquer. It seems Moshe was hesitant in granting them their request. Moshe was ambivalent. In fact, God didn't think it was appropriate to send spies. That's why the language of the *parsha* says **שְׁלַח לְךָ**, *send for yourselves*; it was Moshe's decision as the leader to send them. The obvious question is, what was Moshe's hesitancy? The princes' desire to scout the land does not seem to be a lack of **בְּטַחֲוֹן**, *trust* in God. It is a rational request to send spies to scout a land that you are about to attack.

The spies returned and gave a terrible report of the land of Israel. They distorted the facts and doubted God's ability to conquer the land. It seems that their sin was more than just a fear of the Canaanites. What is additionally disturbing is that the spies were the leaders of the tribes. They were respectable and dignified men. In fact, the Ramban states that the spies were listed according to their wisdom and honor; Caleb and Joshua were not even listed first. How was it that all of a sudden they doubted God and distorted what they saw?

The spies reported that it was a land that consumed its residents. Wherever the spies went, they saw funerals. This seemed to reflect that it was a rugged land and difficult to live in. Caleb criticized them and said that God busied the residents of the Land with burying the dead so they would not detect the spies. In fact, he stated that God removed their protection, **סָר צִלָּם מֵהֶם**.

Rashi states that their protection came from Job, who died and could no longer protect them. What does Rashi mean? Did Job live at that time? The Gemara tries to determine when in fact Job lived. There are many possibilities presented. In fact, some hold that he never existed and was merely a parable. What does Rashi mean?

When the spies reviewed their frightening scouting report, the Jewish people were shattered. They said, let us appoint a new leader and return back to Egypt. Rashi says this reflects a language of idolatry. What does Rashi mean? There were no idols, there was no עבודה זרה.

The Torah tells us that Caleb was concerned about being influenced by the wicked behavior of the spies. He went to the burial place of our forefathers to seek compassion. תוספות ask, how can he communicate with the dead (*Sotah* 34b)? The dead do not know what is going on in this world. What was Caleb doing? Furthermore, Joshua didn't accompany Caleb because Moshe already sought compassion for Joshua, ביקש יהושע, when he changed the name of יהושע to יהושה, עליו רחמים, saying that Hashem, יהוה, should save you from the evil advice of the spies.

Yet, it must be asked, how does a name change protect someone from evil behavior? Also, doesn't man have free will? The Torah further states that Caleb did not fall prey to the sin of the spies since he possessed a different spirit, רוח אחרת. What does the Torah mean?

The Gemara (*Taanis* 29a) states that the day the spies came back with their scouting report was the eve of Tisha b'Av. The distorted report terrified the people. The Bnei Yisrael cried and doubted Hashem's ability to

conquer the land. Hashem responded, “You are weeping without cause, therefore I shall establish for you a weeping for generations on this day.” This day was Tisha b’Av, a day of infamy for the Jewish people.

It seems like God is mimicking a parent who is angry at a child. The parent proclaims, you want something to cry about? I’ll give you something to cry about! What’s going on? Hashem behaving like an angry parent seems absurd.

Hashem thereby punished the people. Every year on Tisha b’Av the people would have to dig their own graves and lie in it. After the first Tisha b’Av, many died and the survivors lived until the following Tisha b’Av when the same procedure occurred. This went on for 40 years until the generation of the spies died. They were not able to enter into ארץ ישראל. This seems like a cruel and unusual punishment. What was Hashem trying to accomplish?

After Hashem pronounced the punishment and the spies were punished with a treacherous death, the incident of the מעפילים, *the obstinate ones*, occurred. There was a group amongst the nation that said, “We made a mistake, we can now go into the land of Israel,” and started marching towards the land. Moshe told them not to go. Moshe and the holy ark did not budge. The people still marched forward and were totally destroyed by עמלק.

What were these people thinking? Hashem just told them that they were going to die in the desert and could not enter into the land of Israel. They just witnessed the treacherous death of the spies but still marched forward, despite the protestation of Moshe. Were these people neurotic?

The Gemara (*Sotah* 34b) says that it is a tradition from our fathers that the spies were named based upon their actions. סתר, he distorted God's actions. And מִיכָאֵל, he made God appear weak. Rashi explains that he compared God to a homeowner who cannot move furniture out of his own house. The implication being that God could not eject the Canaanites from the land of Israel. Rashi states that he distorted what he saw because his hatred of God made him a liar. This is a very difficult comment of Rashi. These were the princes of Israel, leaders and respected scholars. Did they hate God? It would seem ridiculous to say so.

Independence

I think if we understand the mind-set of the spies, we will be able to appreciate their חטא and answer all our questions.

The spies were the princes of the nation. As the leaders, they wanted to scout the land that God was about to conquer. Moshe was ambivalent about sending the spies because he was sensitive about their reason for wanting to scout the land. These leaders witnessed the 10 plagues in Egypt, their miraculous liberation, the splitting of the Red Sea, and God protecting them and sustaining them in the wilderness. God did everything for them. They had a feeling of impotence.

As leaders they wanted to participate and express a certain sense of independence. Hashem did not want them to go because their reason for wanting to go was inappropriate. Their desire emanated from a sense of ego. Moshe was conflicted. In the event that he denied their request, it would just amplify their sentiments

of inadequacy. If they couldn't scout the land and participate in the conquest, Hashem would again be doing everything for them, and they would feel that they could not accomplish anything on their own. Although reluctant, he made the decision to allow them to go. Hashem said, שלך לך. As the leader, it is your decision, even though He disagreed.

The spies' sense of pride would not allow them to accept being passive and letting Hashem conquer their enemies while bringing them into the land. They could not accept their state of being totally powerless. Upon seeing the giants in the land, they were terrified. They still possessed a slave mentality and could not have the courage to believe that they could conquer the land. However, rather than recognize their own inadequacy, they projected their own weakness onto Hashem.

The Torah says (Devarim 1:27) that Hashem hated us and took us out of Egypt so that the Amorites would destroy us. Rashi explains that a person with ill will in his heart will assume that others have the same feeling towards him. This is classic projection. This is what the spies did upon seeing the giants.

They projected their own weakness onto God. He is like an owner of a house that cannot move the furniture around. Their sense of self-importance as the Princes of Israel prevented them from tolerating their own inabilities. They did not hate God, but they had an unconscious resentment because He did everything for them. However, we still must understand why they could not just recognize that Hashem *would* conquer the land for them. They witnessed firsthand so many miracles that God performed. It is true that they felt inadequate, but why did they resort to projecting their own weakness

onto God? Could they not appreciate all the good that Hashem performed for them? I think the answer to this question is really an insight to what their חטא was.

The children of Israel viewed God as a Father in heaven who takes care of all their needs because they are special. They viewed God as big daddy in heaven. It is a classic manifestation of a parent-child relationship in which the child believes that the parent merely exists to take care of all their needs. However, when a child reaches the state of adolescence, he starts to assert his own independence. He cannot tolerate that his parents have done everything for him.

We all have experienced the sentiments of a child asking for the car keys, and upon being denied, responds, “You never do anything for me!” This incredulous response to a parent, whose whole life was dedicated to the welfare of the child, seems ridiculous. However, this is the reason why the spies projected their own weakness onto God. They viewed God as a parent and thus could not tolerate their total dependence on God, their big daddy.

They felt that everything God did for them was because they were special. They acted like spoiled children. They could not tolerate their own inadequacy so they projected their inabilities onto God. They did not realize that God did not perform all those miracles because they were special, rather it was because they had a special mission. They were the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and were chosen to be a moral light unto the nations of the world.

This mindset of viewing Hashem as a parent and that He treats us as special is a form of philosophical עבודה זרה. The *chesed* of Hashem is that even when we breach

our covenant with Him, He gives us an opportunity to do *teshuvah* and be worthy of His providence. We are not special, and if we are not a moral light unto the nations of the world, then we are not worthy of God's providence.

Special Relationship with God

We can now explain the questions posed. Caleb told the people not to be afraid. God is capable of destroying the Canaanites and giving us the land of Israel. He said that God removed their protection. Rashi stated that was Job. Job was the person that questioned God. He underwent many tragedies and ultimately recognized that God was not his parent whose job was to take care of him. We can now appreciate what Rashi meant.

Job learned from his tribulations and ultimately had the proper perspective of his relationship with God. Thus, when Rashi states their protector was removed it means that the Canaanites were not worthy of God's protection since they did not have a proper perspective of man's relationship with his Creator.

We can now understand their request to appoint a new leader and return to Egypt. Rashi quotes the Gemara that explains that this was a language of עבודה זרה. They viewed God as their parent in heaven who existed to take care of their needs. They felt they were special. This is the הטא of philosophical עבודה זרה.

We can also appreciate God's response to their crying. God said you were crying for no reason, I will give you a reason to cry. This reflects that their sin was that they treated God like a parent. Thus, God's response sounds like the rebuke of a parent to a child. That night

miracles in their midst, and yet they doubt My ability to bring them into the land of Israel.”

It is important to note what God stated. He stated all the miracles that I performed בקרבו, *amongst them*, not for them. He did not perform the miracles simply for our benefit. We were not special, rather, we have a special mission. Hashem performed all the miracles בקרבו to take us into the land of Israel so we can fulfill our mission to be a moral light unto the nations of the world. The miracles were performed because we were an עם הנבחר, *a chosen nation*, chosen to teach the world the concept of morality and that Hashem is the King of the Universe.

Correcting a Mistaken Outlook

God’s response as an angry parent was Him merely highlighting their חטא. They wrongfully treated Hashem as a parent that takes care of his special child. God is not our parent and we do not perform *mitzvos* to please God. We perform the commandments of the Torah for they help perfect us to live a moral and ethical life, and because we aspire to have a relationship with our Creator. It is our hope that with this perspective we can fulfill our mission to be a ממלכת כוהנים וגוי קדוש.

The punishment of the generation of the spies is understandable. It was decreed that they would die in the desert and not be afforded the opportunity to enter into the land of Israel. Their חטא was that they viewed God as a parent and that He would take care of their needs because they were special, and that is a total distortion of our relationship with the Creator.

The Jewish nation, when living in Israel, is charged with the mission to be a moral light unto the nations of the world. עם ישראל, through the service in the Temple, demonstrates to the world that we are servants to our Creator and He is the true King of the universe. This is the special relationship that we have with Hashem.

Hashem decreed that each year on Tisha b'Av they would dig their own graves and lie in them. Many would die, but the survivors would be subject to the same punishment for the following years. Ultimately the entire generation died out before the nation entered into Israel. This seems like a cruel and unusual punishment. However, we know a punishment from God is formulated measure for measure, מידה כנגד מידה.

They felt that they were special and that God existed to take care of their needs. They failed to recognize that God is the Source of reality. When man lives the proper life, he can take security in his relationship with the Creator. This means that the focus of a person's existence is to lead a moral and ethical life removed from the petty concerns of the physical self. He is involved in the world of knowledge and perceiving the infinite wisdom of the Creator.

The generation of the spies were totally removed from any such concept. They believed that they were special and were obsessed only with their own self-interest. They felt that the Creator was the vehicle to take care of their own petty interests. Their punishment to dig their own graves and lie in them was not a cruel and unusual punishment. Rather, it obliterated the idea that somehow they were special. It demonstrated that God is the Source of reality, whether it be in happy times or when tragedy strikes.

Man must always accept reality and conform his behavior to the will of the Creator. He thrives to live a life of *קדושה*, removed from the interests of the physical self, and transcend to the world of ideas. He appreciates the beauty of God's creation and sees His infinite wisdom in this world. Digging their own graves shattered any notions of being special and would liberate them to appreciate that this world is not man's but the Creator's.

Man has the ability to recognize the world of the Creator and not be absorbed in his self-interests. This punishment would help them recognize that their relationship with their Creator was not based upon their childish and selfish mentality. Upon entering the land of Israel, the Jewish nation had to recognize that God is the King of the world and they were chosen to be a model to the world. Their kindness and love for their fellow man would be based upon their love of God. No human being is more special than any other. We are all created in the image of our Creator. The generation of the spies could not enter into the land because such concepts were totally alien to their relationship with Hashem.

The *מעפילים* proclaimed that they were sinners but now were ready to march into the Holy Land. They felt that their sin was that they doubted Hashem's ability to protect them. They marched forward despite Moshe's protestations. Moshe and the holy ark did not budge. However, the *מעפילים* still marched forward. They had just heard God's proclamation that the entire generation would not enter into the promised land because of their sin. It seems incomprehensible that they would march forward after witnessing the unnatural and severe punishment that the spies suffered. Hashem had also pronounced their punishment that they would not be able to enter the land. Despite this *ויעפילו*, *they proceeded*.

Rashi states that the *ויעפילו* of *לשן* is a language of *עזות*, *arrogance*. Alternatively, it is derived from *אפילה*, *darkness*. Rashi is teaching us an amazing insight into the character of their sin. They felt that they were special and they doubted God, their big daddy in heaven. They felt their sin was simply not believing that God would take care of them and bring them into the Holy Land. Thus, they marched forward. They felt that God would now take care of them since they recognized their sin was doubting God's abilities. The notion that they were somehow special propelled them to move forward. That is what Rashi means that the *מעפילים* were arrogant. They felt they were special.

Alternatively, *ויעפילו* means darkness. They were in the dark as to man's true relationship with his Creator. They felt that God, like a parent, would take care of their needs simply because they were special. They were totally in the dark. They would be only subject to Hashem's Providence if they fulfilled their special mission to be a moral light unto the nations of the world. Therefore, Moshe and the holy ark did not budge. They were not worthy of God's providence and Amalek was able to destroy them.

At the outset we discussed the three groups that have difficulty in articulating that they are sinners. I believe that now we can understand the underlying problem. Unfortunately, many survivors of the Holocaust lost their faith. They blamed God for allowing the Holocaust to occur. They felt it was God's fault for their suffering. They failed to acknowledge that their sins caused God to remove His providence from the Nation of Israel. The resulting atrocities were caused by the Nazis.

Unfortunately, since we breached our covenant with God, He removed His protection from our nation. Without God's protection anti-Semites are capable of perpetrating the most heinous acts imaginable. Yet, people cannot acknowledge that their sins were the cause of the tragedy because they have an improper perspective of man's relationship with his Creator. They still suffer from the mindset of the מרגלים. They felt they were special and deserving of God's Providence, irrespective of their actions. Thus, when tragedy strikes, they lose their faith because they feel that God was the cause of their suffering. If they recognized that their sins caused God's removal of His protection then they would never blame God for the resulting tragedy. Again, we can never judge them, but we must try to understand why so many turned away from our Creator.

The second group that we mentioned, the military leaders of Israel, believe that their military prowess and the unity of the nation alone will help them destroy their enemies. Many of these leaders never mention "with God's help." Their arrogance prevents them from allowing God to be part of the equation. They believe that their own abilities are sufficient to overcome the tragedy without any assistance from the Creator.

Their arrogance comes from the fact that they view God as a parent. Therefore, when they feel that God has betrayed them, they reject Him. They want to assert their independence because their ego does not allow them to recognize that they need God's protection. They feel that they are special and cannot recognize that perhaps they are sinners. They cannot tolerate the reality that the Nation of Israel only exists because of God's providence. Thus, they will never be able to articulate any חטא.

They are like children who cannot acknowledge their total dependence upon their parent. They therefore believe they can control their own destiny. They cannot look to God because He allowed the tragedy to occur. However, those who recognize that we need God's assistance have a proper perspective of Hashem. They recognize that עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל has a special mission to be a moral light unto the nations of the world. It is only when we fail in this mission that God does not protect us. We must acknowledge our sins. Only then can we seek God's protection so we can fulfill our mission.

The third group that does not acknowledge חטא, I believe, are well-intentioned, but are not cognizant of the Rambam. We cannot simply cry out to God because we are suffering. We must first acknowledge that the situation exists because of our sins. This group believes that by performing more *mitzvos*, God will then answer their prayers.

A proper understanding of the performance of *mitzvos* is essential. The system of *mitzvos* is a means for personal perfection. It is a reflection of God's kindness that He gave us a system of Torah which allows man to live a moral life and have the best existence. God is not physical and has no emotions. The performance of *mitzvos* is for **our** benefit. We cannot affect God. By performing *mitzvos* we raise ourselves to a higher level and become worthy of God's providence.

Teshuvah

Unfortunately, the idea that performing rituals like the mass-baking of *challah* is not a means for the removal of an עַת צָרָה. This misplaced attitude, I believe,

is reflective of the fact that the sin of the spies is still plaguing our nation. When one looks to God as a parent, he will try to do things to somehow please the parent. One mistakenly thinks that his performing more and more *mitzvos* will be subject to Hashem's מידת רחמים. However, as the Rambam states, we must acknowledge our sins and realize that this recognition is the sole cause of Hashem's removal of His protection of our nation.

God is not our parent and we are not special. We have a special mission, and when we sin, we fail in our covenant with God and thus are not worthy of His protection. The Gemara (*Taanis* 16b) discusses God's rescinding His decree on the city of Nineveh. The Gemara states that it was not due to our putting on sackcloths or fasting that our prayers be answered. Rather, it was due to doing *teshuvah*.

The *pasuk* (Job 3:10) says that Hashem saw their deeds and that they repented from their evil ways. It is apparent that by just appealing to God to answer our prayers because we are in a state of pain will not help. Putting on a sackcloth and fasting to reflect our pain is not sufficient. We must start the process of *teshuvah*, which demands that we first acknowledge our sins. Only then will Hashem answer our prayers.

Although God does not want us to be in pain, just expressing pain will not provoke a response from God. He is not our parent who when his child is in pain will respond. Hashem is a God of justice. He did not protect us because we were sinners. Thus, He will only restore His protection when we acknowledge our sins.

Teshuvah is the vehicle whereby we change our ways and acknowledge our sins. Unfortunately, crying

out in pain will not evoke a response from Hashem. He is not our parent. His desire is that we fulfill our covenant and be subject to His providence. Therefore, we cry out to God, acknowledge our sins, and recognize that the fate of our nation is in God's hands alone. It is therefore significant that we understand how זעקה is effective.

Prayer of the Righteous

There is an interesting comment of Rashi (Bereshis 8:1) which states that the prayers of a צדיק can convert Hashem's מידת הרחמים to מידת הדין. He quotes the Gemara which states:

אמר רבי (אליעזר): למה נמשלה תפלתו של צדיקים כעטר לומר לה: מה עתר זה מהפך את התבואה בגורן ממקום למקום, אף תפלתו של צדיקים מהפכת דעתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ממדת אכזריות למדת רחמנות

Rabbi Eliezer said, "Why are the prayers of the righteous compared to a pitchfork? To teach you that just as the pitchfork turns over the grain that is on a threshing floor and moves it from one place to another, so too the prayers of the righteous turn over the attitude of Hashem from the attribute of cruelty to the attribute of mercy."
(Sukkah 14a)

It is interesting to note that the attribute of אכזריות which reflects God turning away from man's prayer, is what Rashi called מידת הדין. The word for pitchfork in Hebrew is עטר. Rashi states that the derivation for עטר comes from the prayers of Issac and Rebecca. They

prayed to Hashem excessively because of their inability to have children. The *pasuk* (Bereshis 25:21) states וַיִּעֲתָר וַיִּצְדָּק לָהּ. The analogy is that just like a pitchfork turns the hay from one state to another, so too the prayers of the righteous turns God's attribute of strict judgment to that of compassion.

When God judges man based upon His attribute of strict justice, that is when He turns away from man's prayers. The *אכזריות* מידת הדין is referred to as *אכזריות*. The righteous, through their excessive prayers, are able to enable God to judge with His attribute of mercy and listen to their prayers. The obvious question is, how does this work? We know that God made the *אמהות* barren because He desired their prayers, so to speak.

Through *תפילה* a person can raise himself to a higher level. As such, he will become closer to his Creator and subject to His providence. Therefore, Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous so they can raise themselves to a higher level of perfection. However, we must try to understand how one becomes more perfected through prayer.

It is interesting to note that there was an incident when King David wanted to go to war with the Nation of Israel, but they requested that he remain in Jerusalem and pray for their victory. This is an amazing testimony to the power of prayer. King David was a powerful warrior. He led the Nation of Israel to many victories. However, the reality of him praying to God was just as significant as him fighting on the battlefield.

Throughout the book of Tehillim, King David recognizes that man's fate lies solely in the hands of his Creator. I believe the Gemara is teaching us that a

tzaddik can convert God's attribute of strict judgment to compassion through his prayers. The *tzaddik* is an individual whose entire life is one who accepts the will of his Creator. He is totally selfless and lives his life based upon the *רצון המקום*, *the will of the Almighty*. Through prayer the *tzaddik* acknowledges that his fate is totally dependent upon the will of his Creator. Excessive prayer reflects that the petitioner surrenders to the will of his Creator and realizes that only God can change his fate.

The *tzaddik* is an individual who is *מקבל רצון המקום*, *who accepts upon himself the will of the Almighty*. The act of prayer is an act of perfection because it demonstrates that the petitioner recognizes that his entire existence is in the hands of God. Prayer is the vehicle where man demonstrates that he is merely a servant of God. He prays to the Creator, the King of the world, Who is the only force that can answer his prayers. Thus, the *tzaddik* requests that the Creator hearken to his prayers and extricate him from his state of affliction. This is *מידה כנגד מידה*. The hope is that since he recognizes and lives his life based upon God's will, then God will accept his will and he will be worthy of God's compassion and his state of affliction will end.

Therefore, when the Nation of Israel faces an *עת צרה* we are *זועק* to Hashem. We cry out excessively and acknowledge that our fate is only in the hands of Hashem. But, as the Rambam states, we must also acknowledge that we are sinners and tragedy has occurred because of our sins. We surrender to God's will and recognize that we failed and breached our covenant with Him. We petition our Creator that we be worthy of His attribute of compassion and that the tragedy should end. This is the crux of *זעקה*.

Hashem's incredible kindness is that even if we do not do *teshuvah*, we will still be worthy of His compassion simply because we acknowledge our sins and recognize our fate is exclusively in God's hands. He is the King of the universe and we accept His will. The מאירי says at the end of מסכת מכות that בטחון means that we perform the *mitzvos* for no reason other than that it is the will of our Creator. This is the theme that resonates in זעקה at a time of affliction.

The prayer of the *tzaddik* is compared to a pitchfork. A pitchfork is very sharp and is inserted into the hay to move it around. The throngs of the pitchfork are sharp and are painful to the touch. The *tzaddik* is a person whose life is removed from the world of the physical self. He is involved in the world of God's infinite wisdom and pursues a life of justice and morality. Removing one's energies from the world of physical pleasures is painful. It is a difficult task and a *tzaddik* has endured much pain and hard work to direct his energies to the world of the soul. Although channeling ones energies away from the physical is painful, the *tzaddik* has liberated his energies to the world external to the petty concerns of the self. He has the best and most righteous existence since he is living life in line with the will of his Creator. Like a pitchfork that moves the hay around the threshing floor, so too does the *tzaddik* have the ability to change God's judgment from the attribute of דין to רחמים.

The Nation of Israel must acknowledge our sins at a time of affliction to be worthy of God's compassion. We have a special mission and when we breach our covenant with our Creator we are not worthy of His protection. We are זועק to Hashem and we recognize that we failed. We are not special, but we request another opportunity to fulfill our special mission to be a גוי קדוש וממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש.

Light Unto the Nations

We can now answer the one remaining question that we had concerning the sin of the spies. Caleb went to the burial place of our forefathers to seek רהמים. The *Avos* had the proper perspective of man's relationship with his Creator. Abraham started the revolution. The world was Godless until he explained God's existence to the masses and mankind's mission to do acts of justice and righteousness. Isaac at the עקידה demonstrated that man's life is committed to accepting the will of his Creator. Jacob spent his entire life to perpetuate the שבטי י-ה, *tribes of Hashem*.

The *Avos* recognized that the Nation of Israel was being formed to be a light unto the nations of the world. This is the special mission of the Nation of Israel. We are not special, but we are chosen to manifest to the world the will of the Creator. Caleb went to the burial place of the forefathers to gain inspiration concerning the proper relationship he must have with his Creator.

It is significant that the language used is that he was ביקש עליו רהמים, *requested mercy on his behalf*. Thus, even when man fails, he can be worthy of God's compassion merely by acknowledging that he failed in his special mission. Caleb needed that inspiration to be insulated from the attitude of the spies. The sentiment of the spies was that man is special and God is here to take care of our needs. Thus the *pasuk* tells us that Caleb was saved because he had אהרה. He gained inspiration from the *Avos* and recognized that Hashem would bring us into the land of Israel so that we can fulfill the special mission that the forefathers started.

Joshua was spared from the sin of the spies because Moshe changed his name. Moshe was his Rebbi, and by changing his name and adding ה-י, he recognized that his identity emanated from God. Moshe changed his name and told him that God should protect him from the evil advice of the spies. Moshe was teaching Joshua that his identity should be based upon the reality of God's existence and not any notions of being special. His existence is based upon the will of his Creator and not based upon his own personal interests.

Because the spies felt like they were special, they did not appreciate that they had to continue the mission that their forefathers started. They became fearful of the Canaanites. They were obsessed with their own self-interest. They failed to recognize that God would protect them because their destiny was to fulfill their special mission of being a light unto the nations of the world.

Fear of man should not enter into a person's sentiments when fighting those who deny the will and existence of our Creator. The reality is that as long as we fulfill our covenant with our Creator, He will protect us and destroy our enemies. King David had no fear. As a youngster, he armed himself with a slingshot and stood up to the giant Goliath. His only recognition was that his fate was in the hand of Hashem. The Creator always protected David because he recognized that his fate was in the hands of God, and as long as he pursued the mission started by our forefathers, God would ensure his success.

The Rambam states that whomever fights the war of God with all his heart and without fear, and his sole intention is to sanctify God's name, it is certain that no harm will befall him and no evil will reach him (*Hilchos*

Melachim 7:15). He will be worthy to build a proper home in Israel and have children in his lifetime and be worthy of the World To Come. The Rambam states that this is a promise from our Creator.

Fear stems from the concerns of the self when one, like the spies, feels that his relationship with his Creator is based upon his own special needs. When one recognizes that he is part of the Nation of Israel and a descendent of the forefathers, and is committed to continuing their special mission, God will protect him. It is certain that he will not be harmed. Fear plays no role because his only reality is to sanctify God's name. Fear only enters into the equation when he is concerned solely with his own self-interests.

This demands a very lofty individual, but it is worthy to pursue and achieve such spiritual heights. One's entire life will have added significance when he recognizes his special mission and the purpose of his existence.

The Symphony of Nature

It is significant that Hashem instructed Moshe that at a time of affliction the Jewish people should recite the thirteen attributes of God to be worthy of His compassion. How does the recital of the *שלוש עשרה מידות* make us worthy of God's compassion? In the last *perek* in Tehillim, King David praises God thirteen times. The Radak says this is reflective of the thirteen attributes of our Creator. The Radak is telling us an amazing insight.

When one looks at the world and sees chaos and injustice, he must recognize that this is the world

of the Creator. The thirteen attributes reflect that there is a harmony of creation and God is orchestrating the symphony of nature. What we perceive at times as evil and injustice is only because of our limited perspective. The thirteen מידות are reflective of the fact that the world exists in line with God's justice and compassion. This was the source of King David's praising God thirteen times.

He recognized that this is the world of our Creator and functions according to the laws of truth and justice. We can now understand why Hashem instructed Moshe to tell the Jewish people to recite the thirteen attributes of our Creator in times of distress.

At a time of tragedy, we have to recognize that this world functions based upon God's attributes of judgment and compassion. There is harmony in creation, and if tragedy has struck, it is because of our failures. In the event we fulfill the will of our Creator, the tragedy will be removed and we will be able to perceive the harmony. Thus God instructs Moshe that when the Jewish people are faced with tragedy, they should recite the thirteen attributes of God. This will allow man to appreciate the beauty of God's plan in creation and facilitate the Nation of Israel to accept God's will and fulfill our mission to live a moral and ethical existence. We will recognize God's kingship and the beauty of His creation.

The Eternity of The Nation Of Israel

When Abraham recognized the Creator and that man's mission is to live a life of justice and righteousness, God rewarded him. Hashem promised Abraham that his children would multiply and one will be incapable of counting them like the stars in the sky. Another time he

promised Abraham that his children will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. What do these two expressions reflect?

The Radak explains that when the Jewish people fulfill our covenant and are a light unto the nations of the world, we will be akin to the stars in the sky. People will admire us and we will always attain great heights like the stars above. However, when we fail in our mission, we will be like the dust on the earth. The nations of the world will trample upon us because we failed in our mission and are not worthy of God's protection.

After the עקידה Hashem promises Abraham that his children will be like the sand by the ocean. Hashem promises Abraham that since you did not withhold your son from Me, you will be worthy of this blessing. The Ramban explains that Abraham was previously blessed that his children would flourish like the stars in heaven and be innumerable to count like the dust of the earth. However, Abraham was never promised that his children would be granted eternal existence.

The Ramban states that after the עקידה, the Nation of Israel was promised that they would never be destroyed. I think the Ramban is explaining an idea that reflects the mission of our nation. We are a moral light unto the nations of the world and are a reflection of the fact that it is not our world but the world of our Creator.

We are the nation that lives life based upon the kingship of our Creator. After the עקידה, Abraham demonstrated that Hashem was the King of the world. He took his only beloved child, that he chose to continue his life's mission, and was ready to slaughter him. He did not understand why this was necessary, but he knew that

it was the will of his Creator. It was at this juncture that God commented, “Now I know that you fear God.”

This was the greatest manifestation of Abraham’s recognition that God is the King of the world and that he must accept His will. I believe this is why Hashem promised Abraham at this point that his children will always exist. His mission to live a life of justice and righteousness now culminated with his recognition that the Creator is the King of the world. Hashem now blessed Abraham that his children will be like the sand of the sea. This is the blessing of *נצה ישראל*, *of the eternity of Israel*.

When one goes to the beach, it becomes nearly impossible to remove all the sand one has accrued. It seems like the sand just won’t go away; it is always there. God now blessed the Nation of Israel that we will always exist and our enemies will never be capable of destroying us. We are the nation that was chosen for a special mission and we teach the nations of the world that God is the one and only King. We are committed to be *מקדש שם השם*, *sanctify God’s name*.