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## Confidence

It was perhaps the single greatest collective failure of leadership in the Torah. Ten of the spies whom Moses had sent to spy out the land came back with a report calculated to demoralise the nation.

*We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large... We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are... The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height... We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." (Num. 13:27-33)*

This was nonsense, and they should have known it. They had left Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world, after a series of plagues that brought that great country to its

knees. They had crossed the seemingly impenetrable barrier of the Red Sea. They had fought and defeated the Amalekites, a ferocious warrior nation. They had even sung, along with their fellow Israelites, a song at the sea that contained the words:

*The peoples have heard; they tremble;  
Pangs have seized the inhabitants of  
Philistia.*

*Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed;  
Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;  
All the inhabitants of Canaan have  
melted away. (Ex. 15:14-15)*

They should have known that the people of the land were afraid of them, not the other way round. And so it was, as Rahab told the spies sent by Joshua forty years later:

*I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two Kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. (Joshua 2:9-11)*

Only Joshua and Caleb among the twelve showed leadership. They told the people that the conquest of the land was eminently achievable because God was with them. The people did not listen. But the two leaders received their reward. They alone of their generation lived to enter the land. More than that: their defiant statement of faith and their refusal to be afraid shines as brightly now as it

did thirty-three centuries ago. They are eternal heroes of faith.

One of the fundamental tasks of any leader, from president to parent, is to give people a sense of confidence: in themselves, in the group of which they are a part, and in the mission itself. A leader must have faith in the people they lead, and inspire that faith in them. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter of the Harvard Business School writes in her book *Confidence*, "Leadership is not about the leader, it is about how he or she builds the confidence of everyone else."<sup>1</sup> Confidence, by the way, is Latin for "having faith together."

The truth is that in no small measure a law of self-fulfilling prophecy applies in the human arena. Those who say, "We cannot do it" are probably right, as are those who say, "We can." If you lack confidence you will lose. If you have it – solid, justified confidence based on preparation and past performance – you will win. Not always, but often enough to triumph over setbacks and failures. That, as mentioned in our study of parshat Beshalach, is what the story of Moses' hands is about, during the battle against the Amalekites. When the Israelites look up, they win. When they look down they start to lose.

That is why the negative definition of Jewish identity that has so often prevailed in modern times (Jews are the people who are hated, Israel is the nation that is isolated, to be Jewish is to refuse to grant Hitler a posthumous victory) is so misconceived, and why one in two Jews who have been brought up on this doctrine choose to marry out and discontinue the Jewish journey.<sup>2</sup>

Harvard economic historian David Landes, in his *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, explores the question of why some countries fail to grow economically while others succeed spectacularly. After more than 500 pages of close analysis, he reaches this conclusion:

*In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and that is the way of achievement, correction, improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right.*<sup>3</sup>

I prefer the word "hope" to "optimism." Optimism is the belief that things will get better; hope is the belief that together we can make things better. No Jew, knowing Jewish history, can be an optimist, but no Jew worthy of the name abandons hope. The most pessimistic of the Prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, were still voices of hope. By their defeatism, the spies failed as leaders and as Jews. To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope.

The most remarkable by far of all the commentators on the episode of the spies was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. He raised the obvious question. The Torah emphasizes that the spies were all leaders, princes, heads of tribes. They knew that God was with them, and that with His help there was nothing they could not do. They knew that God would not have promised them a land they could not conquer. Why then did they come back with a negative report?

His answer turns the conventional understanding of the spies upside down. They were, he said, not afraid of defeat. They were afraid of victory. What they said to the people was one thing, but what led them to say it was another entirely.

What was their situation now, in the wilderness? They lived in close and continuous proximity to God. They drank water from a rock. They ate manna from heaven. They were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory. Miracles accompanied them along the way.

What would be their situation in the land? They would have to fight wars, plough the land, plant seed, gather harvests, create and sustain an army, an economy and a welfare system. They would have to do what every other nation does: live in the real world of empirical space. What would become of their relationship with God? Yes, He would still be present in the rain that made crops grow, in the blessings of field and town, and in the Temple in Jerusalem that they would visit three times a year, but not visibly, intimately, miraculously, as He was in the desert. This is what the spies feared: not failure but success.

This, said the Rebbe, was a noble sin but still a sin. God wants us to live in the real world of nations, economies and armies. God wants us, as He put it, to create “a dwelling place in the lower world.” He wants us to bring the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, into everyday life. It is easy to find God in total seclusion and escape from responsibility. It is hard to find God in the office, in business, in farms and fields and factories and finance. But it is that hard challenge to which we are summoned: to create a space for God in the midst of this physical world that He created and seven times pronounced good. That is what ten of the spies failed to understand, and it was a spiritual failure that condemned an entire generation to forty years of futile wandering.

The Rebbe’s words ring true today even more loudly than they did when he first spoke them. They are a profound statement of the Jewish task. They are also a fine exposition of a concept that entered psychology only relatively recently – *fear of success*.<sup>4</sup> We are all familiar with the idea of fear of failure. It is what keeps many of us from taking risks, preferring instead to stay within our comfort zone.

No less real, though, is fear of success. We want to succeed: so we tell ourselves and others. But often unconsciously we fear what success may bring: new responsibilities,

expectations on the part of others that we may find hard to fulfil, and so on. So we fail to become what we might have become had someone given us faith in ourselves.

The antidote to fear, both of failure and success, lies in the passage with which the parsha ends: the command of *tzitzit* ([Num. 15:38-41](#)). We are commanded to place fringes on our garments, among them a thread of blue. Blue is the colour of the sky and of heaven. Blue is the colour we see when we look up (at least in Israel; in Britain, more often than not we see clouds). When we learn to look up, we overcome our fears. **Leaders give people confidence by teaching them to look up. We are not grasshoppers unless we think we are.**

## QUESTIONS (AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE)

1. How are *tzitzit* the antidote to the fears discussed in this study?
2. Can you see the appeal of the lifestyle that the ten spies feared leaving behind?
3. How can we bring the *Shechinah* into our everyday, practical lifestyle?

### NOTES

1. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Confidence*, Random House, 2005, 325.
2. *National Jewish Population Survey 1990: A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013.
3. David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London, Little, Brown, 1998, 524.
4. Sometimes called the “Jonah complex” after the Prophet. See Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1977, 35-40.



## Of Spies and Men

The main episode which takes place in Parshat Shelach is the story of the men sent by Moshe to scout the land. Although these men are referred to in rabbinic literature as "spies,"<sup>1</sup> the Torah never describes their mission in these terms.<sup>2</sup> Moshe appoints them to tour the land, and they are called, quite simply, men. Only later, in Moshe's retrospective speech describing these events, is the word 'spy' introduced.

*And you came near me, all of you, and said, 'We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us back word, the route by which we will ascend, and the cities to which we shall come. And I thought this was a good idea; and I took twelve men from among you, one from each tribe. And they turned and went up toward the mountain, and came to the valley of Eshkol, and **spied** it out. (Devarim 1:22-24)*

The twelve appointed men did, in fact, act as spies, although this was not the original mission statement; perhaps this was part of the problem. Their behavior warranted a change in name, a redefinition of their mission after the fact. This stands in stark contrast with an earlier episode in the Torah in which a group of men stand accused as spies, and deny it vehemently:

*And Yosef recognized his brothers, but*

*they did not recognize him. And Yosef remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said to them, 'You are **spies**; to see the nakedness of the land you have come.' And they said to him, 'No, my lord, your servants came to buy food. We are all one man's sons; we are honest men, your servants are no **spies**.' And he said to them, 'No, to see the nakedness of the land you have come.' And they said, 'Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.' And Yosef said to them, 'That is what I spoke to you, saying, You are **spies**. This is how you shall be tested: By Paroh's life, you shall not leave here, unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and you shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proven, whether there is any truth in you; or else by the life of Pharaoh surely you are spies.' And he put them all together under guard for three days. (Bereishit 42:8-17)<sup>3</sup>*

At first glance there is absolutely no connection between these two sections; in fact, they seem to be opposites. The "sin of the spies" deals with spies who are called men, and Yosef's accusation of the brothers deals with men who are called spies! Nonetheless, appearances notwithstanding, there may actually be a profound relationship between these sections. Let us carefully analyze the elements of each story: The first striking similarity or common theme is the number of people involved. While it is true that Moshe sent twelve men, only ten of them were spies. The remaining two, Calev and Yehoshua, had no part in the slanderous report or its tragic results. Of Yaakov's twelve sons, only ten were accused of being spies: Binyamin was at home and Yosef was the unknown accuser. A more in-

depth analysis of the sin of the spies will bring to light other common elements that go beyond this seemingly superficial numerical parallel, taking us to the very core of the issue.

What was the sin of the spies? If we carefully analyze their report and the punishment they were given subsequent to their report, we are able to discern several distinct stages. When they first return from their mission, they say:

*They reported to him and said, "We arrived at the Land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. But - the people that dwells in the Land is powerful, the cities are very greatly fortified, and we also saw there the offspring of the giant. (Bamidbar 13:27-28)*

The physical attributes of the Land are described in glowing terms, while the inhabitants of the Land are described as frightful; the implication is that military conquest is not feasible. Thus far, the spies do not denigrate or disparage the Land of Israel; they address the technical difficulty that conquest will present. It is this point that Calev challenges: he assures the people that their goal is attainable, that they have the capabilities.

*And Calev quieted the people before Moshe, and said, 'We will surely ascend, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.' (Bamidbar 13:30)*

When the spies respond to Calev's challenge, they reiterate their previous point and introduce a new argument, a second tier of doubt:

*But the men who had ascended with him said, "We cannot ascend to that people for it is too strong for us!" They*

*brought forth to the Children of Israel an **evil report** on the Land that they had spied out, saying, "The Land through which we have passed, to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants! All the people that we saw in it were huge. (Bamidbar 13:30)*

Now they attacked the land itself, and not only the inhabitants or the fortifications; they describe it as "a land that devours its inhabitants." The Torah prefaces their words with an editorial comment describing their response: "they brought forth an evil report." It is this "evil report," this second-tier attack that elicits a response by the people.<sup>4</sup> This second statement sets the chain reaction in motion. The people are demoralized, and the situation soon spirals out of control. They begin murmuring about returning to Egypt,<sup>5</sup> or even staging a coup,<sup>6</sup> before God puts an end to the revolt.

Significantly, when the spies' punishment is meted out, the Torah relates only to this second tier of criticism and not to their earlier remarks regarding the difficulty they would face in conquering the land. Only the slanderous words against the Land itself provoke God's ire.

*But as for the men whom Moshe sent to tour the Land, and who returned and provoked the entire assembly against him by **spreading a slanderous report** against the Land: The people who spread the **slanderous evil report** about the Land died in a plague before God. (Bamidbar 14:36-37)*

It seems that God is willing to "overlook" the questioning of His (or Moshe's) ability to successfully complete the journey and conquer the Promised Land, but a direct attack on the Land itself is unforgivable.

The word used to describe the sin of the spies is *dibbah*, which implies slander.<sup>7</sup> This is not the first usage of this word; that dubious honor belongs to the episode of Yosef and his brothers. The starting point of the enmity and the point at which the relationship between Yosef and his brothers breaks down is the "evil, slanderous report" that Yosef brought to his father about his brothers:

*These are the chronicles of Yaakov - Yosef, at the age of seventeen, was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock, but he was a youth with the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Yosef would bring **evil reports** about them to their father. (Bereishit 37:2)*

With these words, the backdrop for the sale of Yosef is painted. Despite the tension that had been percolating just below the surface for some time, Ya'akov sends Yosef to seek out his brothers, to bring back a report. Apparently Ya'akov was not opposed to Yosef's reporting; otherwise, sending him on this mission would have been absurd. On the other hand, given the eventual result and long-term consequences, perhaps Yaakov was mistaken. Can we draw any conclusions, learn any lessons, regarding the mission with which Moshe charged the twelve men? Perhaps if we compare the consequences of Yosef's mission with that of the mission of the spies - each having caused years of wandering and exile - these two seemingly disparate episodes come into closer focus.

Yosef's proclivity for telling tales brings another connection between the two episodes to light - a connection that is alluded to by an anomaly in the verses describing the spies. When the names of the men sent by Moshe are enumerated, only one of the representatives of the tribes of Yosef is attributed in the normal way. When the "tourist" from Efraim is named, no

identification with Yosef is offered; when the representative of Menashe is named he is described as being from the tribe of Yosef.<sup>8</sup>

Rashi explains<sup>9</sup> that only the descendant of Yosef who spoke slander - like Yosef himself - is identified with Yosef. Yehoshua was silent; he did not slander the Land of Israel with the other spies, and is therefore not identified as a descendant of Yosef: "From the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun," rather than "From the Tribe of Yosef, from the Tribe of Ephraim," as is the case with the representative of the Tribe of Menashe: "From the Tribe of Yosef, from the Tribe of Manashe, Gadi the son of Susi."

The Ibn Ezra<sup>10</sup> points out a subtle but important difference between Yosef and the spies: Yosef's reports to his father were accurate, factual accounts - disparaging, but true.<sup>11</sup> Yosef's report painted his brothers in a very poor light, bringing his brothers' deficiencies to their father's attention, but Yosef did not manufacture the content of the report. On the other hand, (according to the Ibn Ezra's reading) the Torah states clearly that the spies were telling lies, fabricating a "slanderous evil report."

Despite the subtle differences, the relationship between these two episodes seems to come to life, beyond the words themselves - "spies" and "slander," *meraglim* and *dibbah*. An additional connection may be found in the geographical description of the spies' journey:

*They ascended in the Negev (i.e., the south) and (he) arrived at Hevron, where there were Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the offspring of the giant. Hevron had been built seven years before Zoan of Egypt. (Bamidbar 13:23)*

There is a peculiarity in the text which is sometimes obscured by the translation: The

text indicates that the group, in plural, ascended from the south, while in the same verse stating, in the singular form, that "he" came to Hevron. According to tradition, only one of the men made his way to Hevron, the family home and burial ground of their ancestors: Calev.

*And he arrived at Hevron: Calev alone went there and prostrated himself on the graves of the Patriarchs, offering prayer that he might be helped not to give way to the enticement of his colleagues and join them in their counsel; You may see that it was Calev who went there, for so indeed it (Scripture) states, [Devarim1:36] "[Save Calev the son of Yefunneh, he shall see it] and unto him will I give the land upon which he walked!" and it is written, [Shoftim1:20] "And they gave Hevron to Calev." (Rashi, Bamidbar 13:22)*

It is not surprising that upon visiting this old/new Land, one of the tourists wishes to see the place where his family had lived. This tradition alone may indicate the different purposes the various travelers saw in their trip. One of the twelve men seeks out a connection to ancient family property and burial grounds; the others are far less emotionally connected. They act as spies.<sup>12</sup>

This particular excursion to Hevron has deeper meaning. The Torah states that they ascended in the south; those familiar with the geography and topography of the land of Israel will know that Hevron is on a mountain. On the other hand, when Ya'akov sent Yosef to seek his brothers, the Torah states that he was sent from the 'Valley of Hevron':

*And he said to him, "Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock, and bring me back word." So he sent him from the Valley*

*(depth) of Hevron, and he arrived at Shechem. (Bereishit 37:14)*

Rashi explains:

*FROM THE VALLEY OF HEVRON- But is not Hevron situated on a mountain, as it is said (Bamidbar 13:22) "They ascended in the south and he arrived at Hevron?" Why, then, does it state that Yaakov sent him from the emek, [the vale, the deep part] of Hevron? But the meaning is that Yaakov sent him in consequence of the necessity of bringing into operation the profound thought of the righteous man who was buried in Hevron in order that there might be fulfilled that which was spoken to Avraham when the Covenant was made "between the parts" (Bereishit 15:13), "your descendents will be strangers, etc": (Rashi, Bereishit 37:14)*

Here, Rashi teaches a profound lesson: The sale of Yosef, the exile of the tribes, the slavery of the people, the glorious Exodus and Revelation at Sinai were all part of a larger Divine plan. A covenant had been forged between God and Avraham; slavery was part of the deal, but so were liberation and a return to the Land. Now, Calev returns home, to the place where the exile had begun. As far as Calev is concerned, they have come full circle and it is time for this terrible exile to end. It seems significant that the two renegade men, the two who refuse to be spies, Calev and Yehoshua, were from the tribes of Yehuda and Yosef respectively. These were the main protagonists in the sale of Yosef. After all, it was Yehuda who suggested they sell Yosef in the first place.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Calev was intent on going back to the place where it all began, and perhaps that is what lay at the foundation of the alliance that was formed between these two great leaders.

The sojourn in Egypt was intertwined with a prophecy of a Promised Land:

*And he said to him, 'I am God who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this Land as an inheritance.' And he said, 'Almighty God, how shall I know that I shall inherit it?' And He said to him, 'Bring me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.' And he took to him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each half against the other; but he did not divide the birds. And when the eagle came down upon the carcasses, Avram drove them away. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Avram; and, lo, a fear of great darkness fell upon him. And He said to Avram, 'Know for a certainty that your descendents will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great wealth. And you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' (Bereishit 15:7-16)*

Now, at the cusp of the fulfillment of that Divine promise made to Avraham, hope is replaced by fear. How ironic that now they become fearful: the hard part was past, the slavery in Egypt had been endured, and now that the prophecy is to be fulfilled, the people break down. The catalyst that brought about their slavery was the sale of Yosef, which in turn was caused by the *dibbah*, the evil reports that Yosef shared with his father. The report which Yaakov had asked for - about the welfare of his sons and their flocks, was never

answered. Instead Yaakov received a different answer, one which took him years to understand: God's promise to Avraham had begun, the wheels had been set in motion, and the slavery would soon begin.

The sin of the spies was that they were spies.<sup>14</sup> They approached the Promised Land with detachment, without the desire to go back to their ancestral roots, without the sensitivity to their destiny that Calev displayed when he traveled to Hevron. Their words cause calamity, fear, dread and depression. They lied about the land and exhibited a profound lack of faith in God, in Moshe, in the Land of Israel, in Jewish history and Jewish destiny. Yehoshua and Calev were **men**; they retained their faith and fidelity. They understood that the sale of Yosef needed to be healed, and the highly symbolic return of Calev to Hevron indicates this understanding. They were careful of the words they used, careful that no *dibbah*, no slander, would pass their lips. The time had arrived to go back home. Unfortunately, the other men ceased to behave as men; they became spies. And as one painful chapter of Jewish history, brought on by slanderous speech, came to a close, a new painful chapter was opened - in much the same way.

1. The episode described in our present parsha is often referred to as the "sin of the spies." See Talmud Bavli Ta'anit 29a, Megilah 13a, Sotah 11b,34b, Bav Batra 117b, 118b, Sanhedrin 109b among many other sources.
2. I heard this observation from my teacher, Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik, in a lecture entitled "*Het Miriam uMeraglim*" (The Sin of Miriam and the Spies), delivered 06/04/75.
3. For an analysis of this section, see "Of Spies and Thieves" in my forthcoming volume, "Echoes of Eden" (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishers).
4. This refers to the masses who are now frightened.
5. See Bamidbar 14:3, "And why has God brought us to this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?"
6. See Bamidbar 14:10, "But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. And the glory of God appeared in the Tent of Meeting before all the people of Israel."
7. Mishlei 10:18: "He who hides hatred has lying lips, and he who utters a **slander** is a fool." Rashi, Bereishit 37:2, writes: The word *dibbah* always means, in old French, [speaking slander]; whatever he could speak bad about them he told to his father. *Dibbah* has the same meaning as the verb of the same root in the Song of

Songs, 7:10: "making speak the lips of those that are asleep."

8. Compare this with Bamidbar 1:10, where the leaders of the respective tribes of both Ephraim and Menashe are mentioned as sons of Yosef in one verse: "From the sons of Yosef: of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; of Menashe, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur."
9. This comment is not found in Rashi's commentary on the Torah, rather in his *Sefer Hapardes*, page 93.
10. Ibn Ezra, Bamidbar 13:32.
11. The text in Bereishit 37:2 says Yosef "brought" slander to his father.
12. The outwardly problematic behavior of Yehoshua has been discussed in my book *Explorations* (Jerusalem: Targum Publishers, 2000).
13. Bereishit 37:26-27.
14. Heard from Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik; see footnote 2, above.



## Subjective Proof

God was very kind to the spies. He arranged that a number of Canaanites should die just as the *Meraglim* were passing through the land. Instead of casting suspicious glances at the Jewish scouting party, the inhabitants would be busy attending funerals. Wherever, they went, the *Meraglim* saw huge crowds attending funerals and hardly any traffic on the roads. Ideal conditions for a scouting party, one would think.

But the *Meraglim* put an entirely different spin on the situation. Funeral processions everywhere! Canaan was clearly "a land that devours its inhabitants." They perpetrated a malicious slander and created a wave of public reaction against entering the Holy Land. As atonement, the Jewish people had to spend forty years in the desert. This was a seminal event in Jewish history.

But what was really wrong with what they did? They only reported the facts as they saw them. After all, it was not their fault that wherever they went, they saw large funeral processions.

The Steipler Gaon explains that the *Meraglim* saw what they wanted to see. They looked at the Holy Land with a jaundiced eye, and they saw the worst. According to the Baal *Haturim*, they were subconsciously concerned that they would lose their positions of prominence once the Land was conquered. Had they been more positive in their outlook, they would have understood that their interpretation of events was wrong.

Logically, if Canaan was indeed "a land that devours its inhabitants," if death was always rampant in Canaan, people would not be attending funerals in large numbers. How would society function if everyone spent a good part of his day marching in funeral processions? Nothing would ever get done. If people were really dying in droves, people would go to very few funerals. In fact, no one but the immediate family and closest friends would attend funerals. There would not be many large funeral processions.

Had the spies made an honest assessment of the situation, they would have realized that such large funeral processions proved the exact opposite of what they had concluded; they showed that death was a rarity in Canaan. They proved that having so many funerals at once was a rare phenomenon that brought out the shocked crowds in great numbers. And if they had seen beyond their bias, they would have perceived the hand of Hashem clearing the land before them so they could scout undisturbed.

The Talmud relates (*Gittin* 45a) the story of Rabbi Ilish who was arrested and imprisoned. While sitting in his cell, a bird came to him and chirped something to him. It seemed to Rabbi Ilish that the bird had said, "Ilish, escape! Ilish,

escape!" Rabbi Ilish, however, was not convinced. He asked his cellmate, "Did you hear what that bird said to me?" The cellmate replied, "The bird said, 'Ilish, escape! Ilish, escape!'" Convinced of the authenticity of the message, Rabbi Ilish made his escape from prison.

Rav Akiva Eiger, in the *Gilion Hashas*, wonders why Rabbi Ilish needed confirmation from his cellmate. According to the *Seder Olam*, Rabbi Ilish understood the conversation of birds. He certainly did not need the help of some jailbird to decode the message.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that Rav Ilish did indeed understand the conversation of birds, and it seemed to him that the bird was telling him to escape. But since that was what he wanted to hear, he could not trust himself. He needed the confirmation of an objective person.

A person hears what he wants to hear and sees what he wants to see. The *Meraglim* came into the Land subconsciously seeking something to criticize because of their own personal interests; they feared they would lose their political status in the Land. Therefore, they saw in the large funerals a sign that the "land devours its inhabitants" when, in fact, it proved the exact opposite.

A related theme emerges from a similarity of language between the episode of the spies and the *parashah* of *tzitzis* at the very end of *Shelach*. When Moshe sent off the spies, he told them (13:18), "And you shall see (*ure'isem*) the land." When he gave the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, he said (15:39), "And you shall see (*ure'isem*) it and recall all God's commandments." What is the significance of this similarity?

The Talmud explains (*Menachos* 43b) how "seeing" the *tzitzis* leads us to recall the commandments. The key is the blue *techeiles* thread, which is reminiscent of the sea. The

blue sea recalls the blue sky. The sky recalls the Throne of Glory, and the thought of the Throne of Glory reminds us to perform the *mitzvos*.

The *tzitzis* show us that a person can "see" far beyond the surface if he makes the proper effort. Moshe sent the spies to "see" the land, and indeed, there was much to see. But they could not get beyond the surface. They saw giants and funerals, but they never really penetrated to its holiness. They never did "see" the land.



## Of Ants and Grasshoppers

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

In this week's portion, Moses sends spies to scout the Land of Israel, and they return with a negative report about the land. They say, "The people who live in the Land are such giants that we appeared to be like grasshoppers in their eyes!" (Numbers 13:33). Rashi explains that the Spies overheard the giants saying, "There are *ants* in the vineyard that look like people."

Many commentators grapple with Rashi's inconsistency in quoting the verse. If the Torah explicitly likens the Spies to grasshoppers, then Rashi should have said that the Spies overheard the giants saying, "There are *grasshoppers* in the vineyard," not ants!

We can offer a novel approach in understanding this apparent inconsistency based on the words of the Tiferet Shmuel (vol. II). In the Book of Proverbs (6:6), King Solomon advises the lazy person to go and observe the ant. The Midrash (Yalkut Shemoni, Proverbs 938) explains that the ant spends the entire summer gathering kernels of wheat, barley, and beans. In one anthill that was once unearthed, 300 *kur* - a staggering amount - of surplus grain was discovered. Yet the ant only lives for six months, during which time it is only capable of consuming a kernel and a half of wheat! Why does the ant gather vastly more food than it is capable of consuming?

According to the Midrash, the ant says to itself, "Perhaps God will decree long life for me, and I will be prepared." From here we see that the fundamental characteristic of an ant is that of preparation and saving for the future. King Solomon therefore tells the lazy person to observe the ant, so that he too can learn to prepare in this world for the Next World. This teaches us the importance of saving and preparing in this world for our eternity.

The grasshopper, however, is the antithesis of the ant. The grasshopper is related to the locust, which, instead of saving its food for the future, is constantly involved in eating, in the present. Thus, the grasshopper is symbolic of those who think only of the here and now, materialistically. This is why the verse in this week's portion refers to grasshoppers.

The spies called *themselves* grasshoppers! These spies were the 10 out of 12 whom the Talmud (Sotah 34a) teaches were carrying the physical fruits of the Land of Israel. Like the grasshopper, they were focused on this world - the materialistic qualities of the present.

Based on this understanding, Rashi's comment about ants does not contradict the verse in the Torah; rather, it is referring to the remaining two spies, Joshua and Calev, who the Talmud teaches were not carrying the physical fruits of

the Land. Joshua and Calev were interested in how the spiritual properties of the Land of Israel could help facilitate their eternal existence.

May we all be blessed to view the world through the eyes of the ant. This will change the style of our lives into one where every act, word and thought will be performed with a consideration of our spiritual eternity.