



Parshat Shelach Rachav: Redefined Role Mrs. Shira Smiles

Both this week's Torah portion and the Haftarah relate stories of spies sent to reconnoiter Eretz Yisroel in preparation for entering the land, though the Spies in the Parsha failed in their mission and gave a bad report, while the spies in the Haftarah were successful in fulfilling their mission. But there is also a deeper connection.

The spies that Moshe sent instigated the nation to weep, for which sin they repented, yet Hashem did not forgive them. In the Haftarah, Rachav, who had been a prostitute for forty years, did *teshuvah* and was completely absolved. The contrast between these two Divine responses to *teshuvah* makes for an interesting study.

For most of their report, the spies truthfully answered questions that Moshe posed to them regarding the land they were about to enter. However, toward the end of their report, they interjected themselves and their personal views into the report. These spies were emissaries of Moshe on behalf of Bnei Yisroel, sent with Hashem's consent. Yet, by including their own biased views, they subverted their mission and were unfaithful to Moshe, Bnei Yisroel, and, most seriously, to Hashem.

In a similar way, we are all messengers and

emissaries of Hashem, sent to earth to fulfill whatever tasks He has set for us. It is our responsibility to faithfully accomplish our personal mission.

Now let us turn to the spies Joshua sent and their "contact" in Jericho, Rachav. The spies were Calev ben Yefuneh, the only one of the original spies, who, together with Yehoshua himself, was faithful to the original mission and did not sin, and Pinchas the High Priest. Rachav, who helped them at great personal risk, had been a very successful prostitute for forty years, for her beauty was known far and wide. She did *teshuvah*, and eventually merited to marry Yehoshua bin Nun and be the ancestress of eight prophets.

How was Rachav's *teshuvah* different from the *teshuvah* of the generation of the desert? Besides the fact that the sin of *loshon hora* is almost impossible to atone for fully, other factors also contribute to the differences. First, Bnei Yisroel had already experienced the redeeming effect of *teshuvah*. After the sin of the golden calf, they had done *teshuvah* and their death decree was rescinded. That *teshuvah* was whole-hearted because it came from a truly broken heart. This time, however, the memory of Hashem's forgiveness entered

the process, thereby at least minimally tainting it.

Rachav, on the other hand, had never had a spiritual experience. Her life was a completely physical life. Her body was her god and her inn was her temple. Although her soul was one of the "lost sparks", it had never been activated to its spiritual potential. Now she willingly hid these two holy men of her own volition. For the first time in her life, Rachav encountered a spiritual being, one whose faith invalidated the entire physical realm and physical experience that permeated her life. At that moment, she had an epiphany. She too could erase her previous life, could be born anew with her pure soul restored to her. She could peel away the layers of filth covering her inner, spiritual core and begin life anew. At that moment, she declared, "... For Hashem, your God, He is God in the heavens and on the earth below." She understood that "nothing exists outside Him." With that declaration of Hashem's Sovereignty and her nothingness, she was transformed to a level of purity and holiness as high as her depravity had been low, and she became a model of true *teshuvah* for all generations.