



Keys in challahs, or Egyptian beetles...it makes no difference. If God did not include a practice in His Torah, we are commanded not to deviate from His word right or left.

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Weekly Parsha

Shlach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“However, the nation that dwells in the land is mighty. And the cities are large and fortified. We also saw there the descendants of the giants.” (BeMidbar 13:28)

In our parasha, Hashem tells Moshe to send spies into the land of Israel. Moshe explains, in Sefer Devarim, that Hashem was responding to the request of Bnai Yisrael. The people had

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Segula:

THE SILENCE & FAILURE OF JUDAISM'S LEADERS

THE WAY OF TORAH?

Egyptian Scarab beetle amulet – no different from mikvahs used for physical protection. Corrupt intentions reduce objects of mitzvah into idolatry

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The following belief has been circulating, with no rejection from Torah leaders, and unfortunately, endorsement:

“Going into the mikvah following a pregnant woman who is in her ninth month is a segula for becoming pregnant.”

This belief is becoming accepted as truth, along with other similar promises of segulas. But is this the Derech HaTorah? And I don't mean, “Is this the derech of frum Jews”, for I know many misguided Jews and Rabbis who condone segulas. Clearly, two Rabbis who argue on this

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(Shlach cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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approached Moshe and suggested that these spies be sent. Moshe regarded this as a reasonable plan. Hashem agreed to the request.[1]

The spies returned. They reported that the land was rich and fertile. They also reported that the land was well defended and would be difficult to conquer. Upon hearing this report, Bnai Yisrael panicked. The people refused to proceed into the land. Hashem punished the nation. The generation that refused to conquer the land was forced to wander in the wilderness for forty years. After this generation died, their children conquered the land under the leadership of Yehoshua.

The Torah explains that the spies sinned and caused the rebellion. What was their sin? It is difficult to condemn the spies for reporting that the land was well defended. This was their job. Moshe charged them with the responsibility of gathering intelligence. They were ordered to assess the fortifications and the strength of inhabitants. Surely the spies cannot be condemned for fulfilling their mission!

The Torah describes their sin as propagating negative report on the land.[2] This seems to be a reference to a specific statement made by the spies. They claimed that the land consumed its inhabitants.[3] This was a false assertion. It is reasonable to hold the spies responsible for this lie.

However, this raises an obvious question. The spies initially reported that the land was fertile and rich. They even brought back fruit to support their report. How could they reasonably claim that the land was unwholesome? Why would the people believe a claim that clearly contradicted the spies' own words?

One possible answer is that the initial report was delivered in front of Moshe and Ahron. Moshe was familiar with the land of Canaan from his younger years.[4] He could easily dispute any negative characterization of the land. The spies did not criticize the land of Israel in front of Moshe and Ahron. They acknowledged its richness. Later the assembly broke up. The spies followed the people back to their tents. There, outside of the presence of Moshe and Ahron, the spies denigrated the land.

This does not completely answer the question. Still, the people must have realized that the spies were contradicting themselves in their characterization of the land! Perhaps, the spies responded that they were afraid to contradict Moshe's assurances regarding the land. Therefore, in his presence they had

been less than completely truthful. Now, in privacy they could reveal the truth.

Nachmanides suggests that the spies never contradicted themselves. They never retracted from their report that the land flowed with milk and honey. Instead, they claimed that the land was too rich. The luscious fruit and produce would sustain an especially robust metabolism. It seemed to be a perfect diet for giants. But a more average specimen would be harmed by the richness of the diet. They claimed that this must be the case. They had only encountered giants. Apparently, normal human beings would not be sustained by these rich fruits.[5]

Nachmanides further comments that the sin of the spies did not begin with this lie. The lie was the culmination. The sin began with the statement contained in our pasuk. At first glance this seems odd. In our pasuk, the spies are reporting that the land is well defended. This was an accurate and truthful account!

Nachmanides explains that the role of the spies was to provide intelligence. This information was to be used to formulate a plan for conquest. The spies were never authorized to evaluate the chances of succeeding. If we consider our passage carefully, we can see that the spies overstepped their authority.

The spies use an odd word in our pasuk. They say, "However, the nation that dwells in the land is mighty". Let us consider the implications of the word "however". This word creates some connection between the preceding and the following statement. It qualifies the prior statement. What was this prior statement? The spies had just reported that the land was rich and fertile. Then they added their "however". What was their message? They were saying, "Yes, the land flows with milk and honey – just as Moshe promised. However, what good is this to us? We cannot conquer the land. It is too well defended". Of course, the spies did not actually say this. Their intent was implied in the "however".[6]

“And Moshe and Ahron fell on their faces before the whole assembled Bnai Yisrael.” (BeMidbar 14:5)

The scouts return. They report that the land will be impossible to conquer. They also deny that the land is wholesome. They claim that the land seems to consume or destroy its inhabitants. The nation is discouraged by this report. The people question the purpose of traveling through the wilderness to arrive at this hopeless end. They come to a consensus. They will replace Moshe and Ahron. Another leader will be chosen. This leader will take

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(Shlach continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha



them back to Egypt.

Our pasuk records Moshe and Ahron's reaction to the nation's decision. The Torah does not tell us that they argued with the people. The Torah records that they fell upon their faces before the nation.

What was the purpose of this reaction? Nachmanides explains that Moshe and Ahron were beseeching the people not to perform this wicked act.[7] They should not rebel against the Almighty and refuse to possess the land. They must continue forward and not return to Egypt.

This reaction raises an important question. Why did Moshe and Ahron not respond more forcefully? They behaved as supplicants. They begged the people not to act sinfully. Contrast this to Moshe's reaction upon descending from Sinai. Moshe descended from Sinai and encountered the nation worshipping the Egel – the Golden Calf. Moshe did not become a supplicant. He did not beg the nation to repent. Instead, he acted decisively and sternly. He rebuked Ahron for his involvement in the sin. He separated the sinners from the faithful. He immediately executed those responsible for the travesty of the Egel. How can we explain Moshe's relative passivity in responding to the transgression in our parasha?

The first possibility is that the sin of the Egel was more isolated than the movement to return to Egypt. In the instance of the Egel, Moshe realized that the majority of Bnai

Yisrael remained faithful to Hashem. He enlisted the majority to punish the minority of sinners. In our parasha, Moshe was confronted with a mass movement. The nation – as a whole – had decided to abandon Moshe and the quest for the land of Israel. Moshe had very few allies. He could not act forcefully. Therefore, he was forced to become a supplicant. He appealed to the nation reconsider.

However, Rav Simcha Zisil Broudy notes another distinction between the two incidents. He explains that the sin of the Egel was not directed against Moshe. The nation had defied the law of the Almighty. Moshe vigorously defended the glory of the Creator. In the incident in our parasha, the nation's rebellion was not directed solely against Hashem. The people were also rejecting the leadership of Moshe and Ahron. The people sought new leadership. They wanted leaders that would guide them on a more productive and meaningful path.

Moshe and Ahron could not act forcefully in this incident. One who leads through force can be accused of self-aggrandizement. Furthermore, a leader that forces other to follow is not a true leader. If force must be used, the leader has failed to prove his or her worthiness. Moshe realized that this was not a conflict that could be resolved through force.

Nonetheless, Moshe and Ahron did not abandon the conflict. They realized that they

could not coerce the nation. Instead, they resorted to petition. They were not concerned with their own position of honor. They only cared for the welfare of Bnai Yisrael. If this required them to become beggars and supplicants, they were willing.[8] ■

[1] Sefer Devarim 1:22-23.

[2] Sefer BeMidbar 14:36.

[3] Sefer BeMidbar 13:32.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:2.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:32.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:27.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 14:5.

[8] Rav Shimon Yosef Miller, Shai LaTorah (Jerusalem 5753), volume 3, pp. 143-144.



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(Segulas continued from page 1)

Perfection

opinion, cannot be simultaneously correct...one must be wrong. But who? How do you decide? Torah practice must be based on authentic Torah sources. I hope my provision of these very sources below will put an end to the notion that segulas are Judaic. In fact, they are heathen, and have no more of a track record of success, than a flipped coin landing on heads more than tails.

Culturally Jewish popularities -- even among Rabbis -- is not the barometer for what is Torah (Chulin 124a). We must adhere only to what God has written in his Torah, Neveim and Kesuvim. These are the authoritative, Hashkafic sources. Whatever deviates from these, is not Torah, and is therefore not from God, and hence, not true. Sforno teaches that even the performance of another mitzvah cannot atone for a separate sin. Only teshuva -- on THAT sin -- atones. Certainly, one is not atoned for one sin, when performing heathen practices, even with Torah objects, like mikvas.

When barren, Rachale Imanu did not perform such acts. And even when she asked Yaakov to "give me children", Yaakov grew angry saying, "Hasachas Elokim anochi?" , "Am I in God's Place?" Yaakov did not suggest any segulas, nor did he give her a "bracha" to become pregnant. Rather, he urged her Tefila. The same is true with regards to Chana who was barren: she davened to God, who controls everything. She perfected her view of children, dedicating her would-be-son Shmuel to the Mikdash, only then, she conceived. No segulas. No shortcuts. Only teshuva.

The Shima's words, "Va-avaditem miharah may-al HaAaretz Hatova"... teach that only through Torah adherence do we merit God's Hashgacha, and through Aversos, do we lose it. A sinning woman may be punished by God with barrenness. A barren woman may simply have health issues. But if indeed punished by God with no children, such a woman will not conceive if she wears a red bendel, or follows the practice cited above of following pregnant women into mikvah. These are the "ways of the Emorites" (Tosefta Shabbas, Perek 7). Such practices violate our very Torah Fundamentals cited by Rambam, that of Schar v'Onesh -- Reward & Punishment. God gives punishments to correct us, "For those who God loves does He rebuke." (Proverbs, 3:12) And not until the sinner repents, does God remove the onesh, the affliction. Red Bendels and all other segulas are not found in Torah, and cannot change God's plan...certainly if not endorsed by our Avos and Imahos. Therefore, if, and I stress "IF", a woman is barren

due to sin, then any other practice -- aside from teshuva -- will not help her to conceive. And if she has not sinned, she is well advised to follow medical advice, not inexplicable practices.

No rational individual will say to a female amputee, "Immerse in the mikvah following a woman whose arm was saved from amputation, and your arm will re-grow". Why we never hear this, is because reason teaches the impossibility for cells to grow based on water immersion. No limb will reappear. Similarly, no infertility is cured by immersion, regardless of the practice being a mitzvah.

Due to the absence of the Torah Yesodos in Yeshiva education, such practices and beliefs have grown popular. Mass silence from educators and Jewish leaders also contribute to the proliferation of these lies, granting false hopes to women who are already hurt enough by their childless state.

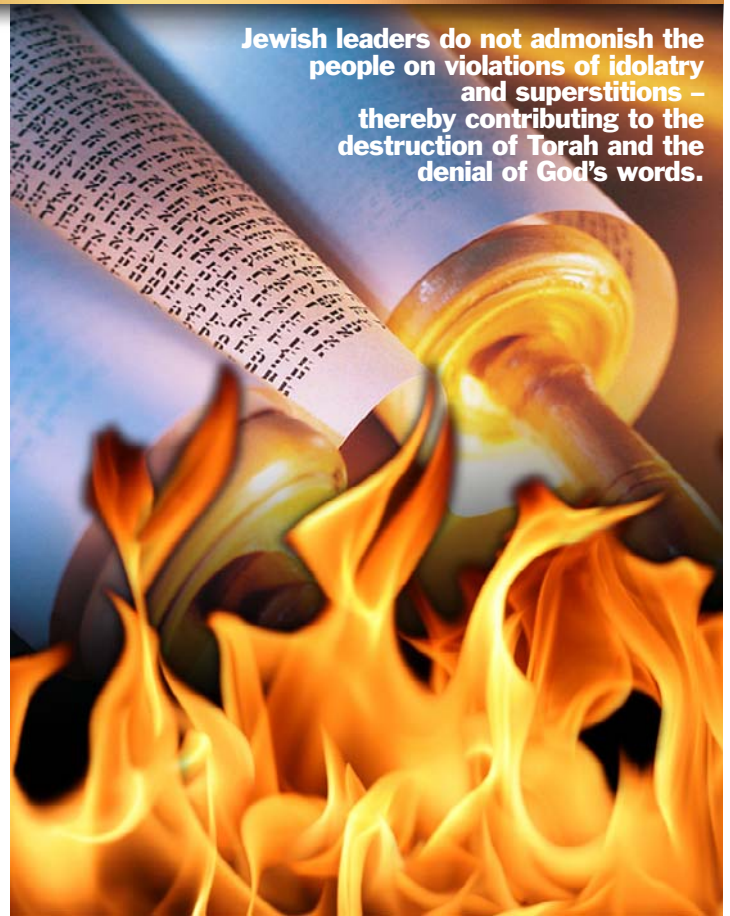
Let us truly help these women as the Gemara teaches (Baba Basra 116a) that they shall "seek a chocham" who can probe their lives, perhaps uncovering a flaw, so they may do teshuvah, and God will give them a home full of smiling children. The Gemara does NOT say resort to useless segulas manufactured by man, and never instructed by Neveim or the Avos. It teaches to follow a wise man. Why then do our people succumb to today's masses, when we have the Neveim and Avos from whom to learn God's truth?

Let us all follow the lessons in God's Torah, and not popular beliefs, which the Avos never practiced.

Using our Tzelem Elokim as God desires, we will arrive at truths, dispel all falsehoods, and earn God's specific providence (hashgacha pratyos), exemplified by Avraham Avinu and all our Avos and Imahos. ■

Reader In Defense of Segulas: If this segula were not permissible, do you think the Rabbanim who told the women to do it, would

Jewish leaders do not admonish the people on violations of idolatry and superstitions -- thereby contributing to the destruction of Torah and the denial of God's words.



have suggested it? It is way too widespread and long-term a practice, for it to not have the haskama of more than one rabbi. There is no issur in ANY married woman going into the Mikvah, and particularly as it is on her lail tevila. So respectfully, I think you should leave the inyan of mikvah to the people who are fulfilling their mitzvah. If a woman wants to go to be toveil a thousand times, it is really not anyone's business but her own and Ha-Shem's. If you disagree, then no men should be going to the mikvah either on a regular basis, because they are not even mitzuvim to go since we have no Beis Hamikdash to take away tumah, and since the days of Ezra.

I can appreciate your point of view, but must respectfully tell you that it is not shared by most people in my neighborhood. If you do not want your wife and/or daughters or sisters to avail themselves of such a segula, then I suggest you teach them not to, and hope and pray that they never have to go through what those ladies have had to endure emotionally and physically by being childless. And whatever you do, feeling as you do about segulos, please don't eat the crumbs from a rebbe's tish, or let your daughters hold the kallah's jewelry at a chuppah. Or is that already assur, too? ■

(continued on next page)

(Segulas continued from page 4)

SEGULAS
PART IIBe-emunah
Shlaimah:*With Perfect Faith*

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi, Cong. Rinat Yisrael
Plainview, NY

With regard to a segula ritual prescribed for pregnant women, a defender of the practice asks:

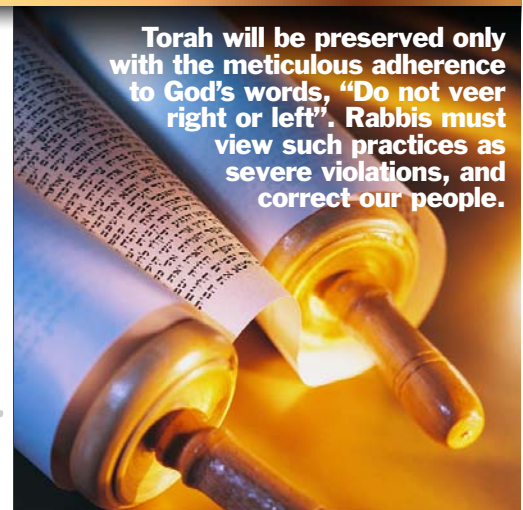
"If this segula were not acceptable do you think the Rabbanim who told the women to do it would have suggested it?"

This is a powerful and challenging question. The answer is that, unfortunately, I do believe Rabbanim suggested it. One must question the behavior of these rabbis. It is irresponsible to mislead innocent people along a false path – which takes the away from Torah and from a true relationship with God.

Judaism commands us to base our actions on the genuine teachings of Torah – the only authentic guide to an appropriate relationship with God. It cautions us to avoid the temptation of unfounded practices. The Torah also warns us against inventing our own religious actions in addition to the Mitzvos. Our well being depends upon scrupulous observance of the Mitzvos, without distorting them in any way to conform to our emotional needs. Every Mitzvah was designed with exact precision and it is our task to use our minds to study, understand the Mitzvah and perform it in the most proper way. Thus, we are bidden to follow the direction of legitimate Torah authorities, the masters of the Oral Law, whom God has entrusted to elucidate the requirements of His religious system.

The dangers of deviation are very great. For by inventing new practices not prescribed by Torah one, in fact, implicitly denies the Torah. He is in effect saying that the Torah is not perfect, for it does not work in my case, and there are other man made practices out there which will work for me. In effect this is a negation of Torah and constitutes a form of idolatry, heaven forbid. For one needs to ask: How will the observance of the segula help me? What connection is there between putting a key in the dough of a challah (schlüssel challah) and the improvement of my material situation (parnasa)? What connection is there between immersing in a mikvah at an advanced stage of pregnancy and having an easy childbirth and a healthy child? Another segula practice in the same area is having the husband of a woman in advanced pregnancy being called up for Pesicha, the opening of the Ark from which the Torah is removed. Apparently the opening of the Ark is associated with the "opening" from which the baby will emerge and the husband's Pesicha somehow effectuates an easy childbirth for his wife. How do these activities work? Is the intention that they are pleasing to God and He rewards us with our heart's desires because of them?

This cannot be the case for He has instructed us to live according to His commandments without deviating to the right or to the left. These segula practices are not included in His



Torah will be preserved only with the meticulous adherence to God's words, "Do not veer right or left". Rabbis must view such practices as severe violations, and correct our people.

commandments – neither in the Written or Oral Law. Nor are they suggested by any of the great rabbinical authorities of the ages. We must conclude that they have no Judaic validity. These actions must therefore be deemed as useless from the standpoint of Torah. The act of performing them indicates that a person has lost faith in the authentic prescriptions of Torah. By performing these "unauthorized actions" one is implicitly affirming that there are other "forces" out there besides God which will respond to the needs of the performer of these ritualistic practices. This constitutes a form of "Avodah Zorah".

We should be cognizant of the great spiritual dangers in seemingly harmless actions. The defender of this segula asks: "What difference does it make to you if a woman feels a little more kedusha for having gone to the mikvah?" The implication is that there is no harm that can come from this action and that indeed it is beneficial for it makes the woman "feel a little more kedusha". This however, is precisely the problem. The woman feels holier because she believes she has done something meritorious and holy. However, in truth, she has deviated from the path of Torah and performed a meaningless ceremonial act, which was invented years ago. The introduction of bogus segulas has the effect of undermining a person's faith in God and His Torah as the only legitimate path to achieving Divine favor. True emunah demands that we serve God and constantly seek to perfect ourselves through the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot. We should do so regardless of whatever difficulties befall us, with the confidence that when our deeds find favor in His sight He will provide us with all our needs. We must never lose faith in God and, unfortunately, that is exactly what we do when out of desperation we put our hopes in alien segulas. ■

the Dangers

of Understanding Midrashim Literally

*An Open Dialogue
with the
Jewish Community*

PART III



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Following Rabbi Pinchas Rosenthal's call to address midrashim, I offer the following explanations for two of this week's Midrashim...

"By their lives, I will give them an opportunity to err with the words of the spies so they don't inherit the land of Israel". (Rashi, Num. 13:2)

This would seem like a vindictive statement, but as God is devoid of human emotion, how do we understand it?

I believe the meaning is that had God not permitted the spies to spy out Israel, they would have been harboring an incorrect notion in relation to God. That is, their desire to send spies displayed their disbelief in God's promise that they will successfully conquer Israel. If this disbelief was not brought out into the open, they would remain with this false notion, and this is not tolerable by God. What does it mean that "God gave them an opportunity to err"? It means that God gave them an opportunity to act out this notion in reality so it can be dealt with. God's goal was not the loss of inheriting Israel. Giving them a chance not to inherit Israel means giving them a chance to realize their emotional conflict of not being desirous of inheriting Israel. In this manner, the Jews are enabled by God to face their mistake, and perhaps correct it.

This teaches us that Israel per se is not the goal for man, but rather, man's perfection outweighs the act of living in the land. Since man's perfection was at stake, God opted for man's perfection, rather than having him live in Israel. ■

"With that death suitable for them, measure for measure.

They sinned with their tongue, (so) their tongues were extended to their navels and worms exited their tongues and entered their navels."
(Rashi, Num. 14:37)

How do we understand such a Medrash? From a standpoint of methodology, one must first define all elements: what do "tongue", "navel" and "worms" represent? We see clearly that Rashi says they sinned with their tongues – their sin concerned evil speech. So tongue represents speech. But what do navel and worms represent? A person's navel has a singular distinction over all other locations of the body: it is traced back to the umbilical cord, as the navel is the scar of that previous appendage. The navel recalls that which supplied the infant sustenance while in the womb. What do worms represent? They represent lowliness and that which one abhors. Something disgusting. We can now interpret the Medrash.

The tongue – over all else – is said to have been the culprit. Thus, speech was the sin. What type of speech? "Wormy" or disgusting talk. Thus, worms indicate this aspect. Finally, the tongues extended to the navel. Meaning, their speech (tongue) affected something to do with their navel, or rather, their sustenance. Israel was to be a land where God provided sustenance for the Jewish nation, besides being their homeland. The spies' foolishly voiced their insecurities and removed their chance to gain this source of sustenance. In other words, "their tongues affected their navel with something wormy". This punishment was meted out to the spies, as God always desires man to recognize his sin and improve. Such a bizarre punishment causes those affected to reflect. ■



Messengers Gone Astray

Long before the spies set out on their ill-fated mission, Moses already suspected something would go wrong (13:16). “These are the names of the men Moses sent to reconnoiter the land. And Moses called Hosea, son of Nun, Joshua.” Why did he change Hosea’s name to Joshua? Our Sages tell us (Tanchuma 6, Sotah 34b) that the new name means “God save.” Moses prayed that God would save Joshua from the conspiracy of the spies. Why was Moses suspicious? Why did he feel this particular intervention was necessary? And why did he single out Joshua from among the twelve spies for special consideration?

RABBI MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

The Talmud notes (Berachos 34b), “A messenger’s failure reflects badly on his sender.” This aphorism displays a sensitivity to the subtleties of human nature. A messenger’s dedication and enthusiasm usually reflect his perception of the sender’s attitude. If he believes the sender cares deeply, he will extend himself to be successful; the messenger, having accepted the sender’s mission, will do his best to satisfy him. But if the messenger deems the sender indifferent or negative to the mission, he himself will take a cavalier attitude toward its successful fulfillment. For instance, a pious rabbi and an indifferent Jew both send the same messenger to purchase a lulav, the palm branch used for the Sukkoth ritual, offering no additional

instructions. The messenger will undoubtedly purchase a first-rate lulav for the rabbi and an acceptable one for the indifferent Jew. Although nothing is spoken out, the messenger’s perception of the sender’s preference will determine his actions.

Although God did not forbid the sending of the spies, Deuteronomy makes clear (1:22-23) that He did not approve of it either. Nonetheless, the weaker elements among the Jewish people, insecure in their relationship with God, persisted in their request for a reconnoitering mission before entry to the land; they did not have sufficient faith that God would deliver the land into their hands. Grounded in spiritual deficiency, the mission was doomed to failure from the beginning. Sensing the negativism of the senders, the messengers adjusted the thrust of their mission accordingly.

Moses perceived the reluctance of the senders to enter the land and understood that the mission was destined for catastrophe. The people’s desire to send spies gave credence to the prophecy of Eldad and Meidad that Moses would not lead the conquest of the land. In order to protect his beloved protégé from this impending disaster, Moses changed his name to Joshua. This act identified Joshua as specifically Moses’ messenger and imbued his role in the overall mission with the passion and enthusiasm of his great sender. ■

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