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PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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PARASHAT SHLACH

Send forth for yourself men. (13:2)

Rashi explains that the term lach, for yourself, means l'daatcha, by your discretion. Hashem said to Moshe Rabbeinu, "I do not command you to do so. If you wish, send forth." Moshe decided to allow the spies to reconnoiter Eretz Yisrael. It was not necessary from a military perspective, since Hashem was the Commander in Chief. Yet, Klal Yisrael felt they needed this added assurance. Hashem told Moshe, "It is up to you, l'daatcha." We wonder what lesson can be derived from the idea that Moshe, of his own volition, sent the spies on their mission. What impact - or lack thereof - did this have on their mission?

Horav Dovid Povarsky, zl, opines that the mission ended tragically directly as a result of Hashem's lack of "participation." Had they gone at Hashem's behest, nothing untoward would have occurred, and the meraglim would have returned safely, conveying a favorable opinion of Eretz Yisrael. When an individual is a shaliach, agent, of Hashem, nothing negative results from his mission. This is similar to the Ramban's comment, Shomer mitzvah, lo yeida davar ra. "One who guards a mitzvah, will not know any evil." No evil results from following Hashem's instructions.

Although the spies left with the proper intentions, something shifted within them along the way. Embedded far beneath their external facade of righteousness was a dormant feeling of negativity. As the Zohar Ha'Kodesh comments, they feared being deposed as Nesiim and replaced by others once they entered the land. This feeling gnawed at them until it finally penetrated their psyche, causing them to speak out with vitriol against Eretz Yisrael.

This negia, vested interest, interfered with their vision, so that they could no longer see clearly. Indeed, they viewed every positive event that Hashem catalyzed for them through a jaundiced perspective. They viewed every bit of good that was to protect them, through eyes tainted by the malignancy of personal prejudice. People were occupied with funerals; rather than viewing this as Hashem's method of keeping the populace involved in their own personal issues, thus oblivious to the

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intruders, they accused the land of eating its inhabitants. This is just one example of the tragic turn of events that would never have taken place had Hashem not sent the spies to scout the land.

The Rosh Yeshivah explains that this is what the Torah is teaching us. Not only does serving as an agent of Hashem provide a protective force, an omen for good fortune, but the mere fact that an individual is His agent becomes a deterrent to the inappropriate behavior. He no longer has the audacity to respond to his personal vested interests and renege on Hashem's command. The fear and trepidation associated with the overwhelming cognition that one is acting on Hashem's behalf is too much. This compelling awareness protects him from slipping into the trap of prejudice, into the abyss of sin.

A Jew must view himself as being in this world on a mission for Hashem, such that everything he achieves is for Him. The Telshe Rosh Hayeshivah, Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, came to America at the beginning of World War II with this idea in mind. Together with his brother-in-law, Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, they built an oasis of Torah in the Midwestern wilderness of America. At a time when hopelessness was a matter of fact, and observant Jews despaired of seeing their children follow in their ways, these two giants of Torah and spirit trail-blazed the path, laying the foundation for Torah in America. Undaunted by the challenges, they overcame personal tragedy, general apathy and constant obstacles in their quest to establish a real yeshivah of the old-,world Lithuanian genre on American soil. This yeshivah would not compromise the timeless standards that had been the hallmarks of Telshe in Europe. They were motivated by the words of Yonasan to David Ha'Melech, Leich ki shilachacha Hashem, "Go, for Hashem has sent you." They felt that they had been spared from the European inferno to fulfill a mission: to build Torah in America. Their mission was their *raison d'etre*. It was their guiding light and their rallying point that empowered them to go on. We are the beneficiaries of their *mesiras nefesh*, devotion and self-sacrifice.

They brought forth to Bnei Yisrael an evil report on the land that they had spied out. (13:32)

This was not the only time in Jewish history that spies were sent to reconnoiter Eretz Yisrael. It happened once again later, when Calev ben Yefuneh and Pinchas ben Elazar were sent as spies. They were taken in by Rachav, a woman of questionable repute, who protected them at the risk of her own life. Ultimately, she ended up marrying Yehoshua ben Nun, Moshe Rabbeinu's successor to the mantle of leadership of the Jewish People. What was the difference between the *meraglim*, spies, and Rachav? The spies were Torah leaders, individuals who had experienced the exodus from Egypt and had witnessed the splitting of the Red Sea and the Revelation at Har Sinai, while Rachav had not. Yet, her faith and trust in the Almighty overshadowed theirs.

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, explains that there are divergent concepts regarding serving Hashem: *tzomeiach*, growth; and *noveil*, withering. Rachav was clearly on a much lower rung of the spiritual ladder than were the *meraglim*. There was one difference, however: she was growing, climbing, reaching up and ascending to staggering heights, as she scaled the ladder of spirituality. They, on the other hand, were withering, falling, descending at breakneck speed to the nadir of corruption and sinfulness. This may be likened to a tree that begins to bloom. While it may now look empty and barren, soon it will be budding with flowers that will give way to luscious fruit. In contrast, the tree that has been uprooted no longer receives its nourishment from the earth. Whereas now it may appear to be in full bloom, before long, it will shrivel and dry up.

Rav Yeruchem quotes Horav Itzele Blazur, zl, who compared this to a wealthy man whose

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fortune had been overturned. As he faced complete bankruptcy, he still had much more money in his portfolio than his poor neighbor who had just struck it rich. Shortly, the once poor man will be extremely wealthy with more money, and the once rich man will have nothing. They are both on the ladder: only one is ascending, while the other is descending.

Rav Yeruchem writes that when Rav Itzele would relate this analogy, he would break down in weeping, acutely aware of its profound implications. He always wondered which ladder he was on! What about us? Is it more than simply a good analogy? Are we so certain which ladder we are traversing?

We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes. (13:33)

Rashi comments, "We heard them (the Canaanites) say, 'There are ants crawling in our vineyards.'" Horav Ovadiah m'Bartenura wonders why Rashi adds the word "ants" when, in fact, the spies said, "We were like grasshoppers." He explains that when one views himself as a grasshopper, others will view him as something even smaller, such as an ant. A number of psychological insights may be derived from the spies' misconception of themselves and what the Canaanites thought of them, especially in light of the Bartenura's observation. First, as noted by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, in all likelihood, the spies did not understand the Canaanite language. Yet, they were certain what they were talking about. This teaches us that when one feels inadequate, he is likely to conclude that others have a similar feeling about him, that they are discussing his ineptitude and are probably expanding upon it.

Second, there is a descending progression concerning feelings of low self-esteem. The spies initially felt like grasshoppers, but this feeling soon had them shrinking to the size of ants. Last, what one feels about himself will invariably be reflected in a less positive form by others. In other words, people think less of you than what you think of yourself, because you project the perception of your own insufficiency.

Having said this, we examine the sin of the meraglim, spies, and the tragic effect it had on the entrance of the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael, from the perspective that their low self-esteem catalyzed the problem. Indeed, the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, comments that the spies' remark was at the root of their sin. They had no right to take to heart what the Canaanites had said about them. As Jews, we are emissaries of the Almighty with a positive mission in this world. That is all that matters to us - not public opinion. As mentioned earlier, however, it is quite possible the Jews misconceived and misconstrued the Canaanites opinion of them. In their negativity, they conjured up an opinion of themselves that was quite removed from the truth. The spies, regrettably, saw demons at every juncture in their lives. They had become victims of their own low self esteem.

How did this occur? This was the nation that had experienced the exodus from Egypt with its accompanying miracles. They had stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah amidst the greatest wonders and miracles. How could they think negatively of themselves? We suggest that in order to affect a solution to a problem, one must first be aware that the problem exists. In other words, the solution to low self-esteem is to live a Torah life totally committed to observing all 613 mitzvos and various Rabbinic enactments and safeguards. This lifestyle rallies a person to a status of kedushah, holiness, in which every action in his life is performed to fulfill the Divine will. While that may be a possible solution, it can correct a self esteem problem only once it has been firmly acknowledged. Most of us are either clueless in diagnosing the problem, or blind-either purposely or unknowingly-to its

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existence. Correcting the self-image distortion can only occur once this malady has been acknowledged.

There are two forms of low self-esteem: first, the one in which the individual has an appropriately low opinion of himself, and the second, in which the feeling of negativity is unwarranted and unsupported. Some people feel that their inadequacies are real - and they are. Others, however, have an incorrect self-perception, thus creating a low sense of self-esteem that is unjustified. Many people see themselves as less than they really are. Some of the most successful people see themselves as failures, refusing to accept their success and finding ways to mitigate the situation. Rabbi Twerski explains that, paradoxically some of the most gifted and competent individuals develop a negative self-image as if they are looking through a trick lens in such a manner that what they perceive is actually the opposite of reality.

Let us take the example of the physician who spends his every waking moment either in his office or in the hospital attending to patients. This goes on for 365 days a year. No rest, no vacation - utter devotion to his work. Admired by his patients, revered by his colleagues, those around him think that his wife must be a shrew. Why else would a man so consistently avoid being home?

Years later, when his wife consults a therapist for severe depression, she explains that while her husband has been a wonderful person and a great material provider, he has never been home. The children have never had a father, and she has never had a husband. The emotional relationship and support that a husband and parent should provide had been non-existent. This woman is otherwise a very gentle, intelligent and compassionate person, quite unlike the perception that her husband's behavior has implied. Wherein lay the problem? After subsequently meeting with the physician/husband, the therapist comes to understand that although the physician knows himself to be competent as a doctor, he perceives himself to be inefficacious as a person. As a human being, he has no identity, no self-worth - a total zero! He has not felt capable of providing his family with the emotional support that they have needed. He, therefore, has gravitated away from home to the hospital, the office, or wherever it has been more "comfortable" than "facing the music" at home. He has deluded himself and, thus, has been suffering the serious detrimental side effects of his self-imposed negativity.

People can convince themselves that they are unworthy. Klal Yisrael experienced an unparalleled Divine Revelation filled with wonders and miracles. This should have elevated anyone. Alas, there are those who feel that they are unworthy of Hashem's favor, of His Revelation, of His miracles. They feel their spiritual position is not exalted. Rather than allow Hashem to make the decision, they continue on with their feelings of rejection and unworthiness. Distorted self-perception results in unwarranted loss of self-esteem, which leads to a variety of emotional distresses and behavioral maladjustments. The spies were great people with tremendous strengths, skills and capabilities, which they should have used in the service of Hashem. Had they not been, they would not have been chosen to represent the nation in scouting out the land. Regrettably, they were not cognizant of their own exalted status; thus, they allowed their own misconceptions to prevail. It has been called the "grasshopper syndrome." In essence, it is much more than that because the Canaanites never called them grasshoppers. It was the spies who wrongly perceived this. It was, instead, a case of misperceived self-identity. They had no clue to who they actually were.

In conclusion, perhaps the following vignette sums up the spies sin and places it and its catalysts in their proper perspective. The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, once approached a chasid who had come to his court, asking, "Why have you come here?" "I have come to find G-d," the chasid replied.

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"It is unfortunate that you came so far and spent so much to waste your time," the Rebbe countered. "G-d is everywhere. You could have found Him just as well had you stayed at home."

"If so, for what purpose should I have come?" the chasid asked.

"To find yourself," the Rebbe answered. "You should have come to find yourself!"

Many of us are seeking and looking for something that is right in front of us. Our problem is that we - not the object which we are seeking - are lost.

A person who shall act high-handedly...he blasphemed Hashem- that person shall be cut off from among his people, for he scorned the word of Hashem and broke His commandment. (15:30, 31)

Very strong words. Unforgiving punishment. After all, the sin is unpardonable. It demonstrates the individual's utter contempt for everything Jewish. Idolatry is much like subtle blasphemy which incurs the punishment of spiritual excision. In truth, the person has long ago cut himself off from the Jewish People. This is the reason that one is shocked with Chazal's declaration in Sanhedrin 99A, "For he scorned the word of Hashem." "This is a reference to him who could study Torah, but does not." Not studying Torah seems to be a far cry from idolatry and blasphemy. There must be a deeper explanation of Chazal's statement.

Horav Matisyahu Salomon, Shlita, cites the Mishnah Berurah who explains that Chazal are addressing the significance of kvias ittim, setting aside specific times for Torah study. Let us expand on the subject and how it is relevant to us. The Shulchan Aruch writes that after one completes his tefillah and leaves the shul, he should go to the bais hamedrash and set aside a specific block of time for Torah study. This set time should be exactly that: a set time that is immutable, regardless of the amount of profit he might have gained during this time. The Mishnah Berurah adds that this set time should preferably take place immediately following davening, so that the individual goes from tefillah to Torah. This is consistent with the pasuk, "They, who go from strength to strength, will see Hashem in Tzion." The mitzvah of limud haTorah is not assigned a specific time. It is ongoing, all day whenever one has time. One who is free and willingly wastes this opportunity by not availing himself of Torah study is guilty of ki dvar Hashem bazah, "For he scorned the word of Hashem." One must have a set period for Torah study, a time designated so that nothing other than an accident prevents him from adhering to it. If such an accident occurs, preventing him from applying himself to his schedule, he must view the time "lost" as a chov kadosh, holy obligation, to reimburse this "time." This is a synopsis of the words of the Mishnah Berurah.

Rav Matisyahu posits that exclusive of the mitzvah of limud haTorah, which applies "day and night," there is a special obligation of kvias ittim, setting aside a specific time to study Torah on a regular basis. The Mishnah Berurah goes so far as to say that one who prioritizes his time in such a manner that regardless of what occurs-- or what "deal" has come along-- continuing to learn during his seder, designated time for learning, manifests a true sense of emunah, faith, in Hashem. His devotion is inextricable. He indicates his belief that Hashem will provide for him, if it has been declared.

The Mashgiach adds that the injunction to set aside a specific time for learning which transcends everything, even the most profitable opportunity, applies equally to those who have made Torasan Umnanan, have dedicated their lives to studying Torah as their lifelong vocation. This kvias is a time that cannot be infringed upon. It is one's fidelity to his kvias that manifests his true commitment

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to Torah and his unequivocal sense of emunah. One who is prepared to renege on his kvius, demonstrates where his true priorities really are. We must remember that the value of anything is determined by what one is willing to spend-- or give up-- for it. As the Mashgiach notes, Eisav ha'rasha, the wicked, was comfortable selling the birthright for a bowl of red lentils. That is what it was worth to him, so in his eyes it was a fair trade. We must ask ourselves: What is Torah learning really worth to us? What and how much are we willing to cede for Torah?

Send forth men, if you please. (13:2)

The Midrash Tanchuma cites a pasuk in Mishlei 26:6 which seems to equate the meraglim, spies, with a kesil, fool. This is enigmatic. The spies were anything but fools. The Torah refers to them as anashim, men of distinction, righteous persons - certainly not fools. If, in fact, they are denigrated because they disparaged Eretz Yisrael, they should be described with another derogatory term. Perhaps we are to view them as reshaim, wicked men, but surely not as fools. Is one who reports unfortunate tidings a fool? Indeed, in the Shulchan Aruch at the end of Hilchos Aveilus, it is stated that one who relates bad news is considered a fool. Why?

Horav Michel Peretz, Shlita, explains this based upon Chazal's dictum, "One does not sin unless he has first been possessed by a ruach shtus, spirit of foolishness." Now, let us ask ourselves: What is really the difference between a fool and a wise man? Chazal teach us that a chacham, wise man, is one who is roeh es ha'nolad, "sees what will be born, what will be the consequences of his actions." A fool, on the other hand, acts without forethought, with no purpose, no goal, and no objective. He acts in response to his whim of the moment.

The meraglim were not sent to discern if war were necessary, or if it would, in fact, be a successful campaign. They were sent to determine how they should fight, what tactics to employ, what methods would be most beneficial. Instead of returning with the correct information, they came back to the nation with defeat written over their faces and spewing from their mouths. They did not follow orders; they did not spy the land for the purpose for which they were sent. By disparaging the land, they only managed to dishearten the people and frighten them into believing that they had no chance for success. This was their act of foolishness: they did not fulfill their goal and objective in spying the land. They were sent for one purpose; they shifted the focus of their mission. This was foolish.

What really is the purpose of the slanderer? What benefit does he derive from tarnishing someone's reputation? What does he gain by causing untimely pain to another person? If that person deserves pain, Hashem will see to it that it afflicts him in due time. It is not the slanderer's function to execute Hashem's task. The disparager talks for no reason, no purpose, no benefit. One who acts without goals and objectives is a fool. He acts to gratify his own momentary needs. This is the meaning of the phrase, "One does not sin unless a spirit of shtus has entered him." Sin has no long-term purpose. It is an act of gratification that serves only to satisfy the moment. The sinner destroys his future in response to the whim of the present. Is that not foolish? Simply, one who acts without purpose, without goal and objective, just to satisfy his yetzer hora, evil inclination, is foolish.

This is the very definition of religion: recognizing that life has purpose and that one lives with that purpose in mind. The nature of the Jewish journey throughout history has been the recognition that history has a purpose and that humanity has a destiny. Through savage suffering and deprivation, we

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have clung to this belief. Through heroic persistence and overwhelming dedication, we have maintained our vision of this destiny. We have resolutely maintained our dignity, because we have understood that it is all part of a grand design. That is purpose. Those who disagree are not necessarily evil. They are simply foolish.

The entire congregation broke out in wailing. The people wept on that night. (14:1)

In the Talmud Taanis 29a, Chazal teach us that "that night" was none other than Tisha B'Av. Hashem said to the people, "On this night you cried for no reason at all; I will make this into a night of tears throughout your exile." Tisha B'Av has gone down in history as the night of weeping: the day of our national mourning; the day that our Batei Mikdash were destroyed; the day that many of our national tragedies occurred. All this was the result of unwarranted weeping. When we cried for nothing, Hashem gave us something about which to cry. We have no way of measuring the multitude of tears that have been shed during the millennia of Tisha B'Avs that we have experienced. Every exile has brought with it its own Tisha B'Av, but they all revert back to that fateful night when we cried for no reason. Is there a reprieve? Will these many tears ever become a source of consolation, comfort - even joy? In an essay on the sin of the meraglim, spies and their tragic ramifications, Horav Moshe Eisemann, Shlita, explains the concept of tears. I think we may be able to apply his explanation to a broader picture of tragedy and joy, exile and redemption.

We cry for two reasons; sometimes from joy, but, more often, from sorrow. Why would Hashem create us in such a way that we express both of these contrasting emotions in the same manner? It is not as if Hashem limited the many resources with which He has endowed us. Was there not an appropriate, less ambiguous way to differentiate between joy and sorrow? On a purely physiological level, tears are an expression of strong emotion. Thus, when one is either very happy or very sad, his tear ducts constrict and emit tears. Tear ducts do not "understand" the source of strong emotion, therefore, we have a technical explanation for tears being the same medium of expression for both joy and sorrow. Does it have to be that way? Are joy and sorrow intrinsically connected?

The Navi Zecharyah says, "Thus speaks the Lord of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month (Shivah Asar b'Tamuz), the fast of the fifth month (Tisha B'Av) the fast of the seventh month (Tzom Gedalyah) and the fast of the tenth month (Asarah B'Teves) will ultimately be transformed into days of joy and celebration for the family of Yehudah, provided only that the (people) will learn to live in truth and peace." (Zecharyah 8:19) The Navi's words are striking. Had he simply said that one day these days of mourning will end and joy will commence, we would have understood him. He goes further than this, however, when he says that these days will not simply disappear, but, rather, they will be transformed and reappear as days of joy and festivity. This is certainly far more than we had hoped for.

In reality, the theme that sorrow will one day not only give way to joy, but actually turn into joy; that mourning and grief will be transformed in celebration and joy seems to be a staple of Jewish history. Yirmiyahu HaNavi also predicts, "I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them and cheer them in their grief." (Yirmiyahu 31:12) He is not presaging some new joyous celebration with no connection to the past. He predicts that the past will be transformed into joy. The Navi's vision that the future is grounded in the past results from viewing the past destruction in a different perspective. He views the past through the prism of the future Messianic era of Redemption.

While there needs to be more space dedicated to a topic of such import and sublimity, I will

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attempt to encapsulate Rav Eisemann's words and include my personal supplement. The Tanna, Rabbi Akiva, sums up life in his famous dictum, Kol mah d'avid Rachamana l'tav avid, "Anything at all which Hashem does is ultimately for the good." Thus, in the global view of the Torah, no tragedy is completely tragic, and no sorrow, is completely dark. There is light beneath the darkness of sorrow and hope within the tragedy. There is no destruction, other than the one that carries redemption on its wings.

We find that when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he addressed all of them equally, comforting them. When he came to Binyamin, he was overwhelmed and began to cry on Binyamin's shoulder, and Binyamin did the same on Yosef's shoulder. Chazal teach us that each one wept in anticipation of the destruction of the Sanctuary that the other one would experience in his portion of Eretz Yisrael. Why would two brothers who had been separated for so long choose this moment of great joy to mourn tragedies that were yet to occur in the distant future?

In his Gur Arye, the Maharal presents an alternative interpretation of Chazal's statement. He suggests that the reconciliation between Yosef and his brothers was a portent of the future reunion of the Ten Lost Tribes, symbolized by Yosef and the remnant of the Jewish nation, which, in turn, was symbolized by Yehudah who remained as the bearer of Jewish history. That reunion will be accompanied by much weeping, which he feels is substantiated by Yirmiyahu HaNavi in 31:5-9, at which point he speaks of the return of the Ten Tribes. Why are they weeping? This is a moment of heightened joy, a moment for which they have waited and hoped for thousands of years. Apparently, the tears about which Yirmiyahu speaks are tears of joy, tears representing the ultimate realization that the horrors of the bitter exile and persecution have finally ended. To paraphrase the Maharal, "When Yehudah and Yosef finally meet, they will cry about the sorrows and destructions that have overtaken them." The tears of joy will be in response to the sorrow and persecution which they have sustained. Does this make sense?

Certainly, the Maharal supports our previous axiom that the tears of sorrow which they shed during the painful galus will be transformed into tears of joy once the exile has reached its culmination. Apparently, what we had originally thought was a technical explanation carries a more profound, meaningful reality. The very same troubles that cause our expression of tears during the immediate period of pain and misery will later bring us the tears of joy when the troubles are resolved. It is all the Hand of G-d speaking, directing, guiding. He strikes, and He heals. He causes pain, and He brings happiness; it is the same Hand. The sorrow is the mask; the rejoicing is the reality.

How true this is. Ask anyone who has undergone a period of travail which culminated in salvation and redemption. His joy is more elevated; his sense of satisfaction and pleasure are heightened. The joy increases with the measure of pain that one has sustained. We Jews have suffered so much. How great will be our tears of joy. We must, however, believe that it will one day reach its culmination with our Redemption, bimheirah b'yameinu.

Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh, of the spies of the Land, tore their garments. (14:6)

In a display of grief, purposefully carried out to raise attention and shock the people into acknowledging their sinful behavior, Yehoshua and Calev rent their garments in mourning. Indeed, when we observe people, who know better acting in a manner that is reprehensible, in a manner unbecoming a Jew, rather than talk about them or criticize them, we should mourn. First, we have just

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witnessed an attack on the integrity of Jewish belief. Hashem's Name has been impugned. Furthermore, the mere fact that we have witnessed this assault on Torah Judaism is indicative of our own personal failing in this area. Hashem shows a person the area in which he himself is deficient. This is the simple p'shat, explanation.

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, offers an alternative explanation that is both practical and, regrettably, a tragic commentary on Jewish history. The meraglim, spies, were anashim chashuvim, distinguished Jewish leaders. Forty days of insecurity and fear of what life in Eretz Yisrael would mean for them brought them to their knees. It catalyzed within them a reaction that would have been totally atypical of their lofty position when they left on their mission. Yehoshua and Calev could not tolerate that these men who had "gone wrong" stood there in all of their glory, wearing the distinguished garb of leadership, with the kapota, Rabbinic frock, and top hat, trashing Eretz Yisrael and speaking with impunity against Hashem and His chosen agents who were to lead Klal Yisrael into the Holy Land. They did not tear their clothing. Rather, they tore the fine garments worn by the meraglim, who had impugned and denigrated themselves. They no longer deserved distinction. I think that the practical aspect of this thought needs no elaboration.

And Moshe said to Hashem, "Then the Egyptians shall hear it, for You brought up this People in Your might from among them...the nations (which have heard Your fame) will speak, saying, "Because Hashem was notably to bring this people in to the land...therefore He has slain them in the wilderness." (14:13, 16)

In the Talmud Berachos 32a, Chazal note that the pasuk should have read, Mibilti yachol - "Because (Hashem) was not able," using the masculine form (yachol), rather than the way in which it is written, mibilti yecholes, in the feminine form. This prompts Chazal to relate that Moshe Rabbeinu said to Hashem, "Ribono Shel Olam, now the nations of the world will say that the G-d of the Jews has grown weak like a female, and He is not able to save His People." Hashem then replied, "Have they not already seen the wonders and miracles that I performed for them at the Red Sea?" Moshe Rabbeinu responded, "Yes, but they still might say that You could stand up to one king (Pharaoh), but not to thirty-one kings." Chazal conclude that Hashem pardoned Klal Yisrael as a result of Moshe's response.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, notes the severe and exact nature of chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name. The exchange between Moshe and Hashem basically revolves around the impact that a possible chillul Hashem might have. Indeed, it was this prospect that catalyzed Hashem's annulment of the decree to destroy His People. Let us consider this idea.

The miracles that Hashem wrought against the Egyptians were unprecedented and unparalleled both in terms of number and nature of severity. The defeat of the Egyptians was a convincing display of military might which certainly promoted the Jewish People as a strong nation with whom to be reckoned. At the time these miracles took place, literally no one in the world doubted Hashem's ability to do as He pleased- however, whenever, and wherever. Only a fool would have thought that Hashem's powers were limited and that defeating thirty-one kings was beyond His capability. If Hashem were to punish the Jews at this point in time, no rational person would think that it was due to His inability to vanquish the kings of Canaan.

Yet, based upon this very concern, Moshe was able to negotiate a stay of punishment for the Jews. As remote as it was, the chance that someone, some place might hypothesize that Hashem was

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weak was a risk of chillul Hashem not worth taking. A risk of desecrating Hashem's Name was a chance that could not be taken - regardless of how unreasonable and unfeasible it might be. Hashem acquiesced to Moshe's request due to this remote liability. The critical consideration of avoiding a chillul Hashem at all costs spared the Jewish People from their fate.

There is a powerful lesson to be gleaned from here, one that each one of us should review scrupulously. The need to avoid any element of chillul Hashem is paramount. Regardless of the remoteness of the possibility, it is a fear that one must take into consideration. It goes without saying that this certainly applies to any behavior unbecoming a member of Klal Yisrael, perceived by the world community, and rightfully so, as the Chosen People. We have an obligation to uphold Hashem's Name to the world - a world that is, at best, hostile to the Jewish concept of religion. When we damage that image that we are to present to the world as representatives of the Almighty, we create an unpardonable chillul Hashem. It is certainly not worth the few dollars we might save with an act of misrepresentation. If the need to avoid a chillul Hashem has the power to overturn a decree against an entire nation, it must be that the devastation caused by this breach is exceedingly great.

And it shall constitute Tzitzis for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem. (15:39)

By seeing the fringe, one will be reminded of the many other mitzvos that Hashem has instructed us to observe. In the Talmud Menachos 43b, this pasuk is interpreted differently. Chazal say that the "seeing" is a reference to seeing "Him," Hashem. By performing this mitzvah with the proper intention, one can learn to realize that Hashem guides the world. Thus, when one "sees" Hashem, he integrates his perception with his duty to serve the Almighty. The Maharal m'Prague takes a different approach to explaining this pasuk. When Hashem created the world, all of the creatures of the world came before Adam, so that he could give them all their proper names. With his unparalleled perception, Adam was able to delve in to the essence of each creature, giving it a name that aptly defined its essence. Adam was named for his source, the place from whence the "materials" that comprised his body were taken. Adamah is earth and, thus, Adam received his name. Maharal adds that man's purpose and goal are parallel to those of the earth. The earth causes flowers and herbage, which sustain the world, to sprout forth from its ground. Likewise, man is to also bring forth and realize his potential. As the seed is hidden deep beneath the surface of the ground, so that after it germinates, it will grow into a life-sustaining force, so too, does man have incredible potential to sustain life- both physical and spiritual. This process is called kiyum ha'mitzvos, mitzvah performance, because the world is sustained through mitzvah observance.

When a person wears and gazes at his Tzitzis, he is reminded of his goal in life. The Hebrew term Tzitzis may be derived from the phrase tzitz ha'sadeh, flowers of the field. Thus, when a man sees the Tzitzis that hang at the fringes of his garment, he understands that they represent his function to be motzi min ha'koach el ha'poel , "maximize his potential" in order to realize his goal and objective in life.

This might be the difference between the Tallis Katan, small individual garment that one wears as a bachur, young man prior to marriage, and the Tallis Gadol, larger Tallis that one wraps around himself when he takes a wife. Marriage brings with it added responsibilities. One can no longer concern himself only with personal issues. He now has a partner in life, catalyzing the need to think globally - not personally. Until now, his goal in life has quite likely been more individualistic,

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revolving around his own potential. Now, he has taken a step forward in responsibility. He must see to it that the potential of others is also realized. He no longer thinks only of himself. He "wraps" himself with responsibility towards others. This does not mean that one should wait until he enters matrimony before he assumes a more public, communal stance. It is just that, at this point, one is obligated to shift his focus.

And these are their names: for the tribe of Reuven, Shamua ben Zakur. (13:4)

A name is more than simply a way to address a person. Indeed, the names of those mentioned in the Torah reveal much of the essence and personality of the individual. At the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah records the names of the Nesiim. These names reveal the personal qualities that rendered these men most suitable for these positions. Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, infers that this idea applies equally to the names given to the meraglim, the men selected to be the spies. Their names should allude to their special capabilities. Thus, the name Shamua implied that he was a good listener, since shamua is from the same root as shema, to hear. An individual of such stature could be expected to listen to Hashem's mitzvos. Zakur is a derivative of zechor, to remember, indicating that he would remember Hashem under all circumstances.

If this is so, why did he sin? He had the qualities that should have protected him. Listening and remembering are two attributes that should contribute to circumventing sin. Rav David explains that every quality has its limitations. One may be a good listener, but it is critical that he listens to the appropriate message and to the right person. Remembering is a wonderful trait, if the memories that are evoked are healthy and constructive.

Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei 14:15, "A fool believes everything." Yes, Shamua listened, but it was to his yetzer hora, evil inclination, that he lent his ear, not to Hashem. Zakur means remembering, but the meraglim evoked the wrong memories in the people. They complained, "We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for free, and the squash and the melon and the leeks and the onions and the garlic" (Bamidbar 11:5).

Moshe Rabbeinu surely screened the spies, studying their names, their qualities, their virtues. These men had it all, but they chose to divert their good qualities for purposes that were not as good. Regrettably, this has occurred a number of times in history. Men who were destined for greatness, who had the qualities to lead our nation in a positive manner, fell prey to the blandishments of their yetzer hora, becoming leaders who led their followers to iniquity and infamy. Hashem grants us the tools. It is up to us to use them properly.

Yet, we see some who are - for all intents and purposes - fine, decent and morally correct individuals, who for "some reason" just "go wrong" somewhere, somehow. What is it that causes this transformation? The Torah informs us that Calev ben Yefuneh was different than the other meraglim.

He, together with Yehoshua bin Nun, stood up against the slander that was spewed by the other spies by defending Moshe. They stemmed the tide of rebellion. Regrettably, it was too late. The damage had already been done. In describing Calev, the Torah writes, "But my servant, Calev - because a different spirit was with him, and he followed Me, I shall bring him to the land to which he came, and his offspring shall possess it" (Bamidbar 14:24). Rashi explains the words va'yimalei acharai, "and he followed me wholeheartedly," literally, that "he filled his heart to follow Me." He filled his heart

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completely with the desire to listen - to follow Hashem.

Rav David explains that the word "full" means to capacity. If there is room in a cup for even one more drop, then the cup is not filled to capacity. Likewise, if there is room in one's heart - regardless of how minute this space may be - his heart is not completely filled. When there is room in one's heart, there is room for a positive influence, as well as for a negative one. The other spies were righteous people. They were good, but there was "something" missing. The difference between the other spies and Calev was a single drop. That solitary, minute drop made a world of difference. Calev's heart was completely full in his desire to serve and follow Hashem. Thus, there was no room for any adverse influences. The other spies lacked this drop. Their hearts were not filled to the top. Therefore, there was room "at the top" to contaminate everything throughout.

One who is partially committed - is fully not committed.

See the Land - how is it? (13:18)

Moshe Rabbeinu instructed the spies to pay close attention to the nature of the land. The climate and terrain of some lands provide an optimum physical environment for its inhabitants to develop into healthy, vigorous people. Conversely, other lands are detrimental to a healthy physical development. The Alshich HaKadosh, zl, explains that Moshe was conveying to the spies the criteria for ascertaining and confirming why the people who inhabited Eretz Yisrael were plagued with a fear of the Jewish army to the point that they were self-defeated even before their first battle. This was to be inferred from the way they surrounded themselves with walls for protection. Despite the Canaanites power and might, they were frightened. How was this indicated?

When the Jews left Egypt, the Canaanites defiantly uprooted every fruit tree in their land, so that the Jews would not benefit from them. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that Klal Yisrael tarried for forty years in the wilderness: to give the Canaanites the opportunity to replant their trees. When they saw that the Jews were in no hurry to enter Eretz Yisrael, the Canaanites planted trees, so that they could benefit from the fruit before the Jews took away the land. They had literally given up hope and were waiting for the end to come. In other words, a nation that is defiant is a formidable opponent. One that is complacent has already given up hope of emerging victorious. It has surrendered before the first shot has been fired.

As long as one maintains a sense of hope, he has a chance of conquering the enemy - regardless of whether the enemy is a nation, an illness, or a difficult situation. The Baal Yesod Ho'Avodah cites the following story that supports this idea. It took place during Napoleon's invasion of Russia. The Russian commander was listening to the somber reports coming from the battlefield. Messages of defeat were arriving one after another: this battalion had surrendered; a regiment had been driven back; an entire brigade had fallen to Napoleon's armies. It appeared, indeed, that all was lost.

The commander's adjutant entered the room to find his superior ashen-faced and thoroughly depressed. "What has occurred?" he asked. The commander gave him a blow-by-blow description of defeat.

"That is it?" the adjutant exclaimed. "Is that not bad enough?" the commander countered.

"No. There is even worse news." The adjutant replied.

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"What could be worse than what I have mentioned?" the commander asked.

"The latest report was that the commander of the Russian Army has given up and lost his will to fight!" the adjutant declared.

When the commander heard this, he understood what he was doing wrong. A commander who falters, falls. He immediately issued orders and jumped into the fray of commanding the battlefields. He rallied the troops, encouraging them not to give up. They could and would prevail - and they did.

Historians consider this the decisive turning point in the war. Indeed, the Russian victory over the French army in 1812 marked a huge blow to Napoleon's ambitions of European dominance, which ultimately led to Napoleon's defeat and exile.

Never give up hope. As long as there is hope, one can turn anything around, even the most challenging situation. The following anecdote sums it up. A sole survivor of a shipwreck was cast upon an uninhabited island. After much trouble, he was able to build a crude hut in which he placed the few belongings that he had been able to salvage. Each day he prayed to the Almighty for deliverance, anxiously scanning the horizon for some sign of a ship that he could hail. One day, upon returning from a hunt for food, he discovered to his chagrin a horrific sight: his hut with all his belongings had burnt to the ground. All that he had was gone. A man of limited vision, he could no longer contain himself, and he began to curse his lot in life. Had he not suffered enough? What could G-d want from him? When would He stop? He went to sleep that night on the ground without any protection, a broken, depressed person. The next morning, he was awakened by the sound of a ship dropping anchor on the island. The captain disembarked and came over to him and said, "We came as soon as we saw your smoke signals."

And how are the cities in which it dwells - are they open or are they fortified? (13:19)

Moshe Rabbeinu asked the meraglim, spies, to look closely into the nature of the land and its inhabitants. One can learn much by studying the habits and lifestyle of the people of the land. The Ohr Pnei Yehoshua from the Admor, zl, of Galant, offers a penetrating insight into Moshe's request that they check to see if the people dwelled in cities that were open or fortified. The spies went and discovered, to their chagrin, that the cities were fortified with lock and key. They figured that had they been living in open cities without fortification for protection, they would be easily conquerable. Now, what could they do to gain entry for battle?

Calev arose and implored the people to listen. He encouraged them, saying that they could "indeed" win the war. The greatest proof is that the cities in which the enemy lived were fortified. Had the cities been open, it would indicate that its inhabitants were on friendly terms with one another. Trust and camaraderie reigned in their communities. People had nothing to fear. Protection was not needed, since everyone got along. There was openness. They were all members of one large community. Had this been the case, they would have proven to be a formidable adversary. There is nothing more difficult to battle than a unified army.

Now, however, that the reports were that that the people lived in fortified cities, there was a strong indication that they were their own greatest enemy. Apparently, discord and mistrust prevailed in the communities. When people lived in locked communities, it was a strong indication of trouble brewing from within. Such a nation would be easy to vanquish. Indeed, they were destroying themselves.

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While this is a penetrating exegesis on the Chumash, it is an even greater lesson for us. When there is mistrust in a community; when openness is feared and everybody looks over his shoulder for fear of what his "friend" is plotting against him; when insecurity is the catchword to describe a community, then it is racing at high speed towards self-destruction. We must ask ourselves: Do these depictions characterize us? If so, are we prepared to do something to address the problem?

But My servant, Calev, because a different spirit was with him. (14:24)

The sin committed by the spies has plagued us ever since that fateful night. When we take into consideration that these were the leaders, the princes of the Dor Deah, the generation that lived through the Exodus, that received the Torah at Har Sinai, it gives us something to think about. How could they have gone wrong? What provoked them to slander Eretz Yisrael, thereby catalyzing the tragic consequences that befell not only them, but the rest of Klal Yisrael? Horav Yitzchak zl, m'Varka, contends that they intended l'shem Shomayim, their whole focus was on acting for the sake of Heaven, to teach the people that one who speaks ill of Eretz Yisrael will die at the hands of bais din. Just as the mekoshesh eitzim, one who gathered twigs on Shabbos, intended to teach the people the importance of Shabbos observance and the punishment for someone who desecrates it, they also were willing and prepared to give up both This World and the World to Come, so that the people would realize the unparalleled kedushah, holiness, of Eretz Yisrael.

They were, however, wrong. The mekoshesh was wrong. Had he not desecrated the second Shabbos since their liberation from Egypt, Moshiach would have come. Chazal teach us that if Klal Yisrael keeps two Shabbosim properly, it would bring Moshiach. The mekoshesh desecrated the second Shabbos. It is because of him and his cheshbonos, calculations, that we have been in exile all these thousands of years. The meraglim had no business playing G-d. Calev did not side with the other spies. Yehoshua, as Moshe Rabbeinu's talmid muvhak, primary disciple, would never dispute his rebbe. Calev, however, could have joined the ranks of the other spies. He could have chosen to die b'mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, to teach the nation the ramifications of slandering Eretz Yisrael, but he did not. That is why Hashem singles him out as avdi Calev, My servant, Calev (ibid 14:24). Calev understood that one does not try to second-guess the Almighty. He must act and follow Hashem's orders. He has to do what he is told, not what he thinks. It is not our role to correct the world on our own and to sacrifice our lives for it. We only have to do what we are told. Then, we will satisfy the Almighty and earn for ourselves the ultimate reward.

But My servant, Calev, because a different spirit was with him. (14:24)

Moshe Rabbeinu only mentions Calev - not Yehoshua. Why? It is not until later that it mentions that Yehoshua will also merit entering Eretz Yisrael. Interestingly, even there, Calev's name precedes that of Yehoshua. Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, derives an important lesson from here. A person is held accountable not only for failing to perform a mitzvah, but even if he does perform the mitzvah, but delays in carrying it out at the most propitious time; "getting around" to doing the mitzvah is a reason for censure. It demonstrates a lack of interest, a feeling of complacency, an absence of enthusiasm. It is an attitude that demeans the mitzvah, undermining its value and significance.

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Rav Zalmen cites the story of a man who had a dream. In the dream, his rebbe, a distinguished rav who had recently passed away, appeared before him. The rav related that he saw a certain tzaddik, righteous person, standing on Erev Shabbos at the gates of Gan Eden. He asked the tzaddik why he was not entering. The tzaddik replied that since he had often postponed changing into his Shabbos clothes until after Shabbos had already started, he was being punished, middah k'neged middah, measure for measure, by not being allowed into Gan Eden on Shabbos night.

Being late is cause for punishment. We may now understand why Calev is mentioned first. The Torah informs us that after the spies returned with their unfavorable report, "Calev quieted the nation," and he encouraged the nation to ignore the report and go into the land. It is later, after the rebellion continued, that the Torah mentions that Yehoshua and Calev tore their clothing and repudiated the spies' report. Hence, measure for measure, when the reward for their actions is announced, only Calev's name appears. When the Torah reiterates the reward of entry into Eretz Yisrael, then Yehoshua's name is mentioned, so that no one should think that Yehoshua was also punished. Even then, Calev's name precedes Yehoshua.

Why did Yehoshua originally remain silent? Rav Zalmen explains that he did not want the people to suspect him of protecting his rebbe, Moshe. Yet, we derive from here that when one should act - nothing should stand in the way. He should not concern himself with what others might think or say. After all, Calev was Moshe's brother-in-law, and that did not hinder him from taking necessary action. The people may think what they want. He was going to do what had to be done

Send forth men if you please (for yourself) and let them spy out the land of Canaan. (13:2)

Rashi explains that the word lecha, for yourself, means according to your own counsel. Hashem said, "I am not commanding you to do so. If you so want, you may send them." Hashem "gave in" - so to speak - to Klal Yisrael's request to send spies. It was not an enthusiastic acquiescence, as indicated by Rashi, "I (Hashem) told them that the land was good, but they do not trust Me." While Hashem was not pleased with the people's determination to send spies to the land which He had told them would be good for them, He, nonetheless, permitted it. History proved that the people had seriously erred, something for which we are paying until this very day. The entire episode begs elucidation. If Hashem was not happy and Moshe Rabbeinu was aware of this, why did Moshe allow the people to send spies? Furthermore, we even find later in Sefer Devarim that Moshe had no problem sending spies. Why did he proceed as planned, fully aware of Hashem's displeasure? Also, Hashem surely knew that this mission would lead to disaster. Why did He not immediately halt it? Last, what is the meaning of "For yourself"? Hashem was telling Moshe to send spies. He distanced Himself from the mission by adding the words, "For yourself." If He issued the command, then it could not really have been "for yourself."

In "Forever His Students," a collection of essays based on the teachings of Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl, Rabbi Boruch Leff offers the following fundamental lesson in Jewish philosophy. Hashem deals with us in accordance with our spiritual position - not in accordance with His. Sending the spies should not necessarily have catalyzed the downfall of Klal Yisrael. Thus, under the circumstances, it was the proper course of action. Hashem felt that the people had made an ineffective decision. Yet, once they made the decision, He dealt with them according to their present position. Their spiritual level had plummeted, leaving them vulnerable to the physical elements. They would

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have to deal with whatever challenges arose in the appropriate manner. This meant sending spies and relying on conventional tactics of warfare in order to succeed.

A holy person whose trust and faith in Hashem are unequivocal can simply pray to Hashem, asking that his sustenance be provided in an unnatural manner. One who is not on this spiritual plateau must resort to conventional methods - together with prayer. When Hashem said, "for yourself," He was implying that He was disappointed in their decision not to place complete trust in Him. If they wanted spies, however, so be it. Hashem certainly did not want Klal Yisrael to send spies, an action which led to such disastrous consequences. They asked for it, as they had made the fatal error of not trusting Hashem and, consequently, they would have to deal with the spies' report and the challenges that ensued. We made the decision; we had to live with it.

Hashem deals with where we are. We design the playing field for our own lives. If we err, Hashem will, nonetheless, support and guide our decision. He will also hold us accountable for our choices and actions, judging and recording our failure. He will, however, always be there to guide us, regardless of how much we err and how far we stray. Today, we are still experiencing the consequences of that fateful decision.

We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes. (13:33)

The incident of the meraglim, spies, is one of the compelling tragedies that occurred during Klal Yisrael's sojourn in the wilderness. The commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, try to find a rationale for the way in which Klal Yisrael's leadership/turned spies literally transformed overnight into a scared and rebellious people. This attitude quickly infected much of the nation, creating a situation that engendered a night of bechiah l'doros, weeping for generations. Indeed, until this very day, we are plagued by the consequences of that ill-fated night.

The Sfas Emes takes a somewhat psychological approach towards understanding what occurred. The night that the meraglim returned, the lines were drawn and a debate ensued: Could Klal Yisrael triumph over the Canaanites? Could they conquer the land that Hashem had promised to them? The meraglim emphatically declared that they had no chance for success. Regrettably, they prevailed.

Now, why were they so "sure" they could not conquer the land? The Sfas Emes explains that they were unsure of themselves. They reported that the inhabitants of the land were huge, like giants, and that "we were in our eyes like grasshoppers" in comparison to them. When people view themselves as grasshoppers, as insignificant in relation to the Canaanites, they are precluding their chances for success. To win, an individual must have motivation, courage, and vigor. This gives him the momentum to achieve. When one is plagued by feelings of inadequacy and incompetence, he has lost the war before the first shot has been fired.

It all boils down to pride - Jewish pride. Throughout the millennia, there have been Jews who have been so self-deprecating that they felt that the only way they could achieve any form of significance would be by assimilating and becoming part of their host nation. Whatever happened to the pride associated with being Jewish, with having a Torah, with maintaining a life of mitzvah observance, with adhering to the ethical and moral values that distinguish us from the nations of the world? Unfortunately, when one is infused with feelings of inadequacy, he does not see beyond himself. He does not see the full context of the greater picture.

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If we peruse history, we may note the incredible achievements of our forbears, their spiritual stamina, their willingness to sacrifice their lives for Hashem, but, above all, their pride in being Jewish. There have certainly been those who have fallen by the wayside, but they were the individuals who viewed themselves as parasites, because they were concerned with public opinion, with the opinion of the pagans, the gentiles, the cruel oppressors, the secular elite, as well as the itinerant farmers. How did our ancestors combat these feelings? How were they able to inculcate pride in their children, to raise the banner of Torah and to perpetuate the eternal verities of our people?

The answer is that they had the Torah. What does Torah do? Let me explain. David Hamelech says in Sefer Tehillim 84:5, Ashrei yoshvei veiseicha, od yehallelucha selah, "The praises of those who sit in Your House, more, will they praise You, forever." Ashrei is defined as praise. The word od means "more." Thus, we say that the praise of the Almighty is an expression of od, moreness. What does this all mean? Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl, explains that this refers to the praises attributed to a person, the excellence of a person, his brilliance, his aura, his glow, the achievement of the optimum, the ultimate expansion of his being. When a person is at the point of fulfilling his potential, when he shines the brightest; when he has achieved his ultimate: this is the power of od. This point occurs not when he is wealthy, not when he is famous, but when he is making maximum use of his Divinely endowed abilities. This is when he has achieved true and maximum excellence, when he is in an expanded state of being, when he is "more," when he is ensconced in the power of "od."

This achievement is realized when he is yoshvei veisecha, "dwells in Your House," when he sits in the bais ha'medrash studying Torah. That is when he has access to the power of od, when he can transcend the here and now in order to attain true excellence.

Torah is mesamchei lev, "gladdens the heart" (Tehillim 19:9). When one studies Torah, when he embraces it, his heart expands with a pure, transcendent joy, and he enters into an expansive state of mind and soul. His vision broadens, and he develops an increased level of tolerance for the irritations that life has handed him. He becomes a person of "moreness," all from the joy of embracing and studying the Torah.

Rav Freifeld cites the Baal HaTanya, who makes an interesting observation concerning the extremes of joy and depression. In the Talmud Eiruvim 3b, Chazal discuss the various forms of amah measures. All amos are comprised of six tefachim, each being approximately the size of a closed fist. There are, however, two types of closed fist: a tightly closed fist and a loosely closed fist. The difference in size between the two is about a third of a finger. Chazal refer to these two fists as an amah sochekes, literally a smiling amah, and an amah otzeves, a depressed amah.

The Baal HaTanya explains the deeper meaning of this unusual metaphor. A depressed person's face is long, taut and scrunched up, while a happy person's face is relaxed and wreathed in smiles. When a person smiles, his face, and, indeed, his entire body, expands. Thus, a loose, larger amah is sochekes, smiling, while a tight, scrunched up amah is otzeves. In addition, the Baal HaTanya explains that this expansion is not merely physical; it is also spiritual. A person's face is a reflection of his inner soul. When a person is happy, the powers and abilities of his soul expand, resulting in a physical expression: a smile. In contrast, when he is depressed, his soul shrivels and constricts. His powers and abilities are now limited, and his face crumples. When a person is happy, a metamorphosis occurs, and he is transformed into a different person.

When a person is happy he tolerates whatever he confronts. He is in an expanded state of being, and he is able to transcend adversity and challenge. Suddenly, his enemies become his friends, his troubles become opportunities, and his pain is a stepping-stone for spiritual growth. On the other hand,

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one who is in a state of depression is constricted. He has no patience. He cannot listen. He does not think straight. Everything is a problem, and even the smallest obstacle is insurmountable. The greatest person can overnight become very, very small. That is what occurred that night in the wilderness. It was the genesis of Tisha B'Av, our national day of mourning and grief. We felt like grasshoppers, and our whole world came tumbling down on us. Only one thing can pull us out of the abyss of depression: the joy that comes with embracing the Torah.

What about the common Jew who has not achieved that level of relationship in which Torah is his companion, his friend, his life? What gives him hope? What comprises his sense of pride? Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, relates the following story which gives us much to be proud of. The Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, one of the few and strong who rebuilt Torah on these shores in the aftermath of the Holocaust, was an individual whose indomitable spirit and love of every Jew paralleled his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah. When he arrived in America, after surviving internment in the Nazi concentration camps, he opened a small shul in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. The shul's congregants had the same history as the Rebbe: suffering, pain and misery. Broken in body, but healthy in spirit, these survivors were prepared to rebuild their lives with hope and courage.

Parashas Ki Savo arrived, and it came time to read the Tochachah, the dread curses which foretold Klal Yisrael's punishment for not observing the mitzvos. The custom is for the baal korei, Torah reader, to read this portion quickly in a quiet, subdued voice, which is what he began to do. Suddenly, the Rebbe exclaimed, "Louder!" The baal korei raised his voice slightly, hypothesizing that he had been reading too low for the Rebbe to hear.

Once again, the Rebbe emphatically said, "Louder!" The baal korei raised his voice again, but, apparently, it was not enough, as the Rebbe again said, "Louder! Read it the way that you always read the Torah." The baal korei listened, completing the Tochachah in his regular tone. Afterwards, he approached the rebbe for an explanation.

"Let me explain," said the Rebbe. "In the past, we have read this quietly, because these curses were nothing more than distant images, far-off tragedies to which we could not personally relate. Therefore, we would quickly read the words without dwelling on them. Times have changed. Our generation has lived through these curses! We know exactly what they are and how they feel, but we have managed to survive them. We are still here today. We are entitled to read the Tochachah out loud."

The Rebbe viewed his Holocaust experience and survival as a badge of honor, a source of pride. He had triumphed over the Nazi beasts. This idea applies equally to us, the descendants of that generation. We have maintained what they had begun to create. They planted the seeds of Torah in this country. We have nurtured, harvested and planted again. We have continued their work. They survived the Tochachah. We carry on the torch, which they kindled. Therefore, we share in their badge of honor, in their sense of pride. We are entitled to hope, because we have earned that right.

When you will come to the land of your dwelling places... and you perform a fire offering to Hashem... and a quarter-hin of wine for libation shall you prepare. (15:1,2,4)

The position which the Torah accords to the laws of the ritual libations that were placed on the Altar in the Bais Hamikdash seems somewhat misplaced. Klal Yisrael had just been informed of the tragic news that they would not enter Eretz Yisrael, as a result of their involvement in the sin of the meraglim, spies. To immediately relate to them laws that are applicable only in Eretz Yisrael seems like

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pouring salt on an open wound! These people were mourning their impending deaths in the wilderness. Everything they had hoped for had just been lost. Why would Hashem add to their misery by discussing laws that would not pertain to them? Furthermore, it is stated in the Tanna D'bei Eliyahu that Moshe Rabbeinu requested of Hashem, "How can I appease the Jews who are mourning their fate?" Hashem responded by telling him to teach them the laws of the libations. How would that appease them?

Horav Moshe Shapiro, Shlita, derives an important lesson from here regarding the awesome power of Torah. When Moshe Rabbeinu began teaching the people the laws of libations, the sweetness of Torah embraced and enveloped them, so that they completely forgot about the tragic decree and their impending doom. There is no greater form of consolation than to hear a shiur from Moshe. Torah does that for a person. Indeed, it is like an anesthetic that allows the individual to transcend the here and now to enter into a different, more pleasant world.

When two people study Torah, Chazal refer to the ensuing dialogue between them, as each one presents and argues his point, as *milchamatah shel Torah*, literally, the battle of Torah. The two study partners contend with one another, each one seeking to understand and acquire the Torah to the greatest degree possible. The Brisker Rav, zl, was once at a health resort together with Horav Shimon Schkop, zl, when a group of senior yeshivah students approached Rav Shimon to speak with him "in learning." The Brisker Rav listened by the side as Rav Shimon delivered a brilliant lecture on the topic about which they had queried him. Afterward, the Brisker Rav told Rav Moshe Shapiro that what Rav Shimon said could have been delivered by any Torah scholar, but the sweetness that was infused in the words of Torah as they emanated from Rav Shimon was unparalleled.

The ability to experience *mesikus*, sweetness, in Torah learning is the result of *ameilus ba'Torah*, toil in Torah. When one applies himself in such a manner, when he toils and labors to understand the profundities of Torah, he will enjoy its sweetness. It becomes a sweet melody whose dulcet tones swathe him with Heavenly sound. This creates a mood that enables the individual to transcend his present worries as he embraces the Torah.

Send forth for yourself men, and let them spy out the land of Canaan. (13:2)

Rashi notes that the passage about the *meraglim*, spies, is juxtaposed upon the previous passage which relates the incident of Miriam speaking against her brother, Moshe Rabbeinu. He explains that since Miriam was stricken over matters relating to speech, the spies should have had enough sense to take heed to learn a lesson from her debacle. Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, questions the comparison between Miriam's speaking against Moshe and the *meraglim*'s speaking against the inanimate wood and stones of Eretz Yisrael. Obviously, there must be a differential between the two. Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, explains that speaking against Miriam created a mindset that should have taught the *meraglim* an important lesson: the critical impact of a *negiah*, personal prejudice/vested interest. He derives this from the following hypothesis.

Chazal teach us that the women of that generation were *tzidkaniyos*, righteous women. It was in their *zchus*, merit, that Klal Yisrael was liberated from Egypt. They refused to contribute their jewelry toward building the *eigal*, Golden Calf. *Bnos Tzafchad* were just a few of the many women who loved and yearned for Eretz Yisrael. At every juncture when the men disputed Moshe, the women had

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supported his leadership. This whole pattern of support ended during the episode of the meraglim. Suddenly, the women agreed with the men and contended with Moshe. Chazal tell us that they all cried on that fateful night. They all complained on that night. What catalyzed this change of heart? What brought about this sudden about-face? It was Miriam's words against Moshe. When she said that Moshe was not treating his wife the way other men treated their wives, this resulted in an uproar among the women: "What? Moshe, our revered leader, is not treating his wife properly? We should support her and rebel against him." Miriam's provocative statement had a tragic effect. It turned the women, who heretofore had been Moshe's greatest supporters, into his antagonists.

It was their negios, personal prejudices, that turned the tide. Moshe, who until now, had been kadosh, holy and perfect, was quickly transformed into someone who was unfit to lead. The meraglim should have derived from Miriam's fiasco that negios sway a person's perspective and pervert his vision. He is no longer able to see reality in its clear light. This constitutes the parallel between Miriam and the meraglim. They should have learned from her error. They did not, and we still suffer from the consequences until this very day.

The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night. (14:1)

That fateful night became a night of weeping for our entire nation for posterity. It was Tisha B'Av, the national day of tragedy on which our Batei Mikdash were destroyed and other tragedies occurred. What precipitated this? Were they really that bad? In the Yalkut Shimoni, Chazal say that weeping is infectious. The spies returned and fanned out throughout their respective tribes. They called together their close families. In somber voices packed with emotion, each related his story. They wept as they spoke, and when they wept those who listened shared in their emotional outbreak. Crying will do that. When someone stands in front of us and cries, we become emotionally moved and it leaves an impact on us. This response spread throughout the nation until everyone began wailing and grieving over the terrible outlook for the future. The unwarranted weeping of Klal Yisrael rose up to Heaven and Hashem responded, "You cried for no reason. I will give a b'chiah l'doros, a reason to cry for generations." Tisha B'Av became our national day of mourning. Our greatest tragedies occurred on this day - all because of our unwarranted, needless weeping.

Let us analyze this. It is human nature to become emotional when someone in front of us begins to weep uncontrollably. Parents and educators are swayed when their child/student begins to cry. Imagine an entire family crying, an entire assembly of people wailing. The entire nation is crying uncontrollably. Can a person be held accountable for giving in to his emotions in the face of such public weeping? On this night the depression and hopelessness were overpowering. The fear was overwhelming. The people were totally unable to cope. Should they really have been blamed and punished so gravely?

We derive from here, posits Horav Gershon Liebman, zl, how much the Torah demands that a Jew be independent, that he not be controlled and easily swayed; that he stand resolute, uncoerced by falsity and deception. One who believes in and recognizes the truth will not be moved - regardless of how many others fall prey to emotion and misguided influence. The unwarranted weeping should not have reached such proportions, because there was no reason to fear a lack of success. Hashem had been with them up until this point. He promised to take them into the land without mishap. They should have maintained their conviction, despite the weeping. Indeed, as soon as they heard their punishment, they lamented their past weeping and were prepared to ascend to the land. This only demonstrates the

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shallowness of their weeping. When one believes in an ideal, when he knows that he is acting correctly and in good faith, he should not fear what others have to say. The truth should fortify his conviction and give him the fortitude to withstand whatever criticism insecure individuals may level at him.

And the people mourned exceedingly. They awoke early in the morning and ascended toward the mountaintop saying, "We are ready and we shall ascend... For we have sinned." Moshe said, "Why do you transgress the word of Hashem? It will not succeed." (14:39,40,41)

An incredible transformation seems to be taking place before our very eyes. The same people who wept b'chinam, for no reason - who earlier that evening had eschewed Moshe Rabbeinu and Eretz Yisrael - were now prepared to eat their words and push on to the Holy Land. Is there a greater indication of teshuvah, repentance? Immediately after Moshe conveyed to them the consequence of their rebellion, that only their children would enter Eretz Yisrael, they repented - according to the halachic process. They regretted their rebellion by morning. They abandoned their sinful behavior, and they confessed to their sin. We do not find a parallel in Jewish history where immediately after the nation sinned, they repented.

Yet, the Torah does not accept their teshuvah. In fact, they were considered reshaim, wicked, for attempting to ascend to Eretz Yisrael. Why? Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, explains that while their intentions were possibly noble, their timing was faulty. Hashem had already declared that they were to wander in the wilderness for forty-years. To ascend to Eretz Yisrael at this juncture - after Hashem said no - was rebellious. Hashem had issued His edict. All they could do now was to accept it. Teshuvah is certainly a process by which the sin is expunged, but it takes time and effort. Apparently, their teshuvah was insufficient.

Rav Nebentzhal adds that quite possibly their teshuvah was an improper and incorrect form of repentance. Since their initial regret and ensuing confession were misplaced, their teshuvah was of no value. Only yesterday the people had fallen under the influence of the meraglim, spies, who slandered Eretz Yisrael and Klal Yisrael's ability to triumph against its inhabitants. They were clearly aware that Hashem had said that they would conquer the land. Their mistake was in assuming that Hashem had no control over the giants who inhabited Eretz Yisrael. They acceded to Hashem's awesome power, but they thought that His powers had limitations. When Moshe told them that they were not going to enter the land as a result of their misgivings, they accepted that they had erred. Their error, however, went deeper than they thought. They thought that they had underestimated Eretz Yisrael. Their real sin was in underestimating Hashem! The next day, they decided to storm the mountain and ascend to the land, because they now realized the critical significance of Eretz Yisrael. What about Hashem? He had said that now was not the time to ascend. Once again, they failed to reckon with Hashem's decree. They did not understand that just as Eretz Yisrael's giants were meaningless before Hashem, so, too, was Eretz Yisrael without meaning if Hashem Yisborach did not want them to go there. The only thing that matters is Hashem's will, and, at the current time, it was not supportive of their endeavor. Indeed, if we consider it, not only did their action not represent teshuvah, in reality it was a continuation of their original sin of not acknowledging Hashem.

There are people who, albeit observant, fail to correlate the mitzvos with Hashem. As far as they are concerned, there are mitzvos - and there is the will of Hashem. For example, we will make the statement regarding an individual, "He is observant, and he is also a great ohaiv Yisrael; he loves Jews, and he loves Eretz Yisrael." This sort of statement can cause one to think that there is a dichotomy

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between an observant Jew and one who is an ohaiv Yisrael, or ohaiv Eretz Yisrael. These are both aspects of Jewish observance and, thus, included in the Torah. Everything we are to do must be viewed as the ratzon Hashem, will of G-d. It is all part of one large package. We do not cut and paste mitzvos.

This form of equanimity towards the will of Hashem exemplified the European Jew, who never looked for ways to cut corners in mitzvah observance. Hashem gave us 613 mitzvos. They are all equally His will, and, therefore, we are enjoined to observe. The same attitude applied to transgression. If an activity or endeavor was not in accordance with the will of Hashem, they did not look for loopholes to get around the sin. What was wrong remained wrong. Heiteirim, halachic dispensations, were not sought as a means to circumvent various inconveniences. The following story is one of the first stories I heard from my revered rebbe, Horav Tzvi Hirsch Meisels, zl, the Veitzener Rav.

It was Erev Rosh Hashanah, when the Nazi guards of Auschwitz rounded up 1600 youngsters under the age of eighteen for a selektzia, selection, to see who was healthy enough to be kept alive. They put a pole with a cross bar in place and the children had to pass beneath the bar. If their heads reached the bar, they lived. If not, they were condemned to die. In the end, 1400 youngsters were condemned to die on Rosh Hashanah. Horrified fathers and relatives went through the motions of attempting to bribe the guards and kapos on behalf of their sons. There were, of course, men of great reason who refused to redeem their sons at the cost of another child, which was the inevitable consequence of their dealing. If 1400 youngsters had been counted, there had to be that exact number - or else someone else had to take the place of the missing children. On that fateful Rosh Hashanah, a simple, unassuming Jew approached Rav Meisels with a halachic query. "Rebbe," he said in a shaking voice, "my only son, my beloved child, is in that barracks doomed to die. I have money to redeem him, but it will be at the expense of another child. I have already lost everything. My son is all I have left. May I redeem him? Please answer me, and I will submit to whatever you decide."

Rav Meisels turned to the father, and with great trepidation, replied, "How can you expect me to give a ruling in such circumstances under such duress? I have no seforim, halachic responsa, to research. I have no one with whom to confer. This is a difficult question for me to decide."

Reflecting on the query, a number of thoughts went through Rav Meisel's mind. There were pros and cons, but the bottom line was that it was a difficult shaaleh, with very little logic to permit redeeming the boy. The father kept on begging, crying bitterly, "Rebbe," he pleaded, "you must decide this question while I still have the chance to save my only son."

Rav Meisels begged the man to desist from pressing the question, "I cannot render a proper decision without my seforim."

The Jew persisted, "Rebbe, does that mean that you do not permit me to save my only child? If so, I will willingly accept, with love, your ruling."

"No, my dear friend," Rav Meisels countered. "I did not say that it is not permitted. I only said that I cannot reasonably rule either way. Do whatever you feel you should do, as if you had never asked me at all."

When the broken-hearted father realized that Rav Meisels could not be swayed into rendering a decision, he cried out passionately, "Ribono Shel Olam, I did what the Torah demands of me. I asked a shaaleh of the rav, the only rav that was available. If you cannot give me an outright heter, then that implies to me that a question in halachah remains regarding granting permission for me to redeem my child. If that is the case, then I abide by this "non"-ruling, even though this means that my child will die tomorrow. I will do nothing to override what the Torah ordains."

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Rav Meisels could do nothing to dissuade the father who walked around for the rest of the day with a subtle smile on his face. He felt he was about to sacrifice his only child to Hashem in the manner of the Akeidas Yitzchak. This man's righteousness was exemplary and indicative of a complete temimus, wholesomeness and perfection in his avodas Hashem, service to Hashem: Mi k'amcha Yisrael? "Who is like Your nation Yisrael?"

For he scorned the words of Hashem and broke His commandment; that person will surely be cut off, his sin is upon him. (15:31)

One who humiliates a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, is included in the transgression of dvar Hashem bazah, "For he scorned the word of Hashem." In the Shulchan Aruch, it is cited as a halachah prohibiting embarrassing a Torah scholar, a sin which cuts the sinner off from Olam Habah, the World to Come. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, writes in his Hilchos Lashon Hora that although people understand the gravity of humiliating a Torah scholar, it does not serve as a deterrent. They fall prey to their yetzer hora, evil-inclination, which tells them that the concept of talmid chacham applies only to the days of yore when the leading Torah scholars were the authors of the Talmud. This is categorically untrue. In every generation a standard exists that is appropriate to that generation. A scholar who fits the position of that generation is a talmid chacham who must be respected. One who denigrates a talmid chacham commits a grave sin. I would be so bold as to suggest that this idea applies equally to any scholar in a position of authority, who disseminates Torah to the masses. All too often we view those individuals who teach Torah to our children as employees with whom we deal according to our whims. It is essentially such an attitude that undermines Torah authority and cheapens the entire fabric of our Torah standards. When children perceive their parents' attitude and lack of respect, what should they do? The apple does not fall far from the tree.

The story is related about a man in Yerushalayim, who shortly after the passing of Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, became very ill with excruciating headaches. He sought the counsel of the greatest specialists, to no avail. Finally, he went to one of the distinguished rabbanim of Eretz Yisrael to ask for his blessing. After the rav discovered that the headaches began during Rav Moshe's levayah, funeral, which was held in Yerushalayim, he immediately asked the man if he had ever touched upon the kavod, honor, of the venerable sage. The man replied in the negative. He would never have impugned the dignity of Rav Moshe. The rav said that he should execute the goral ha'Gra, the Gaon M'Vilna's lot, which would hopefully reveal the source of his illness. This method, which ultimately lands on a pasuk in the Torah which alludes to the answer to one's question, indicated the pasuk in Bamidbar 12:8, "Why did you not fear to speak against My servant, Moshe?" Clearly, this man must have said or done something to impugn the honor of Rav Moshe.

At first, the man could not remember anything negative that he had done. Suddenly, an incident came to mind that brought a shudder to the man. "I remember now what happened. It was Shushan Purim, and Rav Moshe's levayah was dragging on and on. The streets of Yerushalayim were filled with thousands of people who had thronged to the funeral of the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation. It bothered me that everyone's simchas Purim was delayed as a result of the funeral. Indeed, I conveyed my feelings to those around me. I now realize that this was insensitive and insolent."

The rav listened to the man and said, "There is a process cited in the Shulchan Aruch which must be carried out in the event the individual who was shamed is deceased. You must go to the kever, grave, of Rav Moshe and assemble a minyan of ten men, and ask mechilah, beg forgiveness, of his

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neshamah, soul." The man followed the rav's instructions. Soon after, he was healed of his headaches.

And how is the land - is it fertile or is it lean? Are there trees in it or not? (13:20)

Rashi comments that Moshe's reference to a tree is an allusion to a tzaddik, righteous person. He was teaching the meraglim, spies, that if a righteous person was living in the land, he would protect its inhabitants from attack. In his Sefer Simchas HaTorah, Horav Simcha HaKohen Sheps, zl, supplements Rashi with another reason for comparing an adam kasher to a tree. In addition to the shade which a tree provides and the fruit which it produces, a tree has a cleansing effect on the ecology. A tree purifies the air by its very existence. It balances the oxygen level in the air. Likewise, besides a tzaddik's righteous endeavors, his very being in a community has an expiating effect on the surroundings. Hashem sends a special shefa, spiritual abundance, to an area that is home to the righteous.

The following narrative, cited by Rabbi Paysach Krohn, demonstrates how far this effect reaches. When Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, the father of the Mussar - ethical behavior - movement, passed away, he was basically penniless. His surviving descendants inherited limited material possessions from his "estate." One man in Rav Yisrael's neighborhood had the good fortune to gain possession of Rav Yisrael's hat. This hat was not the kind that is worn today. It was old, creased and dilapidated from years of wear. Yet, this man treasured the hat as if it was worth a king's ransom. Every Shabbos, without fail, he wore the hat. At first, the people paid no attention to the hat, but after awhile people took note of how strange he looked wearing this decrepit hat. As frequently happens, people felt the need to ridicule him.

"How can you wear that thing on your head?" they asked disdainfully. "It is so dirty and tattered. You are being mevazeh, humiliating, the Shabbos and yourself by wearing that hat."

At first, the man ignored the derisive remarks. One day he finally responded, "Would you agree that there is a certain hiddur, extra beautification/refinement, in not speaking lashon hora, evil speech, on Shabbos kodesh?" "Yes," they agreed, "not speaking lashon hora on Shabbos certainly adds to the degree of reverence for the holy day."

"Then I must tell you, that when I wear Rav Yisrael's hat on Shabbos, I simply find it impossible to utter any form of defective speech. So great is the influence of his hat!"

If this was the effect of Rav Yisrael's hat, can we even begin to perceive the influence Rav Yisrael himself had on people?

They brought forth an evil report on the land that they had spied... it is a land that devours its inhabitants...we were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes. (13:32,33)

The spies returned from their mission and spread malicious lies about Eretz Yisrael. The land was made for huge and robust people, not for ordinary people like the Jews. They failed to realize that they were the beneficiaries of Hashem's favor. Wherever they went, they noticed funerals going on. Rather than realize that Hashem was sparing them by engaging the Canaanites in funeral preparations,

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they were quick to charge that it was a land that devours its inhabitants. They felt especially insignificant in the eyes of the giants that lived there. This statement was especially slanderous and pure conjecture. They had no right to consider how the people viewed them. Indeed, as the Kotzker Rebbe posits, this was the root of their sin. They were sent on a mission. All that should have been occupying their minds was the success of the mission. The people's attitudes towards them should not have concerned them. They were indeed looking for trouble - and they succeeded in their endeavor.

Slander, lashon hora, evil speech - regardless of the terminology - is one of the most destructive forces that confronts society. The first instance of this destructive form of speech takes place early in creation. This occurs when the serpent convinced Chavah to partake of the Eitz Hadaas, Tree of Knowledge. He convinced Chavah that Hashem forbade them from eating of the Eitz Hadaas because He was jealous of them. The serpent portrayed the negative, because he saw only negative. His jaundiced perspective was at the root of his malignant tongue. The same sin was repeated by the meraglim, Jewish spies. Instead of seeing the positive reason for the ban; rather than realizing that Hashem spread disease among the inhabitants so that they would be preoccupied and too busy to notice the twelve Jewish spies, they perceived it to be a destructive land that devoured its inhabitants.

Lashon hora has its genesis in the way we look at things. When we see negative, we speak evil. The person who focuses on the negative becomes a negative, unhappy person. He literally consumes himself with self-hate. Such a person goes through life seeing only the negative, judging people through his distorted perspective, building mountains of hate on the foundation of his warped and bitter point of view.

Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, cites Rabbeinu Yonah in his Shaarei Teshuvah, who interprets the pasuk in Mishlei 14:9, "The fool pleads a fault, but among the upright there is good will"; a fool searches for another person's shortcomings and indicts him, while the wise man praises the one in whom a good thing is found.

The negative person is embittered, lonely and lacks any joy in his life - other than denigrating people. When he puts someone down, he thinks that he elevates himself. Little does he realize that by degrading others, he buries himself. Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, exemplified the character trait of respecting all people, of seeing the Divine Image in every Jew. He was once sitting in his Succah during Chol Hamoed, and he asked Rav David Finkel to bring him a pen and paper. Rav David was surprised that Rav Isser Zalman would write on Chol Hamoed. Rav Isser Zalman told him, "It is a matter of pikuach nefesh, life or death." He then proceeded to write the pasuk from Mishlei 4:25, "Let your eyes look opposite you, and your eyelids look straight before you" on the piece of paper.

When Rav David noticed this, he became increasingly perplexed. What about the pasuk could possibly create a matter of pikuach nefesh? Rav Isser Zalman explained that during Chol Hamoed, hundreds of people came to visit him. Not all of his guests were noted scholars. Among the people were two mentally challenged individuals with visible and some covert failings. Rav Isser Zalman wanted a constant reminder that when he greeted these people, he would concentrate only on their individual good points - rather than on their faults. He remembered the Netziv's rendering of the pasuk: "When you look at someone and discern a fault, turn your eyes inward and look at yourself instead."

Rav Isser Zalman seriously felt that this pasuk constituted pikuach nefesh for him. He understood that the key to life was the ability to focus on the positive traits of people, things and situations. Otherwise, one chances becoming a lonely, embittered person, lacking any joy in life. This is only one step away from death.

If we look around the world today, we see a society that has spawned evil despots that terrorize

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a world. Eretz Yisrael is surrounded by enemies who seek every way to destroy our people. This is only sixty years after Amalek incarnate destroyed six-million of our brethren. There are Jews who have, regrettably, given up. How can they maintain faith through all the darkness that has accompanied us through history? What they do not realize is that it is specifically our faith in Hashem that has maintained our sanity during those days of infamy. We know that we have survived only because it was the will of Hashem. If our enemies would have their way - none of us would survive.

We have been endowed with freedom of choice, the ability to choose between good and evil. It is up to us to see the good in what seems evil, to see the blessing amidst the curse. There is a poignant story that took place after World War II, between Horav Eliezer Silver, zl, and a Holocaust survivor. Rav Silver was one of the first American Jewish chaplains to arrive at the concentration camps. Representing the Vaad Hatzala, Rescue Committee under the auspices of the Agudath Horabbonim, he performed wonders and saved many Jewish lives. His words of wisdom and encouragement gave hope to many a broken Jew. The sight that confronted him was beyond description. Piles of dead bodies were strewn all around, while those who were alive were nothing more than breathing skeletons, so emaciated that they did not even cast a shadow. With tears streaming down his face, he went from survivor to survivor, speaking to them, encouraging them, attempting to raise their spirits and give them something for which to look forward. He infused life into those broken souls, and they offered gratitude to Hashem for delivering them from death. That is, most of them did - except for one man, who was visibly angry. "I have no use for rabbis," he exclaimed bitterly. "After what I have seen, I am finished with religion."

Rav Silver was patient. He understood the trauma which this man had sustained. "Would you care to share with me the experience that turned you off?" he asked calmly. "Sure, I will tell you," the man retorted. "There was a religious Jew in our camp who somehow managed to smuggle in a Siddur, prayer book. Do you know what he did with it? Do you want to know how he took advantage of his poor wretched brethren? If anyone wanted to pray from the Siddur, they had to give him their portion of bread. You should have seen all the people whose bread he took! After seeing that, I neither respect nor care for religious Jews any longer."

"My son," Rav Silver answered gently, "instead of focusing on the one man who demanded bread for every prayer, why do you not think about the special Jews who were willing to give up their morsel of bread so that they could pray to the Almighty?"

It is all a matter of perspective. One either looks at the positive and sees the praiseworthy aspect of a person or situation, or he falls prey to petty envy in order to justify his own cynicism and bitterness, seeing only the negative. We can look at one wretched, evil man and blame religion, or we can search for the spark of good, the aspect of G-d within each soul and discover the truth of what religion can accomplish.

And you shall not go astray after your heart and after your eyes. (15:39)

In the Talmud Berachos 12b, Chazal interpret the meaning of "straying after ones heart and eyes." "Straying after the heart" is a reference to entertaining heretical thoughts, and "straying after the eyes" alludes to permitting lewd thoughts to enter one's mind. The Torah enjoins us to distance ourselves from places or situations which will inspire such sinful contemplations. We are provided with the mitzvah of Tzitzis as a reminder of our obligation to exercise care in avoiding these spiritual

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hazards.

The Talmud Gittin 55b relates the story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, two people in Yerushalayim with very similar names. A third man who was close friends with Kamtza sent a messenger to him, inviting him to a feast he was planning. By mistake, the messenger invited Bar Kamtza, who was the host's enemy. On the day of the party, when Bar Kamtza walked in, the host became enraged and ejected him from his house. Bar Kamtza tried everything to ward off the humiliation, but to no avail. He decided that since many members of Yerushalayim's rabbinic leadership had witnessed his humiliation and did nothing to prevent it, he would stir up trouble for the entire Jewish religious community. He went to Caesar and told him that the Jews were initiating a rebellion against him. To prove it, he suggested that Caesar send a sacrifice to the Bais HaMikdash and see if they would accept it. Caesar sent a healthy calf to be offered in the Bais HaMikdash. Bar Kamtza, who was the agent appointed to bring the animal to Yerushalayim, made a blemish in the calf, thus insuring that the Kohanim would reject it. The rest is history. This was the precursor of the siege that led to the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash. Horav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, zl, observes an allusion to the concept of "guarding one's eyes" in the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. The blemish that Bar Kamtza inflicted was a small slit in the eyelid of the animal, which Chazal tell us is considered a blemish in regard to a korban, but is not considered a blemish by the gentiles in regard to their sacrifices. This was specifically why Bar Kamtza chose this type of blemish.

Rav Yosef Chaim interprets Chazal figuratively. The blemish in the eye signifies one's lack of control over his eyes. This constitutes a moral flaw for a Jew and is, hence, a blemish. The non-Jewish nations do not view a roving eye as a character flaw. Indeed, it is a way of life for them.

See the land - how is it? (13:18)

There is another u'reisem, "And you shall see," in the parsha. At the end of the parsha, regarding the mitzvah of Tzitzis, the Torah says, "And you shall look at them." (15:39) This implies, comments Horav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, that the meraglim, spies, failed to learn the lesson of Tzitzis. Tzitzis conveys the message that if one looks at them, he will be reminded of all the mitzvos. Chazal tell us that since the Tzitzis contain in them a thread of techeiles, blue-thread, a color which resembles the sea, which - in turn - reminds one of the sky, which calls to mind the Kisei Hakavod, Heavenly Throne - one will thus remember all the mitzvos. The lesson of Tzitzis, therefore, is that there is much more than meets the eye. What we see is superficial. There is much more beneath the surface.

The spies were told to see the land - its kedushah, holiness, its spiritual potential as a resting place for the Shechinah. They only saw what was in front of them - the large fruit, a land that appeared intimidating and frightening, a land that made them feel miniscule and insignificant. Their vested self-interest clouded their ability to see, to perceive Eretz Yisrael's distinctiveness. They ignored the lesson of Tzitzis - a lack of knowledge for which we are still paying today.

They arrived at the Valley of Eshkol and cut from there a vine with one cluster of grapes...They named that place the Valley of Eshkol because of the cluster that Bnei Yisrael cut from there. (13:23,24)

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Geographically, Nachal Eshkol, the Valley of Eshkol, is near Chevron, as indicated in the parsha. It was there that Avraham Avinu's three close friends, Anar, Eshkol and Mamre, lived. One would think that just as Mamre's "home" was called Elonei Mamre, the Plains of Mamre, Eshkol's "home" would similarly be called Nachal Eshkol. The pasuk seems to imply this: "They arrived at the Valley of Eshkol." In other words, when they arrived, it was already known as Nachal Eshkol, not because it was there that the meraglim, spies, cut a vine with a cluster of grapes.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, writes that he posed this question to his rebbe, Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, who gave the following insightful response. He cites the Midrash that relates how when Avraham asked advice from Anar, Eshkol and Mamre regarding his upcoming Bris Milah, Eshkol attempted to dissuade him. He asked, "Why perform a procedure on yourself which will forever mark you indelibly for your enemies?" Eshkol felt that Avraham's descendants would no longer be able to hide themselves from their enemies. Wherever they would go, they would be "marked" people. It did not seem appropriate that a place in Eretz Yisrael, the land inexorably bound up with the Jewish People, should be named after a person who did not understand the significance of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, in the life of a Jew. A Jew who is prepared to conceal his Jewishness is, at best, a coward. Self-sacrifice is a Jewish character trait that flows in our veins - or at least it should.

When Moshe Rabbenu instructed the spies to "strengthen yourselves and take from the fruit of the land," however, despite all of their malevolence and lack of integrity, they carried out his instructions and cut down a vine and carried it back. They did so even though this put their lives at great risk. Thus, they indicated a proclivity towards mesiras nefesh. We can now revert to calling Nachal Eshkol by its original name. The act of self-sacrifice which the meraglim -- Avraham Avinu's descendants -- performed, was a true example of marking themselves before their enemies. They corrected the earlier "taint" which had for so many years soiled this place.

We arrived at the land to which you sent us...and this is its fruit. But the people that dwells in the land is powerful. (13:27,28)

The meraglim saw wondrous, magnificent fruit. Yet, it had a negative impact on them. Chazal describe how they interpreted the many miracles that took place on their behalf in a similarly negative manner. Why? Because their attitude was wrong from the beginning. They did not want to see the inherent good in the land.

They only sought to disparage, to degrade. When people look with such a skewered and negative perspective, is it any wonder that their reports would not be consistent with reality?

Looking for the inherent good in a person is more than an attitude: it is a requisite for success in life. Parents should look for the good in their children, even when they are hurt by them. Educators must seek out the positive in their students if they are to successfully reach out to them. I recently read a compelling story by Rabbi Abraham Twerski M.D. who employs this attitude in his unique treatment of alcoholics and drug addicts. He explains that the key to success in the field of treatment is the belief in the inherent goodness of every client - regardless of his background.

Indeed, it is difficult to recognize this good in a person who has led a destructive lifestyle for decades, someone whose abuse of alcohol and drugs has caused great suffering for himself and so

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many others. Yet, each individual's integrity is always there, lurking beneath a veil of miscreancy. Just give it a chance, and it will emerge.

Rabbi Twerski tells a story about Avi, an ex-convict, who was in recovery from substance abuse and was enrolled in an Israeli rehabilitation program. Addressing the group of "freshmen" who were joining the program, Rabbi Twerski spoke of the importance of maintaining one's self-esteem. Suddenly, Avi interrupted and asked, "How can you talk to us of this? I have been a thief since I was eight years old. When I am not in prison, I am out of work, and my family wants nothing to do with me. What kind of self-esteem can I have?"

Responding to this compelling question, Rabbi Twerski countered, "Have you ever walked by a jewelry shop and noticed the beautiful diamonds in the window? You know, those diamonds were not always so beautiful. In fact, when they come from the mine, they are nothing more than ugly lumps of dirty stone. Only a professional who understands the diamond can take the shapeless mound and transform it into a brilliant stone. He is able to bring out its intrinsic beauty. That is what we do at the recovery center. We look for the diamond in everyone. We enable the soul to emerge in all its true beauty, as we polish it until it gleams. You, Avi, are like that dirt-covered stone. Our function is to find the diamond within you and polish it until it glows brilliantly."

Two years elapsed, and Avi graduated from the program. He took a job as a construction worker. One day, the young woman who managed the halfway house where Avi had been a resident during his rehabilitation, received a call from a family whose matriarch had recently passed away. They desired to donate her furniture to the halfway house. She called Avi and asked him if he could possibly oblige and pick up the furniture. Avi quickly agreed. When he arrived at the house, he immediately saw that the furniture was not really worth picking up. Yet, he did not want to insult the family, so he took it anyway.

While Avi was toiling to carry the shabby sofa up the stairs to the halfway house, an envelope fell from the cushions. Avi brought in the couch and retrieved the envelope -- in which he discovered five thousand shekalim. Here was a man who had served time in prison for burglary, a recovered drug addict who, a few years earlier, would have broken into a home if he thought it would net him twenty shekalim. Avi was different now. He called the halfway house and told them about his discovery. They immediately called the family who had donated the sofa and notified them of their added contribution. The family was so appreciative of the integrity which Avi and the members of the halfway house displayed that they contributed the entire sum of money to the halfway house. As a result, the halfway house was able to purchase another bed and provide room for one more person in need. One more thing - Avi no longer perceived himself to be a thief!

Avi relayed the entire incident to Rabbi Twerski in a letter. He wrote, "When I used drugs, I would get high - temporarily. After a short while, I felt miserable and depressed - worse than before. It was a never-ending cycle of highs and lows. Now, it has been three months since I found that money. Every time I think of what I did, I feel great all over again. How different is this feeling from a temporary fix."

About a year went by, and Rabbi Twerski returned to the halfway house where Avi's good deed had set off a wonderful chain of events which led to the addition of another bed - and client. There was a new sign hanging over the entrance. It read: DIAMONDS POLISHED HERE. The diamond in the rough had finally emerged.

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It is a land that devours its inhabitants. (13:32)

Wherever the meraglim, spies, went, they saw funerals. This clearly demonstrates that this land was a dangerous place to live. Otherwise, why was there so much death? Had they used their heads to look for the positive instead of searching for the negative, they would have realized that Hashem caused this in order to distract the population from the unwelcome Jews. What is the meaning of ocheles yoshvehah? Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, explains this with an analogy. A simple-minded individual once went into a house in which all of the windows were shut. It was impossible to breathe in there. Immediately, the fool began to rant and rave, "How can I live in here? I cannot breathe. How will I survive?"

His friend, who was a bit more "erudite", said, "If you look around, you will see that the house is large and roomy. The view is excellent, and the location is perfect. The only problem that you have found is the home's stuffiness and lack of air. If that is the case, just open up the windows and let in some air. This house is fine - you are the problem!" A similar response may be applied to the case of the meraglim. Let us first focus on a pressing question: The meraglim returned from their ill-fated mission and disparaged the land that Hashem had promised to Klal Yisrael. This was no ordinary land - this was Eretz Yisrael! This was a land about which Hashem Himself had attested to its superiority over all other lands. Yet, this did not deter the slander espoused by the spies and the ensuing ridicule which the people expressed in support of the spies. How did the Dor Deah, the generation that had such profound spiritual knowledge, who had experienced Revelation with its accompanying miracles, react so. How could they "fall" for this maligning of Eretz Yisrael? Rav Neiman explains that, indeed, Eretz Yisrael was a land that devoured its inhabitants. It was a land that had a low tolerance level for evil. Ein tov ela Torah, "There is no good other than Torah." When Hashem said that Eretz Yisrael is an eretz tovah, good land this means, that, through Torah observance Eretz Yisrael becomes good to its inhabitants. It protects and preserves them. Just as a home whose windows remain sealed shut will suffocate its inhabitants, so, too, does Eretz Yisrael not show mercy towards those who have no place for the Torah. When Klal Yisrael enter the land with the Torah as an inexorable part of their lives, its windows will open up and the fresh air will enter. Torah is the air of Eretz Yisrael, without which we cannot endure. True, there are many who live in the Holy Land who are far from observant. There are, however, many who are committed Jews. They are the ones who open the windows and sustain the others.

Bearing this in mind, we now have a new perspective on galus, exile. It is no longer a punishment for our past sins. It is a chesed, kindness, from Hashem. Eretz Yisrael's air is of a highly refined spiritual nature. It has a low tolerance level. Chutz la'arets, the Diaspora, on the other hand, has "natural" air which permits one who does not observe the Torah to endure - for awhile. When we sin in exile, we are punished by Hashem. Since, however, the nature of Hashem's response is that of punishment, He can be lenient and delay the punishment. In Eretz Yisrael this is not the case. There, as soon as one sins, there is no delaying the response. It is immediate.

There shall be a single teaching for them... (15:29)

One Torah - for everyone. One halachah - for everyone. The Torah is immutable and timeless. It is an absolute truth, and its laws apply equally to all Jews. Alternatively, we may say that

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the Torah is emphasizing its indispensability to everyone. In other words, regardless of who one is, where he comes from, his station in life or his illustrious pedigree - the Torah is the source of life from which we are nourished. Without Torah, we cannot exist. Horav Moshe Mordechai Schlessinger relates the following story to emphasize this point.

One of the great Torah leaders of Hungarian Jewry, Horav Hillel, zl, Mi'Kulmayh, studied in the great yeshivah of Pressburg as a young man. During those days, it was common for the yeshivah students to eat teg, days. They would receive their daily meal at the home of one of the members of the community. Rav Hillel was assigned to the home of a certain Jew who was a stickler for punctuality. He insisted on eating his meals at specific times every day. Rav Hillel, accordingly, made every effort to adhere to his benefactor's schedule. One time, regrettably, he was late.

It happened that Rav Hillel had become so engrossed in his Torah study that he did not notice that he had passed dinnertime. As he became aware that he was late, at first he decided to skip dinner. Life was different in "those days" - it did not revolve around food. Then he realized, however, that his baal ha'bayis, householder, would be concerned about him. He decided that it would be best if he went and apologized for his tardiness in the hope that the baal habayis would understand.

He was mistaken. Punctuality was more than an attitude to this person - it was a character trait. He viewed someone who was not punctual as being character deficient. When Rav Hillel arrived at the home, he was met by his stern-faced baal ha'bayis who lashed into him for his negligent behavior and character deficiency in not showing up for his meal on time. During the entire tirade, Rav Hillel remained silent, accepting the rebuke with humility and dignity.

As soon as the man finished speaking, Rav Hillel looked up and said, "Everything that you said is true. There is no question that I should have been on time and it was a serious infraction on my part to have neglected your daily schedule. This is true only according to the premise that you are supporting me. That is, however, where you are grossly in error. I am not eating by you; rather, you are eating by me!"

The baal ha'bayis immediately understood the penetrating meaning of his response. He stretched out his arms, embraced Rav Hillel and kissed him. After begging his forgiveness, he invited him into the house and personally served him a scrumptious meal.

There is a compelling lesson to be derived from this story. We look around and see many people involved in secular pursuits: working, building, creating. They seem to be the builders, developers and sustainers of the world. We see another group: people, engrossed in Torah, in what seems an interesting pastime, but surely not as consequential as the first group of "builders." We derive from the above that not all is as it seems. Without limud ha'Torah, the study of Torah, the world would be on a collision course of self-destruct. Everybody is dependent on Torah study: either by virtue of his own study or by virtue of his connection and support of those who do study. Indeed, those who study Torah are the true sustainers of the world.

Moshe sent them to spy out the land of Canaan. (13:17)

Yehoshua also sent spies to spy out the land prior to conquering it. He had no problem with his spies. In contrast, when Moshe Rabbeinu, his rebbe, sent twelve distinguished leaders of the Jewish

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nation, a terrible calamity resulted. The impact of this calamity affected the entire Jewish nation. Wherein lay the difference between the two sets of spies?

Perhaps the difference is in the numbers. Doleh U'mashkeh cites the pasuk in Devarim (1:22): "Vtikrevun eilai kulchem" "And you all came close to me" and requested spies. Yehoshua sent two representatives of the people, whom he felt were the individuals who were most appropriate and suitable for this mission. On his own volition, Moshe would have sent two, which is really all they needed. Yehoshua, his devoted disciple, and Calev, the prince of Shevet Yehudah, the most distinguished tribe, would probably have been the individuals he would have sent. The other tribes would not accept this approach. They each wanted their own representative. They did not trust one another.

What happened to their kinship? Apparently, it took a hiatus that presented itself as a breach among the tribes. If all the tribes could not agree on a leadership that was to represent them all, then it is no wonder that this feeling of insecurity catalyzed this enormous tragedy.

Calev hushed the people toward Moshe. (13:30)

Calev sought to attract the people's attention, in order to listen to what they were saying against Moshe: "Is it this alone that the son of Amram has done to us?" Calev gave the inaccurate impression that he would now disparage Moshe. They were wrong. He only wanted their attention, so that he could reveal the wonderful things that Moshe had done for them. Is one permitted to resort to subterfuge, to give the impression that he is not very observant, only to clarify the matter shortly thereafter?

The following halachic query was presented to Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, by a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who was seeking a rabbinical position in a community whose religious observance was, at best, left of center. The attitude of several of the board members was antagonistic towards the Torah community. They hammered the candidate with questions that had little to do with the rabbinical position. Their intention was to sidetrack the prospective rabbi to observe whether he would compromise his stance in regard to religious issues. In short, they sought to "weed out" any candidate who might be too frum, observant.

The question that the candidate posed to Horav Zilberstein was a practical one. Was it permitted to respond in the affirmative to the question, thereby giving the impression that he was a progressive and liberal rabbi who would have no problem compromising in areas of Torah law - if that was what was needed to keep the congregants in good spirits. After the position was his and he would have an opportunity to endear himself to the congregants, he would, of course, show his "true colors." He would explain to the membership that the only authority in regard to Jewish law was Daas Torah, the authority of Torah interpreted by the gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants of each generation. Regrettably, when he would be questioned, he would be compelled to present himself as one who is estranged from the Torah way of life.

Horav Zilberstein responded that it is forbidden to present oneself in a negative light even if it is only for a short time. He supported his psak, halachic decision, with a Mishnah in Meseches Ediyos 5:6. Akavia ben Mahalalel testified concerning four things: he was in dispute with the Sages regarding four areas of Jewish law. They said to him, "Akavia, withdraw these four things in which you are in dispute and we will promote you to be the Av Bais Din, head of the Rabbinical court." He said to them, "It is better for me to be called a fool all my life than I should become a wicked man in the presence of

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the Almighty even for one hour. Let not men say: 'He withdrew his opinions for the sake of getting power'."

Chazal attempted to persuade Akavia ben Mahalalel to change his view. Iyun Yaakov understands from the Mishnah that the request was temporary in nature. They wanted him to change his view for one hour, during which they would elect him as the Av Bais Din. Afterwards, he could revert to his original decision. He responded that he would rather be called a fool for the rest of his life than to compromise his opinion of halachah and consequently be viewed as a rasha - even for one hour. We may add that certainly what was expected of Akavia was in no way as potentially damaging to halachah as what was expected of this young rabbi. Yet, one's commitment to halachah must be unwavering. This does not apply only to rabbis; it applies to their congregants, as well.

We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so were we in their eyes. (13:3)

What did the spies want to prove when they said, "And so were we in their eyes"? The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, said that this comprises, in effect, a major aspect of their sin. The fact that the spies felt small in their own eyes is something we can accept. They saw these giant men, and they felt overwhelmed by them; they felt small compared to them. While a Jew who has faith in Hashem should not have feelings of inadequacy, it is understandable that some of us have a difficult time dealing with pressure. What the Canaanites thought, however, also concerned them. Who cares what they think of us? Our self esteem should not be determined by the opinion of others - especially not by those whose lifestyle is based upon the values and morals of contemporary society.

The first Bobover Rebbe, zl, quoted by Horav Yissacher Teichtal, zl, explains that there are two types of modest people: the sincere and the insincere. The latter is an individual who makes it a point to "display" his modesty. He presents himself as the paragon of humility as long as it serves his purpose. Heaven forbid should someone offend or embarrass him. He will immediately take offense and spew forth a venomous diatribe against the unlucky soul who offended his honor. The former maintains his humility under all circumstances, because it is sincere humility. The spies could not tolerate the fact that the pagans looked down on them. They were concerned with the opinion of others, even the lowest of the low. When they made this statement, they indicated their true colors.

And the people wept that night. (14:1)

Klal Yisrael believed the spies' malignant report of what they saw in Eretz Yisrael. They responded to the report in a manner unbecoming a noble people, a nation that stood at Har Sinai and was privy to an unprecedented Revelation of the Almighty. What was their response? They cried - and cried. They withdrew to their tents and lamented the terrible "fate" that was awaiting them. They lived through a night of ceaseless weeping, a night of unwarranted weeping. Hashem also responded. The Talmud in Taanis 28a states that Hashem said to Klal Yisrael, "You wept without reason; I will provide you with a weeping for generations." This refers to our national day of mourning, Tisha B'Av, the day upon which our two Batei Mikdash were destroyed, the day that served as the harbinger of our galus, the beginning of our long exile.

Hashem does not tolerate unwarranted weeping. While it is appropriate to mourn for a tragedy,

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it is wrong to transform a mishap into a tragedy, to view a temporary setback as a national calamity. It is not justifiable; it is not honest. Even in mourning, integrity must prevail. Another aspect of unmitigated grief should be addressed. The Jewish nation has undergone great tragedies throughout our tumultuous history. We have suffered persecution, affliction, and annihilation. We have always, however, bounced back. We did not resign ourselves to the loss. We took the necessary steps to rebuild our lives, to emerge from the ruins and go forth with courage and determination. We did not permit grief to lead to despair.

It is told that during the Three Weeks of mourning, from the Seventeenth of Tamuz to Tisha B'Av, Rav Naftali, zl, m'Ropshitz would repeatedly sing a tune to the words of the prayer, "And You will restore the Kohanim to their service, and the Leviim to their chants, and Yisrael to its place of beauty." He did not allow himself to be overcome by grief; he did not permit despair to take hold of him.

The story is told about a Talmid chacham,

Torah scholar, who was once walking along the edge of a river when he heard a sudden cry for "help." He looked around and saw a man struggling to stay afloat in the water. Unable to swim, the scholar quickly obtained a rope and threw it to the man, saying, "Better grab the rope. If you do not succeed, give my best regards to the Livyasan," the legendary large fish at the bottom of the sea.

People who observed this incident had a difficult time accepting the scholar's callous remarks. He explained that this was not gallows humor, but an attempt to ease the person's anxiety somewhat, so that he would be more capable of grasping the rope and saving his life. When one panics it becomes difficult to see the way out. Even in the most difficult times, one must find some source of cheer, some positive outlook, to prevent depression and despair from setting in - a situation from which it is difficult to extricate oneself.

And it will be in front of the eyes of the assembly. (15:24)

The Torah refers to leadership, the Sanhedrin, as the *einei ho'eidah*, the eyes of the assembly. Their ability to see far beyond that of the common person; their penetrating insight; their global perspective; their clear vision and comprehension of a situation makes this *nom d"guerre* highly appropriate. Their vision and perception is honed and refined by their constant immersion in the sea of Torah. The eyes that never leave the Gemorah are capable of seeing beyond the limits imposed by nature.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates that Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, was able to look at a vessel and ascertain if it had been *toiveled*, immersed in a mikvah, prior to its first use. He said that a *keili*, vessel, that has been immersed has the *Shem Havaya*, Ineffable Name of Hashem, in it. We cannot see the Name, but someone of Rav Isser Zalmen's holy stature can. When this was related to the Brisker Rav, zl, he was unimpressed. He said, "Do you think this is something surprising? Do you have any idea who Rav Isser Zalmen is? Do you even begin to understand his *sichas chullin*, simple, mundane conversation? In other words, when one begins to fathom the greatness of Rav Isser Zalmen, one does not become surprised by his spiritual perception.

Horav Zilberstein continues, explaining that the distinction of the Torah giant does not extend itself only to the great actions that he performs. On the contrary, it is the little things, the simple

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activities, the everyday actions, that distinguish a gadol b'Yisrael, our nation's Torah leaders. He cites the following incident that left an indelible impression on him. He was a young student in Yeshivas Eitz Chaim in Eretz Yisrael, and Rav Isser Zalmen, the Rosh HaYeshiva, was escorting his son-in-law, Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, and grandson, Horav Shneur Kotler, zl, prior to their return to America. Rav Aharon and Rav Shneur had recently been saved miraculously from the clutches of Satan's representatives - the Nazis. They had spent a short while in Eretz Yisrael and were now about to journey on to America. Rav Shneur was a chassan, whose marriage would take place upon his arrival in America.

Rav Isser Zalmen accompanied them down the steps, but did not continue on to the street where the taxi to take them to the airport was waiting. He bid them an emotional good-bye on the steps. He would not walk with them to the street, to the waiting cab. The students who observed their rebbe's actions were somewhat taken aback by his reluctance to walk them to the street. They knew that everything their rebbe did, or did not do, was by design. What was his reason? Finally, someone conjured up the courage to ask Rav Isser Zalmen the rationale behind his actions. He gave a response that tears the heart and should cause us to shudder.

"Not all of my grandson's friends were fortunate enough to be in the situation he is in today. Most of them were slaughtered after being persecuted in the most heinous and brutal manner. They were sacrificed Al Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying G-d's Name. How can I walk them down to the street and publicly kiss them good-bye, knowing that there are others who did not attain such a moment? How many mothers and fathers lost their children? How can I not be sensitive to their emotions?"

When one plumbs the depths of these words and is cognitive of the true sense of caring that is emitted by this special human being, it is no longer any wonder how this person could sense whether Hashem's Name was on a vessel or not! We now understand why the Brisker Rav was not impressed when he heard about Rav Isser Zalmen's supernatural powers. Apparently, Rav Shneur inherited the unique sensitivity and caring for another human being that exemplified Rav Isser Zalmen's character. He, too, exhibited incredible sensitivity for others, as demonstrated by the following little-known episode. As mentioned before, Rav Shneur was engaged to his rebbetzin prior to the outbreak of World War II. The two miraculously survived the war by Divine design. A short time after they had been reunited, Rav Shneur received a letter from his intended. She wrote that due to the war's hardships, her physical condition was no longer as fit as when they had first become engaged. She, therefore, was absolving him from the engagement, and she would have no complaint if he were to decide to break the engagement and seek another bride.

What did Rav Shneur, the man who was Rav Aharon's son and successor to head the greatest Torah center in the world, answer to his kallah? He said, "You lost your father during the war. You no longer have the material wealth that you once had. Your health is no longer what it used to be. You have undergone much pain and anguish. Do you think that I, too, your chassan, will also forsake you at a time like this? Never - it will never be!"

The rest is history. Rav Shneur, zl, and tibatel l'chaim, his rebbitzen, married and raised a family that includes some of the greatest Roshei Yeshiva and marbitzei Torah of our generation. This is how Torah is built - on the small things - on the simple concerns - on caring and sensitivity to all people. The small acts define great people.

Bnei Yisrael were in the wilderness and they found a man gathering wood. (15:32)

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In directing the spies where to investigate the land, Moshe Rabbeinu instructs them to confirm whether "there are trees in it or not." Rashi defines the word tree as a reference to an adam kasher, a decent, righteous man who would protect Canaan's inhabitants through his merit. Eitz, tree, is an allusion to a pious, upright man in whose merit a community, or an individual is sustained. In order to receive the merit of the tzaddik, however, one must be machsiv, recognize, value and appreciate the tzaddik. If he "knocks" every Torah scholar; if he determines who is a scholar and who is not, we cannot expect the tzaddik's merit to preserve him in his time of need.

Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan suggests that the mekoshesh eitzim, gathered sticks of wood, are a metaphor for selecting and determining who is an "eitz" and who is not. The mekoshesh denigrated tzaddikim. He decided who was worthy of being an "eitz". How can one who degrades tzaddikim expect to be sustained by them? He, accordingly, was not.

Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan...They brought forth to the Bnei Yisrael an evil report on the Land that they had spied out. (13:2, 32)

One of the most difficult narratives in the Torah to understand is the incident of the meraglim, spies. They went to Eretz Yisrael on an ill-fated mission, to slander the land, Moshe Rabbeinu and even Hashem. The Yalkut Shimoni refers to these meraglim as "kesilim," fools. They were actually the nesiim of their respective tribes, men who were gedolim, great leaders, whose reputation until that moment had remained untarnished. What happened? What transpired that suddenly changed a tzaddik into a "kesil"?

Chazal cite the pasuk in Mishlei 10, "One who slanders /spreads lashon hora is a fool." They say that although when they left they were gedolim, the meraglim transformed themselves into fools. Chazal reveal to us that they were not actually foolish, but rather, they acted foolish. They made themselves into fools. How does a wise man, someone who has seichel, common sense, suddenly become a fool? Horav Shmuel Truvitz, Shlita, suggests that the answer lies in Moshe's rebuke to Bnei Yisrael. In Sefer Devarim 1:26,27, Moshe recounts Bnei Yisrael's transgressions throughout their journey in the wilderness. He addresses the times that they "tested" Hashem, when they displayed a certain lack of trust or a deficiency in faith. In regard to the sin of the spies, Moshe Rabbeinu says, "But you did not wish to ascend, and you rebelled against the word of Hashem, your G-d. You slandered in your tents and said, 'Because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Emori to destroy us.'" The word, "vateiragnu," "(and) you slandered," implied a different form of slander. Rabbeinu Yona interprets this verb to describe the behavior of one who constantly finds fault, who is always complaining. He grumbles about everything and everyone. He blames others for his plight. Even if his circumstances are not negative, he perceives them as bad. Moreover, he convinces himself that people are always cheating him, rejecting him, disparaging him. This form of depression is a disease in which the individual can never have any enjoyment, because he thrives on being miserable. Indeed, he needs to find fault in his own behavior to justify his punishment.

The meraglim grumbled, "Hashem hates us - and indeed, He has every reason to despise us. Did we not worship idols in Egypt? He is taking revenge against us." They were so obtuse in their depression that they perceived a positive sign as a negative omen. They saw funerals taking place in Eretz Yisrael. Rather than viewing this as Hashem's form of intervention to distance the inhabitants so

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that they would not see the strangers, they looked at it from a negative perspective. This was their utter foolishness. They convinced themselves that Hashem hated them and wanted to destroy them. It is no wonder that their vision was so myopic that everything looked sour.

With this idea in mind, we can understand why Moshe prayed for the welfare of Yehoshua but did not pray for the other spies. One would think that Moshe was displaying favoritism. Horav Truvitz cites the Targum Yonasan ben Uziel who says that Yehoshua's exceptional humility catalyzed Moshe's prayer on his behalf. Simply, Moshe was concerned that, as a result of his diffidence, Yehoshua would not take a stand against the other spies. Thus, he would defer to their sinful intentions. Horav Truvitz suggests that Yehoshua's humility determined his worthiness for blessing. Because he was humble, he viewed everything that occurred in his life as a gift from Hashem. He saw the positive in everything. He was the type of person that deserved Moshe's blessing. The meraglim, on the other hand, were bitter, unhappy people. They could be exposed to the most positive expression of Hashem's beneficence and distort it with their negative perspective. Someone who cannot appreciate Hashem's gift does not really deserve to receive it. Moshe prayed on behalf of the individual who would appreciate and value his prayer.

They said to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael...the land which we traversed ...the land is good, very, very much so...(14:7)

The sin of the meraglim is, indeed, difficult to understand. After all, the meraglim did not really tell any lies about Eretz Yisrael. The testimony that it is a land that "eats up its inhabitants" certainly appeared to be true, considering the many funerals that they had witnessed. Veritably, they even recounted that it was a "land flowing with milk and honey." So, why were they punished to such an extent?

The Yismach Yisrael cites his father, who posits that the meraglim were aware of the superiority of Eretz Yisrael. They felt the kedushah, holiness, everywhere they travelled. The kedushah permeated the air. The spies conceded that the "land was very good." It would be much easier to reach a sublime level of spirituality in such a land.

The spies' refusal to enter Eretz Yisrael was not a product of their fear for their material/physical well-being. They said, "Efes ki az ha'am." "But the people that dwells in the land is powerful and strong." This is a reference to the unusually powerful forces of tumah, spiritual impurity, which exist there. A commensurate measure of tumah is necessary in order to combat the unequalled forces of kedushah. They feared that, while they had the opportunity to attain the summit of kedushah, they were also vulnerable to descending to the nadir of tumah if they erred. They conjectured that, in the long run, it would be more beneficial for their spiritual well-being to remain in the desert and defer the opportunity for growth rather than risk ultimate failure. In the midbar, wilderness, they might not have become such great tzaddikim, but they also would not risk turning into reshaim.

Were the meraglim really inappropriate? Do we not have precedent from Yaakov Avinu, who feared the effects of his previous "sin"? Indeed, even after Hashem assuaged his anxiety with His assurance of protection, Yaakov still expressed the fear that receiving Hashem's kindness might have diminished his own merit. If Yaakov's fear was not viewed as transgression, why were the meraglim faulted for their anxiety?

There is, however, a significant distinction between Yaakov Avinu's fear and the meraglim's

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anxiety: their response to their individual concerns. Yaakov Avinu, despite his overriding concern, continued. He did not halt in his path, refusing to pray, reluctant to continue to Eretz Yisrael. He prepared for the eventuality of war. He sought a peaceful reconciliation with Eisav. Above all, he prayed. He entreated Hashem to grant him life, to give him a future - despite his past transgression. He did not concede to his fear.

The meraglim's reaction is well-known. Not only did they react hysterically, denying Hashem's "ability" to bring them into Eretz Yisrael, they also cultivated distress in the hearts and minds of Bnei Yisrael. Because they feared their later spiritual decline as a result of the increased opportunity and demands in Eretz Yisrael, they were willing to sin now. They thought that by sinning now they would preserve their subsequent spirituality. They erred in thinking the end justifies the means. Not going to Eretz Yisrael was apparently clearly wrong, whereas the possibility of not being able to succeed in Eretz Yisrael was ambiguous. Why would they defer to a dubious situation? We do not sin today just because we might sin tomorrow!

Horav Simcha Bunim, zl, M'Pesicha, applies a similar approach to understanding the sin of eating from the Eitz Ha'daas. According to the Rambam, the Eitz Ha'daas provided the koach ha'bechirah, the ability to choose between right and wrong. Now they would develop a yetzer hora, evil inclination, which they would have to overcome in order to choose to do good. The serpent encouraged Chavah to eat of the forbidden fruit, so that she could grow spiritually. She would not simply gravitate to doing good because now she would have to contend with her yetzer hora. Commensurate to the challenge would be the reward. She would earn her spiritual success. She would work for it. She deferred to the serpent's guileful suggestion. She sinned now so that she might grow in spiritual stature later. She destroyed her present to build an ambiguous future. In the end, she lost her present and arrived ill-prepared for the future. The wise person listens to Hashem and does not attempt to manipulate circumstances according to his limited perspective.

They ascended toward the mountain-top saying, "We are ready, and we shall ascend to the place which Hashem has spoken, for we have sinned. (14:40)

The people were embarrassed. They sought to compensate for their sin. They finally realized that their reaction to the spies' slander of Eretz Yisrael was terribly wrong. They were, however, too late. Their teshuvah was long overdue. How many times can a people rebel against Hashem, apologize and proceed with life as planned? They would not accept a negative response, insisting upon going on to Eretz Yisrael. They failed; their fate was sealed. They were attacked and thrown back.

Why did Hashem reject their teshuvah? They acknowledged, "We have sinned." What more should they have done? The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh attributes Hashem's rejection of their teshuvah to two factors. First, the sin was still fresh. Second, their declaration of teshuvah was inspired more by regret over defaulting Eretz Yisrael than by remorse over the sinful behavior.

The Baal Shem Tov responds to this question with an observation on human nature. He punctuates the pasuk in such a manner that a different meaning may be applied to it. They were actually saying, "We are ready to go to Eretz Yisrael, for Hashem has said that we have sinned." In other words, they did not concede one iota that they had sinned. It was Hashem Who had said they had sinned! Their self-righteous attitude was obvious. They conceded that Hashem was not happy with their behavior, but, they did not necessarily agree with His perspective. Although externally they manifested a contrite

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image, between the lines, they were still defiant.

We compound our sin by refusing to acknowledge our role in its perpetration. How can one perform teshuvah if he refuses to recognize his error? Self-denial usually leads to an obstinacy that controls the individual - and his perspective. Klal Yisrael was prepared to fight, to go and attempt to conquer the pagans. They were prepared to do whatever was needed to go up to Eretz Yisrael - everything - but be modeh al ha'emes, concede to the truth, confess that they had sinned. Are we any different today?

That you may see it and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem. (15:39)

The Torah reveals to us that by seeing the tzitzis we might remember all of the mitzvos. Consequently, we will be inspired to perform them. How does this transpire? Rashi explains that the numerical equivalent of tzitzis is 600. In addition, there are eight threads and five knots, bringing it to a total of 613, the number of mitzvos which we are commanded to observe. In the Talmud Menachos 43b Chazal comment that the techeilas, turquoise wool, which was the color of one string of each fringe, brings the Almighty to mind. Techeilas is similar to the color of the sea, the sea to the sky, and the sky to Hashem's Throne. Thus, techeilas helps the wearer to focus on Hashem and his duty towards Him.

Chazal imply that one string can inspire a person, so that he can visualize the Holy Throne. How does this happen? Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, suggests that the key lies in the word "u'reisem," "that you may see." We should approach the Torah in a manner that we can visualize it. We should look at tzitzis and visualize mitzvos. It must be something tangible, something that we can see, something that we can perceive.

Chazal tell us, "Who is a wise man? He who can see that which will be born." It is not sufficient to merely know what will be. It is necessary that one understand it so well that he actually sees before his very eyes what will take place. Everyone knows that one day our sojourn on this world will come to an end, and we will eventually have to give an accounting for our behavior. But, how many of us actually see it? We are to focus on mitzvos and their message to the point that we actually perceive that message.

The Alter M'Kelm was wont to say, "The difference between a tzaddik and a rasha is the ability to visualize the Torah's truth. The Rasha is not simply a non-believer, he does not see! If he would apply himself and/or open his eyes he would see. Thus, he would believe.