



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

As A Bond of Marriage

What exactly was the sin of the Spies?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's zt'l dazzling analysis of Rashi's first comment in parshat *Shelach* opens a new vista in conceptualizing the nature of their transgression.

Rashi addresses the juxtaposition of two seemingly unrelated stories. The story of the *Meraglim* (Spies) immediately follows Miriam's ridicule (*lashon hara*) of her brother Moshe - and Rashi wonders why. He explains that the correlation between the two incidents is that the spies saw what had happened to Miriam, the fact that she was punished for her talk and speaking ill of her brother, and yet they did not learn the lesson and they too were critical of and spoke ill of Eretz Yisrael.

The Rav offered a distinct perspective on Rashi's comment and explained the true connection between the sin of Miriam and the sin of the spies.

Miriam's sin was not merely the *lashon*

hara she spoke, but the content of the *lashon hara*. Her perspective contained a fundamental error in judgement.

She had overlooked the *segulah* element in Moshe. *Moshe Rabbeinu*, the *Av HaNeviim* was categorically different from every other prophet. *Segulah* in this context means that Moshe was elevated, exceptional, distinct and singular. Miriam failed to perceive the chosenness of her brother Moshe. She judged Moshe to be like any other prophet.

The spies missed this message as well when they were sent to examine the Land of Israel. The spies missed this message in their assessment of the Land and the way they reported their findings upon their return. In a similar fashion to Moshe's exceptional *segulah* quality, this trait is true of the Holy Land. Just as Miriam failed to affirm Moshe's uniqueness, the sin of the spies was that they failed to acknowledge the *segulah* aspect of *Eretz Yisrael*.

With this in mind the Rav asked a simple question: Why then was it necessary to send spies? If the Land has been promised to Israel and would be miraculously con-

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quered, what sense does it make to send twelve spies to scout out the land. For what purpose?

The Rav posited an exquisite explanation. In a word, the *segulah* land must be wed to a *segulah* people. He compares the covenant between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel to a bond of marriage. Everything that happens in this Land influences the spirit and the position of Jews, wherever they may be. The connection between the Jewish People and their land is intimate, is cherished, unbreakable, and endures forever.

Employing the analogy of the bond of marriage, the Rav cited a *halacha* that states that a couple must first meet before consummating their marriage. Symbolically, the people of Israel were in this same position prior to entering the land. Jewish law states that it is forbidden for a person to marry a woman or even become engaged to her until he has seen her. It matters not how many good recommendations he has received about her. The connection must be from the depth of one's heart, and without reservations. Therefore it must be based on his directly knowing her. "By entering the Land, the people were being wedded to it and, despite Divine assurance of its quality, they had to experience it through their princes before commitment could be deeply rooted and irrevocably assumed" (Reflections of the Rav, p.122). ■

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