A Troubling Turning Point

I. Sefer Bamidbar Structural Overview
Preparations for Departure from Sinai...... [anticipation, impending first footfalls of national journey] ...... Departure First Turning Point...... [Cascading Series of Sins] ...... Chet Hameraglim Second Turning Point......Passing of the Generations, Setting the Stage for Sefer Devarim

II. Confronting the Second Turning Point: The Sin of the Spies
A. The Issue of Plan A and Plan B in God’s Realm

- Does God know from the outset that this generation will fail?
- Does the generation of the Exodus have Free will, or is it a “set-up” from the outset?
- In switching from plan A to plan B, does God change His mind?
- What lessons are meant to be learned to be learned from the doomed journey of the Generation of the Exodus?

III. Defining the Sin
A. The Problem

And Moshe sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and he said to them: Go up here into the South, and go up the mountains;
And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwell therein, whether they are strong or weak, whether they are few or many;
And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is good or bad; and what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps, or in strongholds;
And what the land is, whether it is fat or lean, whether there is wood therein, or not; and strengthen yourselves, and bring of the fruit of the land.’—and the season was the season of the first-ripe grapes.

- Whose idea was the mission of the spies? Comparing to the version in Devarim...
- Was the initial request, itself, a sin?
Ramban

What did the Spies do [wrong]?
Did Moshe send them for the purpose of presenting false testimony?

B. A Three-Stage Response: Immediate Issue, Increasing Culpability

Stage One

And they reported to him and said: “We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

But-- the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we also saw the offspring of the giant there.

Amalekites dwell in the Negeb region; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites inhabit the hill country; and Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan.”

- Overstepping of bounds, changing the mission [Akeidat Yitzchak: move from the role of נשותיה to the role of נשותיה]
- Introduction of doubt, use of word אפס

Stage Two

Caleb hushed the people before Moshe and said, “We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we shall surely can do it.”

But the men who had gone up with him said, “We cannot ascend against that people, for it is stronger than we.”

- Caleb’s immediate reaction proves the danger of the first stage in retrospect
- Spies from ostensible reporting move to outright rejection
- Nechama Leibowitz: Double entendre in the word ממנו [first person plural, third person singular]
And they brought forth an evil report among the Israelites about the land they had scouted, saying, “The country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers. All the people that we saw in it are men of great size; we saw the Nephilim there—the sons of giants from among the Nephilim—and we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were we in their eyes.”

- No longer double entendre, suggestion
- Open, deliberate campaign by all means possible
- Lashon Hara concerning the land… (various interpretations)
- Devastating final words: ונהי בעינינו כחגבים וכן היינו בעיניהם

Additional overall note: Turning feelings into facts

III. Forgiveness?

And Hashem said: 'I have forgiven according to your words.
But, as I live--and all the earth shall be filled with the glory of HaShem—Surely all those men who have seen My glory, and My signs, which I wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested Me these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, and all who have despised Me shall not see it.

- Critical redefining of forgiveness and success: Intergenerational [discuss]
And Moses said to Hashem: 'When the Egyptians shall hear—that You brought up this people in Your might from among them—

And they will say to the inhabitants of this land, who have heard that You, Hashem, are in the midst of this people; to whom You, Hashem, have appeared face to face, and Your cloud stands over them, and You go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night;

And now if You shall kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of your fame will speak, saying:

Because Hashem was not able to bring this people into the land that He swore unto them, therefore He has slain them in the wilderness.

And now, I pray, let the power of Hashem wax great, as You have spoken, saying:

Hashem, slow to anger, and great in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.

Forgive, I pray, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Your lovingkindness, and as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.'

And Hashem forgives as per Moshe’s words

God’s forgiveness will not exceed our own vision for ourselves

Origin of Tisha B’Av—crying for generations

Also first step towards Yamim Noraim