

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Shlach Lecha
June 29, 2024 *** Sivan 23, 5784

Shelach in at Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2201/jewish/Shelach-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Shelach," means "Send" and it is found in Numbers 13:2.

Moses sends twelve spies to the land of Canaan. Forty days later they return, carrying a huge cluster of grapes, a pomegranate and a fig, to report on a lush and bountiful land. But ten of the spies warn that the inhabitants of the land are giants and warriors "more powerful than we"; only Caleb and Joshua insist that the land can be conquered, as G-d has commanded.

The people weep that they'd rather return to Egypt. G-d decrees that Israel's entry into the land shall be delayed forty years, during which time that entire generation will die out in the desert. A group of remorseful Jews storm the mountain on the border of the land, and are routed by the Amalekites and Canaanites.

The laws of the nesachim (meal, wine and oil offerings) are given, as well as the mitzvah to consecrate a portion of the dough (challah) to G-d when making bread. A man violates the Shabbat by gathering sticks, and is put to death. G-d instructs to place fringes (tzitzit) on the four corners of our garments, so that we should remember to fulfill the mitzvot (divine commandments).

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Joshua 2:1-24

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/691124/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah tells the story of the spies that Joshua sent to scout the city of Jericho, prior to the Israelites' invasion of the Holy Land, a point in common with this week's Torah reading, which discusses the twelve spies that were sent by Moses years earlier to explore the Holy Land.

Joshua sent two spies to Jericho, where they lodged at an inn located in the city's walls, operated by a woman named Rahab. Their presence was quickly discovered by the king who sent for Rahab and asked her to turn in her guests. Rahab responded that her guests had already left the city — when actually she

had hidden them on her rooftop.

"And she said to the men, I know that G-d has given you the land, and that your terror has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away because of you. For we have heard how G-d dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt; and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you completely destroyed."

At Rahab's request, the two spies assured her that she and her family would not be harmed during the conquer of Jericho—provided that she would tie a scarlet thread and hang it from her window. This would be a symbol that this home is a safe haven. Rahab helped the men escape via a rope she lowered from her window and told them how to hide from possible pursuers. The spies escaped safely and returned to report to Joshua.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[What Made Joshua and Caleb Different? 5771 by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shelach-lecha/what-made-joshua-and-caleb-different/)
<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shelach-lecha/what-made-joshua-and-caleb-different/>

The twelve men sent by Moses to explore the land of Israel came back with a wholly misleading report. They said:

"We cannot go up against those people, for they are stronger than us . . . The land which we have journeyed through and scouted is a land that consumes its inhabitants; and all the people we saw were tall and broad to a man." [Num. 13:31-32](#)

In fact, as we later discover in the book of Joshua, the inhabitants of the land were terrified of the Israelites. When Joshua sent spies to Jericho, Rahab told them "A great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you." When the people heard what God had done for the Israelites, "our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you" ([Josh. 2:9-11](#)).

The spies should have known this. They themselves had sung at the Red Sea:

"The people of Canaan melted away; terror and dread fell upon them."
[Ex. 15:15-16](#)

The spies were guilty of an attribution error, assuming that others felt as they did. They said, **“We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we were in their eyes”** ([Num. 13:33](#)). But as the Kotzker Rebbe noted, they were entitled to make the first claim. Just not the second. They knew how they themselves felt, but they had no idea how the people of the land felt. They were terrified of the Canaanites and failed to see that the Canaanites were terrified of them.

Now there are two obvious questions: First, why did ten spies make this mistake? Second, why did two of them, Joshua and Caleb, not make it?

Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck has written a fascinating book, *Mindset*[\[1\]](#), on why some people fulfil their potential, while others do not. Her interest, she says, was aroused when she observed the behaviour of 10-year-old children when given puzzles to solve. Some, when the puzzles became difficult, thrived. They relished the challenge, even when it proved too hard for them. Others became anxious. When the puzzles became hard, they were easily discouraged and quick to give up.

She wanted to understand why. What makes the difference between people who enjoy being tested and those who don't? What makes some people grow through adversity while others become demoralised? Her research drove her to the conclusion that it is a matter of mindset. Some see their abilities as given and unalterable. We just are gifted or ordinary, and there is not much we can do about it. She calls this the “fixed mindset”. Others believe that we grow through our efforts. Where they do not succeed, they don't define this as failure but as a learning experience. She calls this the “growth mindset”.

Those with a fixed mindset tend to avoid difficult challenges because they fear failure. They think it will expose them as inadequate. So they are reluctant to take risks. They play it safe. When do people with the fixed mindset thrive? “When things are safely within their grasp. If things get too challenging . . . they lose interest.”

People with the growth mindset react differently. “They don't just seek challenge, they thrive on it. The bigger the challenge, the more they stretch.”

Parents can do great damage, Dweck says, when they tell their children they are gifted, clever, talented. This encourages the child to believe that he or she has a fixed quantum of ability. This in turn discourages them from risking failure. Such children often grow up to say things like, “I feel that my parents won't value me

if I'm not as successful as they would like.”

Parents who want to help their children should, she says, praise them not for their ability but for their effort, their willingness to try hard even if they fail. A great basketball coach used to say to his players, “You may be outscored, but you will never lose.” If they gave of their best, they might lose the game but they would gain and grow. They would be winners in the long run.

The person with a fixed mindset lives with the constant fear of failure. Those with a growth mindset don't think in terms of failing at all.

Apply this logic to the spies and we see something fascinating. The Torah describes them in these words:

“All were all leading men among the Israelites.” [Num. 13:3](#)

They were people with reputations to guard. Others had high expectations of them. They were princes, leaders, men of renown. If Dweck is right, people laden with expectations tend to be risk-averse. They do not want to be seen to fail. That may be why they came back and said, in effect: We cannot win against the Canaanites. Therefore, we should not even try.

There were two exceptions, Caleb and Joshua. Caleb came from the tribe of Judah, and Judah, we learn in the book of Bereishit, was the first *ba'al teshuvah*. Early in life he had been the one who proposed selling Joseph into slavery. But he matured. He was taught a lesson by his daughter-in-law, Tamar. He confessed, “She is more righteous than I am.” That experience seems to have changed his life. Later, when the Viceroy of Egypt (Joseph, not yet recognised by the brothers) threatens to hold Benjamin as a prisoner, Judah offers to spend his life as a slave so that his brother can go free. Judah is the clearest example in Bereishit of someone who takes adversity as a learning experience rather than as failure. In Dweck's terminology, he had a growth mindset. Evidently he handed on this trait to his descendants, Caleb among them.

As for Joshua, the text tells us specifically in the story of the spies that Moses had changed his name. Originally he was called Hoshea, but Moses added a letter to his name (see [Num. 13:16](#)). A change of name always implies a change of character or calling. Abram became Abraham. Jacob became Israel. When our name changes, says Maimonides, it is as if we or someone else were saying “[You are not the same person as you were before](#)” ([Mishneh Torah, Laws of](#)

Repentance 2:4).

Anyone who has experienced a name-change has been inducted into a growth mindset.

People with the growth mindset do not fear failure. They relish challenges. They know that if they fail, they will try again until they succeed. It cannot be coincidence that the two people among the spies who had the growth mindset were also the two who were unafraid of the risks and trials of conquering the land. Nor can it be accidental that the ten others, all of whom carried the burden of people's expectations (as leaders, princes, men of high rank) were reluctant to do so.

If this analysis is correct, the story of the spies holds a significant message for us. God does not ask us never to fail. He asks of us that we give of our best. He lifts us when we fall and forgives us when we fail. It is this that gives us the courage to take risks. That is what Joshua and Caleb knew, one through his name change, the other through the experience of his ancestor Judah.

Hence the paradoxical but deeply liberating truth: Fear of failure causes us to fail. It is the willingness to fail that allows us to succeed. [1] Carol S.

Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success, Ballantine Books, 2016.

[The Largest Significance of the Littlest Letter by Malka Strassberg Edinger](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-large-significance-of-the-littlest-letter/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-large-significance-of-the-littlest-letter/>

Could one tiny letter really be so important? At the beginning of this week's parashah, as Moshe sends twelve scouts to tour the Land of Canaan, we are told that Moshe changed Joshua's name from Hoshea to Yehoshua:

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן־נוּן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ

Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun 'Yehoshua'" (Num. 13:16).

Midrash Rabbah (Sotah 34b and Rashi on this verse) tells us that this name change was in fact a prayer for Yehoshua to be saved from the counsel of the other scouts, as the verb "called" can also refer to prayer (cf. Jeremiah 29:12) and the name "Yehoshua" can mean "May YHWH save him." In consonantal Hebrew, the change from Hoshea/הוֹשֵׁעַ to Yehoshua/יְהוֹשֻׁעַ is achieved by the addition of the single letter yod, י. But the midrash teaches us that this was no ordinary י; God had been saving it for this moment in time. When God changed Avram and Sarai's names to Avraham (via the addition of a medial ה) and Sarah (via the

replacement of the final ם with a ה), the letter ם complained to God: "Because I am the smallest of all the letters, you have taken me out of the name of the righteous Sarah!" God appeased this ם by telling it that its new location would be at the beginning of Yehoshua's name. This special little ם knew that despite its size it was fulfilling a holy purpose in the world by being a part of a righteous person's name, and it didn't want to settle for anything less (Bereishit Rabbah 47:1).

The ם may be the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet but it is important. Beyond its place in the names of biblical righteous people, ם stands in the most prominent place of the most prominent name of all: the beginning of God's holy name, the Tetragrammaton, יְהוָה/YHWH. The ם also played an important role in YHWH's creation of the world. Isaiah 26:4 reads:

בְּטַחוּ בַיהוָה עַד־עַד כִּי בָּיָהּ יְהוָה צוּר עוֹלָמִים:

Trust in YHWH forever, indeed, in Yah, YHWH, the Eternal Rock.[1]

Midrash Tehillim (114:1). reads the second half of this verse in an acontextual hermeneutic manner, as is the midrashic way: "for with "Y-H" (the letters yod/י and heh/ה) God formed the worlds." That is, God used the two letters to create two worlds, this World and the World to Come. But which letter was used to create which World?! Genesis 2:4 reads: **אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם**, "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created." The ה in the word **בְּהִבְרָאָם** is written small in the Torah, serving as an invitation for rabbinic interpretation. Midrashically, the word can be read as if it were vocalized **בְּהִבְרָאָם** (with the letter ה God created them). Thus, the heavens and earth, i.e., this World, were created with the letter ה, and the World to Come was created with the letter י. What a large feat for such a small letter!

Elsewhere, Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague, teaches that just as the written letter ם floats above the other letters on a line of text, the ם represents the metaphysical—that which transcends the earthly physical world and its constraints of time, matter, and space. Thus, ם is truly the letter of the metaphysical World to Come. The letter ם is also the recipient of a few special written forms in a Torah scroll. The text of each Torah scroll is written precisely, with certain layout formats, certain words beginning each column of text, certain words written with seemingly superfluous or missing letters, and certain letters written in unusual forms, e.g., upside down, inverted, majuscule/enlarged, minuscule (such as the aforementioned ה in Genesis 2:4), and with dots placed

above them.[2] One occurrence of the letter י with a special written form appears in this week's parashah where an enlarged י is found in Moshe's plea to God to muster God's strength to forgive the nation for their rebellion:[3]

יַעֲתָהּ יִגְדַּל-נָא כֹחַ אֲדֹנָי

Now may the power of the Lord be magnified (Num. 14:17).

This enlarged י is understood by biblical commentators in various ways. One explanation is that the י, which has a numerical value of ten, is a hint to the forefathers—and particularly Avraham, who underwent ten tests of faith—that in their merit God should forgive the nation (Paaneah Raza, Tur). R. Bahya explains that the י, which represents the divine name YHWH and, therefore, God's attribute of Mercy, indicates Moshe's plea for God's attribute of Mercy to ascend and prevail over God's attribute of Justice (represented by the divine name Elohim).[4] Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that the enlarged י in the word יִגְדַּל / "may the power be magnified," indicates the magnitude of the strength God would need to forgive the people—a level greater than all the strength God had showed in all the miracles performed thus far, both in Egypt and throughout the wilderness.

The Jewish people share a kinship with the letter י. The י is the smallest letter and the Jewish people are the smallest nation, as acknowledged in Deuteronomy 7:7:

כִּי-אַתֶּם הַמְעַט מְכָל-הָעַמִּים

for you are the fewest of all peoples.

But despite our size, we can, like the letter י, strive both individually and collectively for holiness and not settle for anything less. We can be great and even limitless, and not let our size hold us back. We can strive for transcendence, and always channel faith, divine mercy, and willpower. Let us strive to learn these lessons from the י and live our lives in a manner resonant with this tiny but great letter. And as we do so, may the letter י, representing YHWH, protect us from negative influence and save us from harm, as it did Yehoshua many years ago.

(Malka Strasberg Edinger is a JTS alumnus from the Kekst Graduate School and Adjunct Lecturer in Bible.) [1] Shadal (R. Shmuel David Luzzatto, 17th century, Italy) explains the word יַעֲתָהּ in this verse as a word conveying emphasis (i.e., "indeed") rather than introducing a reason (i.e., "for, because"), as is prevalent in poetic passages. [2] There are many different traditions regarding writing majuscule and minuscule letters in a sefer Torah; few of them are universal. [3] This majuscule yod, יַ, though not universal, is attested in the commentaries of the Paaneach Raza (Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yehudah haLevi, 13th century, N. France), Rabbeinu Bahya (Rabbi Bahya ben Asher, 13-14th century, Spain), the Tur

(Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, 14th century, Germany/Spain), Minchat Shai (Rabbi Yedidiah Shlomo Norzi, 16-17th century, Italy), and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th century, Germany). [4] Midrash Aggadah (Buber) and Rashi, Genesis 1:1, s.v. אלהים ברא.

Sh'lach Lecha: Israel/Palestine Buddy Cop Edition by Rabbi Lev Meirowitz Nelson

https://truah.org/resources/lev-meirowitz-nelson-shlach-lecha-moraltorah_2024/

This week's parshah recounts the first time the Israelite send spies to investigate the Land of Israel, an episode that leads to them wandering in the desert for 40 years until the entire generation dies. The haftarah recounts the second time, when Joshua sends two spies to investigate Jericho before conquering it.

Reading it brought me back to fourth grade, when I studied the story for the first time. I remember writing an interview with the spies as a school project. The text doesn't name them at all, so I decided that one of them was Caleb — apparently my teacher knew enough about midrash to cue me in that direction. I gave the other spy a made-up name, Mari ben Dari, which I thought sounded like Hebrew but was probably more influenced by the dwarves in "The Hobbit."

Why the text leaves them unnamed could be its own d'var Torah, leading to a meditation on the individual soldiers who are actually carrying out Israel's war against Hamas but whose names we in the U.S. tend not to know. But I'm more intrigued by the implications of their midrashic identities. Numbers Rabbah 16:1 identifies the second spy as Pinchas, Aaron's grandson, the young zealot who (in)famously stands up for God's honor by stabbing a copulating couple to death later in Numbers.

It's hard to gauge their ages precisely, but we know Caleb and Joshua are the only two men from the generation that left Egypt who make it into the promised land — their reward for being the only two spies from the original 12 who gave a good report. And Pinchas is at least one generation, perhaps two, younger. The scene unfolds in my mind's eye like a buddy cop movie. Caleb, the seasoned professional, jaded and a little grumpy, doing one last mission as a favor for his old pal the Chief before he can retire. Pinchas, the impulsive rising star, out to make a name for himself.

The midrash itself seems to paint this picture of Pinchas as it tries to solve a textual question of why Rahav — a sympathetic harlot in Jericho — hid "him" (singular) from the king's soldiers (Joshua 2:4). It has Pinchas tell her that priests are like angels, and angels can decide whether to be visible or invisible;

therefore, "I am a priest, and there is no need to hide me. Hide my counterpart, Caleb, but I will stand before them and they will not see me." The invincibility of youth fairly drips off Pinchas as he delivers this line with a swagger. (The Talmud in Megillah 15a also says that Rahav was one of the four most beautiful women in all of history. Despite Pinchas's zeal against foreign women seducing Israelite men, and all the more so the prohibition on priests marrying converts, he's obviously interested in her.)

Caleb has been here before — if not to Jericho per se then scouting the Land of Israel. What has he learned after 38 years of desert wanderings — about himself, about his people, about the world? Does he have regrets about how the last mission went, regrets he is determined to set right this time around? Have his years in the desert, as a senior elder, taught him patience and deepened his wisdom, or is he a washed-up has-been, ready to throw in the towel?

I can imagine him being resentful: If you all had just listened to us in the first place, we would have been here 38 years ago, and I would be entering this land in the prime of my life instead of my twilight years. Or perhaps his main emotion is loyalty: I'll do whatever Joshua — whatever God — needs of me. (His name seems to be related to the word for dog, kelev; we don't have much indication of how ancient Israelites viewed dogs, but I like thinking of him as loyal.)

And what about Pinchas, whose main attributes seem to be total devotion to God and a penchant for violence? (His PR people prefer to call it "righteous indignation.") Is he a loose cannon, apt to do more harm than good until he settles down? Or is he the latest model, made for the current moment, able to see things Caleb can't?

While I play this scene out to my own amusement, I simultaneously can't help but overlay it onto Israel and the occupation with bitter grief. I was in fourth grade in 1991, when — though I wasn't conscious of it at the time — the groundwork was being laid for the 1993 Oslo Accords. It's not quite 38 years later, but many of the same leaders are still in power; I do remember Netanyahu's first election to Prime Minister in 1996. What have we learned over these 30-odd years? How much of the present crisis is happening because of tired old men in leadership nursing sour grapes, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results? Is it time for a Pinchas who can take radically different action? Or is it exactly the opposite way around, with the hot-

headed Pinchasim of our day (ahem, Smotrich, Ben Gvir) glorying in violence, in need of some wise elders to restrain them?

I can't read the biblical account of Jericho — today a Palestinian city in the West Bank of over 20,000 — without thinking of Gaza. Rahav and her immediate family were rescued because they helped the Israelites. Her neighbors? "They exterminated everything in the city with the sword: man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey." (Joshua 6:21)

When it's time to actually rescue Rahav and her family, the text describes the spies as young men (Joshua 6:23), which would seem to contradict the midrash's identification of Caleb. Rashi solves this problem by saying that in this instance, with the battle raging around them, they needed to move swiftly, and so God made them like youths. Perhaps this holds out a hope that any of us can be transformed to meet the needs of the moment.

And perhaps, with the capabilities of both Caleb and Pinchas, we can find a way to change the course of the story so it does not have to end in wholesale destruction. *(Rabbi Lev Meirowitz Nelson is director of Leadership and Learning at T'ruah. He also serves as the part-time rabbi of the Flatbush Jewish Center in Bklyn.)*

Sh'lach: Sin of the Spies – Widespread Panic

<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/table-for-five/2024/06/25/shlach-sin-of-the-spies/>

Why were the ten spies punished so severely?

Table for Five: Sh'lach

Edited by Salvador Litvak, The Accidental Talmudist

As for the agents whom Moses sent to scout the land, those who came back and caused the whole community to mutter against him by spreading calumnies against the land – those who spread such calumnies about the land died by plague, by the will of the Lord. – Num. 36-37

Elan Javanfard, L.M.F.T., Professor & Author, Psycho-Spiritual Insights blog

The episode of the 12 spies provides us profound insights into the psychological concept of social influence. Social influence refers to the ways individuals change their behavior to meet the demands of a social environment. The damning report from 10 of the 12 spies did more than just convey their findings, it shaped the collective mindset of Bnei Yisrael. The Rambam writes that the spies received a measure for measure punishment for their crimes. They used their tongues to speak evil and had their tongues swell up to the point of death. Their

punishment was far more severe than those who listened to them, as they used their power of influence catastrophically.

The ten spies' fearful and pessimistic perspective led to a widespread crisis of faith, highlighting how influential voices can steer the course of a community. Their words planted seeds of doubt in Bnei Yisrael. Positive, faith-filled perspectives can inspire and uplift, while negative, fear-based reports can lead to despair and destruction. The story of the spies provides us a cautionary tale that the opinions and beliefs of other people can be powerful influences. As we experience more marketing, social media, and peer pressure in this modern world it is important to think for yourself and question the information and ideas you encounter. We must choose to be comfortable being in the minority like Caleb and Joshua, rather than falling prey to the influence of others.

[Shlomo Yaffe, Rabbi@ Congregation B'nai Torah, Springfield, MA](#)

We ask, why do we not today see the kind of open miraculous intervention in human affairs that we see in the Torah and the Prophetic writings as in the supernatural punishment of the Spies as indicated in the "Plague...before G-d"? We can see G-d's hand in the "garments of nature" if we look hard enough -but one needs to look for it with the spyglass of faith. One common answer: In our people's infancy we needed to see everything in a very clear and stark way. Just like all the basic skills we need to teach a small child. As we mature, we are expected to figure things out on our own as to how to live and indeed right and wrong. There are consequences – pleasant and unpleasant – for all our choices, but not necessarily immediate, or even in any one particular physical lifetime which is but a small part of the multiple journeys of our souls. In our People's infancy we had to see the hand of G-d -clearly and openly. In maturity we must seek it, using our minds and hearts. G-d desires that we find Him, as we are, in mind and body, in this physical world. G-d's purpose in the creation of Humanity – of which the Jewish people are to be the guide – is that we understand that G-d is One equally everywhere, even in a darkness that we must, by our efforts, illuminate with the light of our G-dly souls.

[Rabbi Cheryl Peretz, Associate Dean, Ziegler School at AJU](#)

Moses sends twelve men "latur et ha-aretz", to scout or more literally, "to tour" the Land. Ten return offer dispiriting reports. Tourists they left, and tourists they returned. They saw the land, but didn't let it touch them, didn't let it change them. They found no bond. They were only visitors, not owners, not inheritors.

Fearful, they concluded they didn't belong in or to this place and it would never belong to them.

Joshua and Caleb heard a different message: "alu zeh", rise up, become an oleh. Let the land elevate you, let the experience transform you, let this life moment move you. Go not as visitors or as strangers. This is your home. You are expected. Fight for this place. Root yourself here.

We do not have to go far to be tourists. We don't even have to take a trip. We meet people all the time who stand on the outside looking in, living separately and unaffected by the people around them or the things that happen. That report, says the Torah, is a travesty.

Later, we are commanded to wear tzitzit, fringes, on the corners of our garments. "V'lo taturu", "do not become a tourist" – don't shrink in fear of the world as if you don't really belong or are merely visiting or sightseeing. "Le'maan tizkiru" – in order that we remember that we belong, that we need not be afraid. Rather, we are each one of us needed to transform and mend the world.

[Yehudit Garmaise, Journalist and student of Marriage and Family Counseling](#)

Although the spies started out nicely by telling b'nai Yisroel that the land did indeed flow with milk and honey, they quickly pivoted into hysteria after they said, "effes," which means "however..."

We must listen to ourselves when we speak. When we sneak in "howevers" to our reports, we should see blazing red flags that warn us to choose silence instead of spreading negativity. The silence we must often choose, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks defines, "as the sound you can hear only if you are listening. In the silence of the midbar, the desert, you can hear the Medaber, the Speaker, and the medubar, that which is spoken.

"To hear the voice of G-d, you need a listening silence in the soul."

The spies' high self-regard, which might have come from their oft-repeated high status, influenced them to rely too heavily on their own distorted impressions. Their bitter complaints were so numerous that Hashem mentions their crime of "spreading calumnies," twice in this psuk.

The spies' negative speech not only revealed their lack of trust in Hashem, but their sad lack of trust in themselves, which we saw when the spies described themselves as "mere grasshoppers" in comparison to "the descendants of giants," they saw.

Instead of giving in to our anxieties and vulnerabilities, we must always take pride in ourselves as a people whom Hashem conceived, far before creating anything else, as the tiny people who create a spiritual revolution by teaching the world about morality and G-dliness.

David Brandes, Screenwriter, world famous in Canada

What did the spies do that was so egregious to merit the painful death of plague? Why didn't God empathize with the ex-slave's insecurity? Was God demanding too much of them? This is how the great scholar Nehama Leibowitz answers the questions.

From the beginning, the need to send "spies" to scout the promised land expressed the doubts in the peoples' hearts. Moses charged the spies to report on the quality of the land and on information necessary to defeat the inhabitants therein. They reported back on three different occasions.

First, they reported to Moses and the people that the land 'flowed with milk and honey'; however, the inhabitants were fierce; and the cities strongly fortified. This upset the people.

In response to Caleb's efforts at encouragement, the spies gave a second report: 'We dare not go because the inhabitants are stronger than we'.

The third response was directly to the people: 'The land eats the inhabitants, and everywhere we saw giants.' This created "murmurings" among the people and completely undermined their faith in God's project.

The reports of the spies progressed from facts, to opinions, to fear-mongering. The climax of the spy's transgression was when they said to Caleb: "...the inhabitants in that land are stronger than WE." Rashi quoting a midrash explains that the word WE is: "...in reference to Him that is above," i.e. God. The spies had lost their faith in God and infected the people with their doubt. It is this that God punished with such severity.

Yahrtzeits

Fran Nelson remembers her father Lewis Rapaport on Sunday June 30th

Roni Bamforth remembers her husband Brian Bamforth on Thursday July 4th