



One Day For Each Year

“[The punishment] shall parallel the number of days that you spent exploring the land. There were forty days, and there shall be one day for each year... a total of forty years until your sin is forgiven.” (*Bamidbar 14:34*) Many questions arise in understanding this calculation. Firstly, the spies only sinned on the day they returned with their pessimistic report of the land, why are they being punished for 40 days? Further, the spies died immediately, why should *Am Yisrael* have to suffer for a full forty years, they did not sin for forty days! Finally, doesn't the wording of the *passuk* seem illogical? One would think it ought to be inverted, “one year for a day”, as each year corresponds to one day.

Rav Asher Weiss explains that the spies' whole attitude throughout their journey was negative. When one's perspective is negative, everything he encounters is filtered through that prism. Rav Schwab points out that while the spies' report

contained truth – they were correct that there were giants in *Chevron* – they failed to see the ‘spiritual giants’ that were buried there. One's point of view creates the reality of what he sees. Therefore, the spies were held responsible for sinning each day of their mission since they looked at the Land with an evil eye each day they were there. The *Shelah Hakadosh* adds that it specifically applies to the *lashon hara* they spoke. The Torah teaches us “*lo telech rachil beamecha*” (*Vayikra 19:16*), here their walking itself was counted as part of their *loshan hara* about the Land.

Rav Zaitchik in *Ohr Hanefesh* explains that although the spies were the ones that sinned, the people were the ones who sent them. Requesting that spies be sent was a rebellion against Hashem who had promised them this special land. Since the people were of the same mindset as the spies, they were punished for identifying with the negativity and fear. Rav Zaitchik further explains that when we commit a sin, we do not know how it will affect us and those around us. Although the spies only sinned for forty days, the effect of this sin led to suffering for forty years and beyond. What is the lesson here for us? At times we think a particular sin is so small, even insignificant, yet it may really generate greater consequences than we realize. Understanding that we are limited



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in knowing the ramifications of the sins we commit can influence our choices and make us take pause before we act.

The *Seforno* explains the “one day for each year” as one particular day, *Tisha B’av*, when we cry every year as a result of the spies’ sin. The *Chatam Sofer* offers a further fascinating understanding of this phrase. The entire period that the Jewish people were in Egypt was for the purpose of becoming purified, worthy and ready to enter the Land of Israel. However, the spies managed to undo all of this in their 40-day journey. Since there were ten spies who toured the land for forty days, it can be calculated “one day for each year”, each of the 400 years that *Am Yisrael* worked to build, cleanse and refine themselves in *galut*. We can see here how easy it is to destroy what is painstakingly built over many years. The reverse also holds true. Something that may take others years to build can be acquired by someone else with one significant spiritual act, catapulting him to the greatest height. This awareness underscores the import of our actions and the value we place on everything we do. ■



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