

JewishTimes

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Shelach:
**Two
Nations**

Shelach:
Imagining a
**Different
World**

Shelach:
**The
Unthinkable**

UNHAPPY?

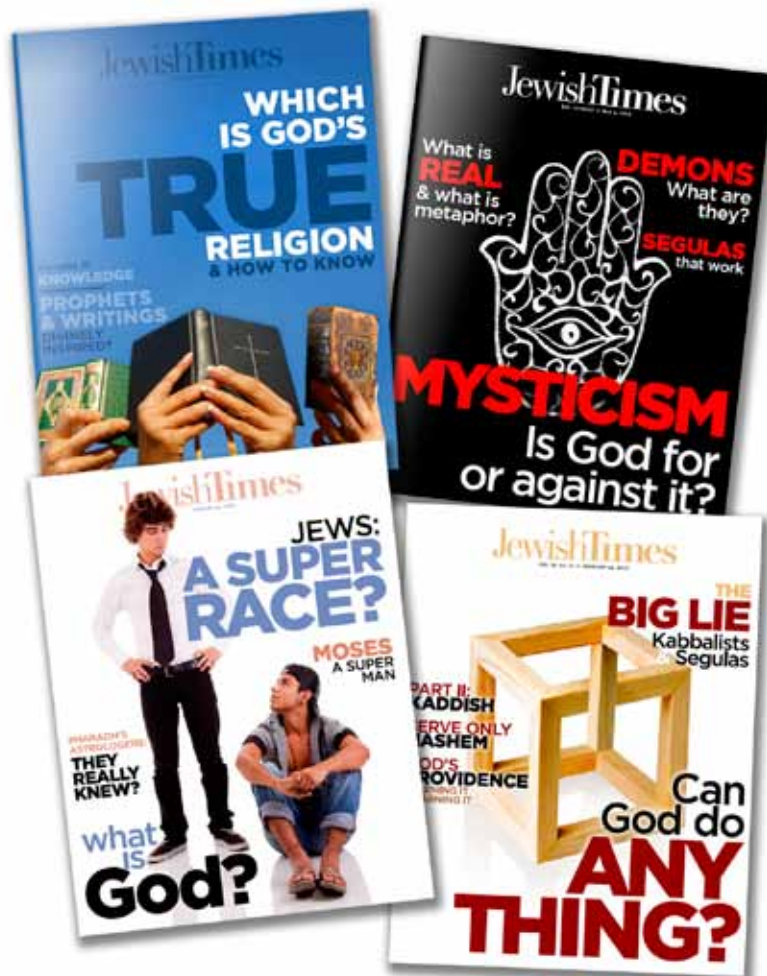
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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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LETTERS

Omens

Reader: I have had a bit of a disagreement with a local rabbi about various 'customs' surrounding the Havdalla wine at the Sabbath conclusion, which seem to me to be omens or amulets and therefore, according to you, forbidden. For instance, wine overflowing and dipping fingers in the wine afterwards and putting it on ones eyes and in ones pockets to

ensure success for the upcoming week. I would like your comments please.

Rabbi: Yes, these are Nichush (omen) violations. See Mishne Torah, Avoda Zarah chapter 11. Any act that has no demonstrated effects, yet people claim it causes certain results...is Nichush and a form of idolatry.

UNHAPPY? FIX YOU



The results are in:
Bad marriages.
Harsh divorces.
Court battles.
War.
Politics.
Failed relationships.

Lost friendships.
Arguments.
Still single.
Poverty.
Enemies.
Illness.
Frustration.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Maimonides states that most of the evils in life are self-inflicted (Guide III, xi, xii). This means that we make poor decisions, which backfire and lead to our unhappiness. This also means if we correct ourselves, we can avoid most causes of our unhappiness. We can lead truly happy lives.

Major causes of unhappiness:

Ego.

Greed.

Selfishness.

Ignorance.

Hasty decisions.

We don't wish to accept error.

We don't examine our behaviors and thoughts, nor do we change. Change is hard.

We seek matters that cannot provide the imagined happiness.

This last one is major; we are fooled by culture that happiness is attained through wealth, fame, and ego. In fact, wealth and fame breed envy and contempt. We also don't need that much wealth to live happily; simple clothes, and small homes

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and cars do fine. And ego is in our imagination, and not real. What gives man happiness is not the silent applause of the misled masses, but his engagement in pursuits external to the self. Children can teach us a lot here. Watch any 1st grader play ball, build his Legos for hours, socially interact with friends on a PC, shout with joy upon climbing a tree, or find jaw-dropping discoveries through a microscope or at the museum. Kids are in total happiness, without the amassing of wealth or the clamor for fame. As adults, we're merely large kids...still possessing the same faculties and capacity to be thrilled by engaging pursuits that offer discovery, amazement, socializing, and accomplishment. Of course, learning is at the top of the list. The first lesson is to reevaluate what we assume offers happiness, and identify those pursuits that offer it in truth.

Causes of Unhappiness

Some people never seem to find a mate. Many times this is due to the search for "perfection" (which doesn't exist) – and this is due to an egotistical self-image: "I'm so great, I deserve perfection." Dismissing others is a method of elevating the self, "He's not good enough for someone like me." Such individuals often do not get married, but could have, had they compromised.

Other times, singles wish to experience intense love on their first date. And when they don't, they don't pursue that prospective match. The error here is seeking on date #1, what took months to develop with a past love. We will always find flaws in others. The question is if the good outweighs the bad.

Others harbor considerations that if voiced, could be corrected by friends or family. Remaining silent about your decisions will only lead to prolonged time without a mate. And friends are wise to be honest and inform friends of their destructive thinking and actions. If you truly care for a friend, you will risk your relationship and help them with sound advice, for their own good. Even if they might not speak to you again. However, if you wish to preserve your friendship by remaining silent, that's no friendship. It's actually evil to care about retaining a friend through silence, instead of telling them the truth, regardless of how much it hurts them, or your relationship. Unfortunately, most people lack the backbone and true concern to speak up.

Sometimes we feel persecuted, we scream, "It's not my fault!" as we cast blame on others for our bad relationships and other failures. But if we're honest, we might find our own faulty decisions at the cause of the mess. In either case, we can escape or

resolve the problems, if we wish.

Others "can't seem to find work." They prefer to live under duress than to work at a not-so-perfect job, despite the fact that they'd finally attain better living conditions and bills paid on time. Some causes of poverty are the aversion to work, laziness, the discomfort of change, ego ("the job's below me") to name a few. But if such a person should realize that having some job is better than no job. And even a less-than-perfect job, which might pay little, is not permanent. Money can be saved and a better job can be sought later on. One must start somewhere, or remain in poverty.

"Who are you to tell me how to raise MY kids?" is a primary example of when ego harms people. In this case, the child is the victim. And no one is immune. King David's son Adoniyahu rebelled and sought the throne. Torah tells us why: David never rebuked him from his childhood, so he never learned to fear authority:

"And Adoniyahu ben Chagit elevated himself saying, 'I will be king.' And he made for himself chariots and riders, and fifty men running before himself. And his father [David] never aggrieved him from his youth saying, 'Why have you done such and such?', and he was very handsome...(Kings I, 1:6,7)."

We have a mesora (tradition) that when a few ideas are in a single verse, they are related. Thus, David's failure to admonish his son was due to his favoritism of Adoniyahu; for he was a beautiful son. David did not want to place a frown on such a face. And this in turn resulted in Adoniyahu's lack of fear for authority, and his rebellion. Sadly, many parents fail regarding discipline, as David did in this matter.

Parents err, and feel as a parent, they know best. Of course the simplest refutation is that parents bring kids to doctors. Why don't they know best here too, and prescribe their own remedies...without doctors? Similarly, a parent should welcome good advice from anyone. The truth is, parents are biased, and sound, objective advice can be found in others.

The Remedy

Most people never examine themselves. (Do you?) They don't reflect on their thoughts, values, reasonings, behaviors, or actions. They repeat destructive patterns. They are not happy.

(continued on page 7)

"Most people never examine themselves. (Do you?) They don't reflect on their thoughts, values, reasonings, behaviors, or actions. They repeat destructive patterns. They are not happy."

"You must commence an honest evaluation of yourself."

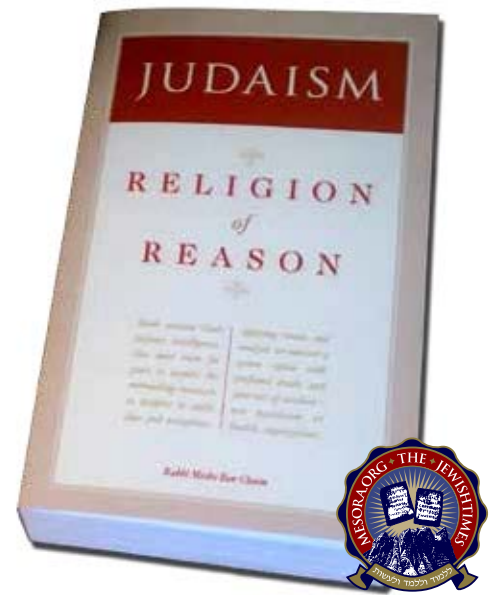
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Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN — *Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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In his commencement of the Mishne Torah, Maimonides discusses character traits and our management of our them. He advises us that we can change any of our destructive traits, by practicing the opposite...for a duration, until the original trait no longer rules us. We are ultimately to find a medium, where neither of the two poles affects our intelligence, and where we decide all matters without emotional influence. For example, a shy person must engage is speaking up more often, until the shyness that cripples him or her from sharing personal feelings is removed. Practicing courage and openness – the opposite of shyness – will permanently reduce the shy feeling. This ability to finally vocalize inner feelings can allow friends to now offer their reaction, and the formerly-shy person can then improve his/her thinking and actions. This will lead to greater happiness.

A person who is afraid of change, must constantly make changes until the emotion of stagnancy is eliminated, and the person finds it easy to change when necessary. And the person who always feels right, must seek advice very often, even in crowds, so the ego is broken and he or she no longer feels the need to defend the self, and can view the self as capable of error, and accepting of correction.

I cannot stress enough, just how vital this is to your happiness. You must commence an honest evaluation of yourself. Maimonides' chapters on Hilchos Dayos are a crucial read.

And in addition to controlling our emotions, we must gain knowledge...

Truth Rules Supreme

"The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God (Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 1:7)." Meaning, if one does not accept his ignorance, but thinks he's got all the answers, there is no remedy. To progress and remove the harm we cause ourselves, a person must be able to say "I am wrong." Some define insanity as the repetition of the same act, with the expectation of different results. It is foolish and self-destructive to continue a behavioral pattern, and expect change in your life. If you have no work, you must change your methods. If you have no spouse, you must admit your selection criteria and reasons for dismissing others is simply not working. If you do not change, your life will not change. That being homeless, single, or impoverished can be avoided, can motivate us to seek advice from others, when we can't decide on our own. Accept that you are harming your child by not disciplining him. Apologize to others whom you have wronged. Heal that relationship. Decide you will no longer seek "to be right," but rather, that you will seek the truth, and the best life that's in line with reality. Make all decisions to get there. Don't cower from difficult decisions or from admitting error. Be guided solely by intelligent choices.

Making this change may not come easy, but if you want to be happy, you must change. And don't be concerned with peer approval. You're not living to make others happy. They're certainly not living for you.

The shame of it all, is that after reading this, many will attempt to preserve their egos and continue in their self-destructive ways. You

will say, "This doesn't apply to me," when in fact, you can be helped through some of the advice in this article.

If you are not happy, or you have problems, make an effort to improve matters. Identify your problem(s) and their causes, determine where you can change, and seek advice from intelligent people, and make those changes. Maimonides taught that most problems are self-inflicted. It is in our abilities to change our lives, to improve, to be happy.

Knowledge of the ruth will outweigh any emotion. No matter how much we'd love to fly, we won't leap off a roof. Reality tells us that is fatal. Our intelligent acceptance of reality motivates us more than our emotions. So we must investigate all matters, and seek what is true. Such clarity will empower our better decisions, and will weigh stronger in our hearts than previous emotional biases. God designed man such that truth compels our decisions and actions, far more than our emotions.

1) So examine yourself. Share your findings with intelligent people.

2) Discover precisely what decisions and actions have led you to your current unhappiness, and abandon such actions and character traits.

3) Accept the blame; this will help you avoid repeating poor choices that have ruined your happiness until now.

4) Set your goals.

5) Obtain guidance on determining what precise steps will lead you to that goal.

6) Now start on that path and take those steps. You will eventually get there. Others have, and so can you. You can fix you. ■

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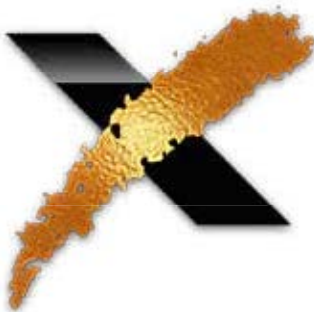
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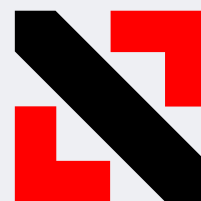
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IMAGINING A DIFFERENT WORLD

RABBI BERNIE FOX

And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Send men for yourself, that they may study the land of Cana'an, which I give to Bnai Yisrael. From every tribe of their fathers you should send a man –each a prince among them. (Sefer BeMidbar 13:1-2)

Behold, Hashem your G-d has set the Land before you. Ascend! Take possession as Hashem, the G-d of your fathers, has spoken to you. Fear not, neither be dismayed. And you came near unto me every one of you, and said: Let us send men before us, that they may spy the land for us, and bring us back word of the way by which we must go up, and the cities unto which we shall come. (Sefer Devarim 1:21-22)

1. TWO ACCOUNTS OF THE INCIDENT OF THE SPIES

Parshat Shelach provides the Torah's first account of incident of the meraglim – the spies. A second account is provided in Sefer Devarim. In the second account, the incident is reviewed by Moshe in the context of his final address to Bnai Yisrael before they enter the Land of Israel without him. There are a number of differences



between the accounts. One of the most fundamental differences is that in the account in Sefer Devarim, the impetus for sending the spies comes from the people. Moshe tells the people that the moment has arrived to conquer the Land of Israel. The nation responds by suggesting to Moshe that the conquest of the Land should be preceded by a scouting mission. The scouts will investigate the Land and discover the weaknesses in its defenses. The intelligence provided by the spies will be used to devise a plan for the Land's conquest. In Parshat Shelach, the account begins with Hashem's direction to Moshe to send the spies. No mention is made of the nation's role in initiating the ill-fated mission.

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra and others explain that the two accounts are not contradictory. They merely begin their presentations of the events from different points. The account in Sefer Devarim begins from the very beginning of the incident. The account in Parshat Shelach begins from a later point in the incident. The people have come to Moshe with their suggestion and Moshe has asked Hashem to guide him in responding. The account begins with Hashem's response to Moshe. Hashem tells Moshe that he may send the spies.¹

2. THE APPROPRIATENESS OF SENDING SPIES

The commentators dispute whether the nation's request was proper. Nachmanides maintains that the request was completely proper. Bnai Yisrael was poised to wage war against the nations living in the Land. A strategy for conquering the Land needed to be developed and this required intelligence regarding the defenses to be overcome and knowledge of any other physical obstacles that might interfere with the campaign. Furthermore, the Land would be conquered through a series of campaigns. Therefore, it was necessary to determine which areas should be first seized. These areas would form the staging ground for further campaigns and the produce of the territory initially captured would be required to sustain the people until the conquest was completed.²

Malbim disagrees. He argues that the

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normal rules of warfare did not apply to Bnai Yisrael. They should have understood that their conquest of the Land of Israel would not be through the strength of their armies or the wisdom of their military strategy. Instead, they would conquer the Land through miraculous means. Hashem would conquer the nations of Canaan and not the armies of Bnai Yisrael. The suggestion of the nation to send spies represented a failure in the people's trust in Hashem.³

And it came to pass, when the Ark set forward, that Moshe said: Rise up, Hashem, and let Your enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. And when it rested, he said: Return, Hashem, unto the ten thousands of the families of Israel. (Sefer BeMidbar 10:35-36)

3. MOSHE'S VISION OF THE CONQUEST OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Malbim's position is supported by the two passages above. These passages, the Torah describes the first stage of the nation's journey from the Wilderness of Sinai toward the Land of Canaan. Bnai Yisrael left Sinai with the understand-

ing that it would shortly arrive at the frontier of the Land of Canaan and the conquest would begin. The cloud of Hashem's glory preceded them and led them through the wilderness. Moshe declares that Hashem should rise up and that He should scatter the nation's enemies. Malbim explains that the meaning of these passages is that Bnai Yisrael will not wage a traditional war employing a carefully developed strategy based upon sound intelligence. Instead, the cloud of Hashem's glory will lead the nation into the Land of Canaan and Hashem will conquer the nations of Canaan just as He vanquished the mighty armies of Paroh.⁴

However, Malbim's interpretation of the dialogue between Moshe and Bnai Yisrael raises an important question. Why did the people not follow the cloud of Hashem and allow Hashem to scatter their enemies? Why did the people feel that it was necessary for them to send spies, gather intelligence, develop a traditional strategy, and wage a conventional war?

If you walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them, then I will give your rains in their season, and the land shall yield her produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (Sefer VaYikra 26:3-4)

4. THE TORAH'S ALTERNATIVE REALITY

The above passages begin the Torah's description of the blessings that Bnai Yisrael will enjoy in the Land of Israel in response to their observance of the commandments. This section of the Torah expresses a novel idea. The future of Bnai Yisrael in the Land of Israel will be determined by whether the nation observes the mitzvot. This means that prosperity and comfort, or scarcity and affliction will not be determined by natural material causes. Instead, a direct causal relationship will exist between the spiritual excellence of the people and its material wellbeing. In short, natural cause and effect will not apply.

These passages actually demand that Bnai Yisrael adopt a new and radical view of the physical world. They are to abandon the traditional view that material outcomes are determined strictly by material causes. This perspec-

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tive is to be replaced by the radical alternative that the spiritual excellence of the nation is the fundamental cause affecting the material existence of the nation in the Land of Israel.

In fact, the laws of Shemittah and Yovel – the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years are essentially expressions of this idea. These two mitzvot are completely counterintuitive and even ludicrous from the perspective of a conventional material understanding of the world. Every seventh year is a Sabbatical Year. Every fiftieth year is a Jubilee Year. Observance of the Sabbatical Year differs from the observance of the Jubilee Year. However, both have an important law in common. During both it is prohibited to work the land of the Land of Israel. The abstention from working the land is acknowledgment that it is Hashem's land and must be used as He prescribes. The Torah asserts that prosperity and comfort in the Land of Israel will be secured through the observance of Shemittah and Yovel. If these laws are disregarded, then the nation will experience poverty and anguish. In other words, not working the land will result in prosperity and working the land will bring about desolation and poverty!

What is the message of Shemittah and Yovel? It is that the Land of Israel is not governed by conventional cause and effect. It is governed by "a-material" cause and effect. The spiritual cause governs the material effect.

5. IMAGINING A DIFFERENT WORLD

In order for Bnai Yisrael to accept Moshe's assurance that the Land of Israel will be conquered miraculously and without waging a conventional war, the people needed to first accept the Torah's radical revision of our perception of the material world. They were required to imagine a very different world. They were required to envision and embrace the proposition that material outcomes – conquest of the Land of Canaan – would not be brought about through the familiar material means. Instead, Hashem would grant them possession of the Land in some miraculous manner that they could not imagine or grasp. In other words, they were required to use their imagination and perceive a deeper more fundamental reality than the familiar material reality. At this point, the people were not prepared to abandon the conventional perspective with the new radical one proposed by Moshe. Their imagination failed them. Therefore, they responded to Moshe's directive, "Ascend, Conquer!" with "Let us send spies". ■

1. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 13:2.
2. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:2.
3. Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), HaTorah VeHaMitzvah – Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 13:2.
4. Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), HaTorah VeHaMitzvah – Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 10:35.



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the UNTHINKABLE

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Shelach, is one of the gloomiest in the entire Torah. In it we encounter what may rightfully be described as the "unthinkable." Who would have thought that this people who had personally witnessed the mighty Hand of Hashem in crushing the Egyptians, would suddenly do a complete about face and refuse to march forward to the Promised Land? At the very outset Moshe informed them that G-d's plan was to take them out of Egypt, give them the Torah and then march triumphantly into the land of Israel. Hashem wanted them to inherit this goodly land in order to establish a society based on wisdom and justice in which He could "dwell." The Jewish nation, settled in Israel, would conduct its affairs in such a manner that it would be an "Or Lagoyim" (Light to the Nations) and sanctify G-d's name in the world. Yet, when the preliminary objectives had been accomplished and the time had come to embark on the final journey to the land, everything fell apart. The generation that was supposed to conquer the land instead was consigned to a forty year exile in the wilderness, until they had all passed on and their



children could proceed to Eretz Yisrael. We must ask, what happened to the people who left Egypt and experienced all the great miracles of Hashem? What happened to those who saw the splitting of the Red Sea and upon viewing the drowned Egyptian Army, "believed in Hashem and His servant, Moshe"? What happened to the nation that stood at the base of Mt. Sinai, witnessed supernatural phenomena and heard a voice from heaven proclaim, "I am the L—d your G-d who took you out of Egypt from the house of slavery"? How could this people refuse to follow G-d's command to "go up and inherit the land"? How could they deny His ability to crush the inhabitants of Canaan as He had the Egyptians? How could they propose to "appoint a leader who will bring us back to Egypt"?

This is a very complex issue that does not lend itself to simple answers. We must seek to gain some understanding of the calamity and, hopefully, apply its lessons to our lives. It is true that upon viewing the mighty giants who inhabited the land they were smitten with fear. On a superficial level the natives of Canaan

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were stronger than them. However, they had G-d's assurance that He would fight the battle for them and we would have expected that this should be sufficient to calm their apprehensions. Yet, as we see, it was not.

Perhaps there is a connection between the story of the spies and an incident that occurs in the previous parsha, Behaalotcha. There we also encounter the "unthinkable," ie the rebellion of the people against the Manna. This was the special food that was miraculously provided for them by Hashem. A fresh supply was waiting for them every morning, except Shabbat. It was the most perfect nourishment one could have. It had great taste and versatility regarding the ways it could be prepared and consumed. Yet, in spite of the greatness of the Manna which inspired Moshe to compose the first blessing of the Grace after meals, the Jews launched a rebellion over it complaining that things were better for them in Egypt. They said, "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt for free, the melons, leeks, etc. and now our souls are dry without anything substantial and we have only the Manna to look to." How is it possible that the Jews who had been so mistreated in Egypt could not now wax nostalgic about the "wonderful" fare they were treated to in that land? Rashi addresses himself to this issue and says, "If you say that the Egyptians gave them fish for free, doesn't it say and straw shall not be given to them? If they

wouldn't give them straw for free would they give them fish for free? What then is the meaning of free? Free from the mitzvot." According to Rashi the problem was not with the Manna. Rather, the Jews were having second thoughts about the "restrictions" and obligations of the Torah system they had accepted. Their inner reservations and complaints were directed at the Manna but the cause of their discontent was the fear of losing their freedom to "live as they please" and become bound by the Torah. The dissatisfaction with the commitment to Torah was at the root of the rebellion against the Manna. In my opinion, this attitude played a significant role in the tragic story of the spies. The fear of the inhabitants was completely unwarranted by a people which had proclaimed, "Hashem is a Man of War, Hashem Is His Name." The grumblings about the land "consuming its inhabitants" were a displacement of their complaints against Torah. If they had fostered a love of Torah and enthusiasm for its way of life nothing could have held them back. Joshua and Caleb saw the same things they had seen. Yet Caleb said "we shall certainly ascend and inherit it for we will certainly overcome them." His positive perspective was based on his love of Torah and desire to see the Jews established as G-d's people in His Land. May that attitude be the guiding light of our efforts to study and observe Torah and become a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation.

Shabbat Shalom ■

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DIVIDING the Jewish People



Rabbi Dr.
Darrell Gisnberg

The centerpiece of this week's parsha is the sin of the spies and subsequent decree given to the generation of Jews over the age of twenty who left Egypt. This was an epic tragedy of immense magnitude, altering the destiny of the nation entrusted with the Torah. It was a turning point in the history of the Jewish people. While indeed it was terrible, this does not mean it does not require analysis. God acts in a manner reflecting true justice, and as we will soon see, His communication to Moshe regarding the punishment reveals some important ideas regarding this punishment.

God delivers the punishment in two separate prophecies. The first was given to Moshe during his plea to spare the Jewish people complete annihilation. The second was given to Moshe and Aharon to deliver to the Jewish people. In this second prophecy, the message is longer, and essentially follows the trajectory of the first. There are ideas contained within the first that demonstrate how the foundation of the punishment was built into this initial prophecy.

After Moshe's plea, God responds with the following (Bamidbar 14:20-25):

"(20) And the Lord said, 'I have forgiven them in accordance with your word. (21) However, as surely as I live, and as the glory of the Lord fills the earth... (22) 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 to My voice, (23) if they will see the Land that I swore to their fathers, and all who provoked Me will not see it. (24) But as for My servant Caleb, since he

was possessed by another spirit, and he followed Me, I will bring him to the land to which he came, and his descendants will drive it[s inhabitants] out. (25) The Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valley. Tomorrow, turn back and journey into the desert toward the Red Sea.'"

The basic concept of the punishment here is that the generation of Jews who exited Egypt would not enter the Land of Israel. There are some unique things that jump out. Rashi explains that the preface "as surely as I live" refers to a shevuah, or oath. This seems to be a strange concept – God taking an oath? Why is His word not sufficient? If God says they are not going to make it in, you can be sure they won't.

Another question emerges from the qualification of the punishment. God says the reason for this ending of the generation that exited Egypt is tied to the fact that they tested God ten times. The Talmud (Erechin) lists each one, with the actions of the spies being the final one. What kind of rationale is this? If the nature of the action by the Jewish people was so unbelievably heinous in and of itself, why the need to attach it to the other "tests"? And if it was not, then why is ten the magic number, so to speak. Why not after the eighth or ninth?

One final question has to do with God tacking on "all who provoked Me will not see it", referring to the Land of Israel. The Sforno and Ibn Ezra explain that this refers to the condemned generation's children. If they anger God in a similar manner as their parents, they will not enter the Land of Israel. We see this

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outcome with the deaths of those involved with the sin of Korach and Baal Peor, as well as by the incident of the snakes. Why were these people tied to the sin of the spies? It would seem that their sins should be viewed as separate phenomenon, rather than, in a metaphoric manner, suffering the same outcome as the generation that left Egypt.

As noted above, God focuses on the constant “testing” at the hand of the Jewish people. The overall concept of these tests concern the inability of Bnai Yisrael to place their security in God. This is without question the seminal challenge that the Jews faced in the desert. They had been slaves in Egypt, dependent on a human king. With the exodus, the Jews were freed from the physical bondage of Egypt; the opportunity presented itself for them to turn and place their security in God. Yet they failed in different instances. Time and again, God forgave the Jews for this failure. However, at a certain point, it seems that God indicated there could no longer be forgiveness. Why? The sin of the spies merited the punishment of death in and of its own right. But there was another idea here to be transmitted. The inability to place their security in God was no longer a rectifiable flaw – it was fused to the identity of those who had been in led out of Egypt. To have this generation of Jews enter into the Land of Israel would have catastrophic consequences. The underlying inability to place their security in God would return in an even worse way, leading to the destruction of the people. This is the concept of the ten tests. The Jewish people had exhibited this same flaw over and over again. However, this time, it became part of their very identity. There was no way for them to overcome it. So we see two concepts related to this sin: the sin itself was horrific, but it also signaled a fixing of the trait in the consciousness of that generation. In order to ensure the future of the Jewish people, God decreed that none of those



who left Egypt could enter the Land of Israel. It is as if there would now be two distinct nations travelling the desert for the next forty years. The first would be those who could not enter the Land of Israel, marked by their flaw of failure to place their security in God. And the second would be the next generation, those who would enter into the Land of Israel.

This idea of two nations bears out to some degree based on a well-known Midrash. The Talmud in Bava Basra (121a) explains that the fifteenth of Av was celebrated by the Jewish people as it was the day the Jews ceased dying in the desert. The Rashbam cites the Midrash in Eichah, where every year on Erev Tisha B'Av (as the punishment was decreed on the ninth of Av) an announcement would be made throughout the camp, leading to the Jews digging graves, sleeping in them overnight. In the morning, those who had died would be separated out from the living. Each year, around 15,000 would die, leading to the eventual 600,000 dead over the forty year period, thus fulfilling

the decree God passed on this generation. When this finally ended, the Jewish people remaining celebrated.

There are numerous questions one could ask regarding this Midrash. In order to stick with the topic at hand, let's focus on the concept of sleeping in their own graves. On the surface, this seems to be an act replete with fear and insecurity, almost sadistic. What idea is conveyed here? It would seem critical that those who were part of the decree should view themselves as if they were already dead. The sin of the spies was so grievous that the Jews should have been killed at the moment God determined their punishment. Moshe's tefilah bought them time, so to speak. However, they should not view this as a true reprieve. Instead, they were living on borrowed time. Every year, they needed to go through this “ritual” to ensure they recognized this reality. Furthermore, the fact that 15,000 died every year at this time indicated to them how indeed this punishment was from God, rather than being the product of chance.

This perspective, as a people who in essence were defined as “dead”, is what created the divide between themselves and their children. This also can explain why God included those who would sin in the future, with Korach and Baal Peor. The source of these various sins partook to some degree of the failure to place their security in God. However, the main idea here is that God demonstrated from this point on, those who were active participants in testing God would forfeit being included in the future nation. They would become part of the “other” nation, those who were incapable of continuing God's mission in the Land of Israel.

Finally, there is the idea of the oath. It is possible God was conveying a critical message to those who fell under His decree. Without question, these people must engage in teshuva. They also would play a role in passing along their experiences to their children, as well as the ideas of the Torah. However, this did not mean that they could somehow remove this permanent stain. Their identity was fixed; it was a reality, something not subject to change. It was a truism, as God Himself was true. This finality was imperative for them to internalize, as it would lead to a false hope of possibly shedding this mark. This oath was a statement of reality, so that there would be a clear understanding that the flaw could not be removed.

It is hard to fathom the extent of this tragedy in Jewish history. The people who had been led of Egypt, who had experience miracle upon miracle, and ultimately had stood at Sinai and received the Torah, were condemned to never see the Land of Israel. Yet we still see how God operates with perfect justice. Rather than the punishment be simply an act of retribution, God in fact was conveying the message that the future of Judaism could not include these people. Their eventual demise was imperative in order for Bnai Yisrael to accomplish God's mission. ■