



Likkutei Sichos

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The Spies' Names

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman

Edited by Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger
Rabbi Eliezer Robbins

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1.

QUESTIONS ON THE *TALMUD*

The *Talmud* writes:¹

Rabbi Yitzchak says, “This matter {interpreting the names of the spies} is a tradition in our hands from our fathers: The spies were named after their actions. We, however, have in our hand only one of those expositions — Sesur ben Michael:² *Sesur*, for he destroyed {*sasar*} Hashem’s actions;³ *Michael*, for he depicted Hashem as weak {*mach*}.” Said Rabbi Yochanan, “We, too, can expound {an interpretation of the name} Nachbi ben Vofsi:⁴ *Nachbi*, for he concealed {*hechbi*} Hashem’s words; *Vofsi*, for he stepped {*pissa*} over Hashem’s attributes.

Rashi⁵ understands the phrase “We, however, have in our hand (only one of those expositions)” to mean, “We do not know how to interpret {the others}.” Meaning, we only know how to expound the name of one of the spies (Sesur ben Michael). On this basis, we must conclude that Rabbi Yochanan, who also interprets the name *Nachbi ben Vofsi* (in fact, **two** names),⁶ disagrees with Rabbi Yitzchak who said, “We, however, have in our hand only **one** of those expositions.”

But on this basis, many questions on this teaching emerge:

a) Why is it so difficult to expound the names of the spies, in the manner of *drash*,⁷ to show how their names hint at their deeds? So difficult, in fact, that Rabbi Yochanan could manage to do so for only one or two names? What

¹ *Sotah* 34b.

² *Bamidbar* 13:13.

³ {As Rashi explains (loc. cit.): He quarrelled with Hashem, so to speak, and called Him a liar. For Hashem had guaranteed the Jewish people’s successful conquest of the Land of Israel.}

⁴ *Bamidbar* 13:14.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ {Both *Nachbi* and *Vofsi*.}

⁷ {The *drash* method of commentary frequently deviates from the simple, straightforward understanding of a verse. It is an exegetical method of commentary in which the words of a verse are used as a platform to express a related but more complex idea.}

distinguishes **these** names from the many other names in Torah, regarding which we find numerous expositions by our Sages?

[True, the *drash* branch of Torah {exposition} is also governed by methodological principles. Nonetheless, *drash* offers a broader scope of interpretation, since the homiletic meaning does not need to correspond perfectly to the semantic meaning (or correspond with all the letters) of the original word. This holds true to the extent that in scholarly works its says,⁸ “we cannot refute a *drash*.”]

Moreover, we do find explicit expositions of the other names of the spies by our Sages.⁹ Indeed, *Tanchuma*¹⁰ expounds **all** the names!

b) What is the meaning behind Rabbi Yochanan’s wording, “We, too, can expound”? If he wanted to expound another name, he should have simply said, “We have in our hands **two**...,” or even more concisely, “two....”

c) The syntax, “*amar Rabbi Yochanan* {said Rabbi Yochanan}” as opposed to, “*Rabbi Yochanan amar* {Rabbi Yochanan said},”¹¹ implies that Rabbi Yitzchak and Rabbi Yochanan do not disagree. Rather, Rabbi Yochanan’s statement complements Rabbi Yitzchak’s statement.

[Indeed, this is also the simple meaning of the words, “(We) *too* (can expound).” “Too” implies that Rabbi Yochanan does not disagree with Rabbi Yitzchak (i.e., he does not maintain, “We have in our hands **two**...”); rather, he merely **adds** an exposition of the name *Nachbi ben Vofsi*.]

However, we need to clarify. Since Rabbi Yochanan does, in fact, offer an exposition of a second name, he does then disagree with Rabbi Yitzchak who maintains, “We, however, have in our hand **only one**.”

⁸ *Sefer Halikutim* on the verse *Shemos* 1:14.

⁹ See *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 71, sec. 3. See also *Tanchuma*, *ibid. Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 16, sec. 10. *Tanchuma*, Buber ed., “*Shelach*,” sec. 10.

¹⁰ *Haazinu*, sec. 7. (He concludes there, “Thus we found in the book of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan.”) See also *Shach*, in his commentary on Torah, *Bamidbar* 13:4, who interprets all the names in a praiseworthy manner.

¹¹ {Although this nuance is indistinguishable in the English language. In the original, the order of the phrase gives this indication.}

d) Most importantly: Since “the spies were **named** after their actions” (even before Moshe selected them), and “this matter is a **tradition** in our hands from our fathers,” and there can be no dispute regarding a tradition, how then could Moshe have selected them? This difficulty is especially problematic in light of the principle that “a person should always be mindful of {people’s} names.”¹²

e) How does this teaching conform with the teaching of our Sages¹³ that (at that point in history)¹⁴ the spies were righteous? This statement implies that the **root** of the spies’ {sinful} conduct can also be found in righteous men.

2.

SUGGESTION AND REBUTTAL

Seemingly, the following answer (for questions b and c) can be given:

By saying, “We, however, **have** in our hand only one,” Rabbi Yitzchak meant to say that only one exposition reached us by way of “**the tradition from our fathers.**” (This does not imply that we cannot find expositions for any of the other names.)

Thus, Rabbi Yochanan responds, “We, **too**, can expound.” Meaning, true we have retained an exposition on only **one** of the names from “the tradition from our fathers,” but we can suggest an interpretation for another name, *Nachbi ben Vofsi*.

However, the aforementioned question remains: Why did Rabbi Yochanan expound only **one** name and not any of the other names of the spies?

¹² *Tanchuma, Ha’azinu*, sec. 7.

¹³ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 16, sec. 9. *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 158b. This is also the source for Rashi, *Bamidbar* 13:3.

¹⁴ {When Moshe appointed them as spies.}

Furthermore:

Rabbi Yitzchak's wording is nuanced: He says, "*lo alsah beyadeinu elah echad*" {lit., "only one has arose in our hand"}, rather than, "*ve'yesh beyadeinu rak echad*" {lit., "there is in our hand but one"} or something to that effect. Ostensibly, this implies that Rabbi Yitzchak succeeded in expounding just a single name, and that the tradition teaches only that "the spies were named after their actions," in accordance with Rashi's remarks, as mentioned above .

3.

QUESTIONS ON THE EXPOSITIONS THEMSELVES

Additionally, we need to clarify the expositions themselves:

a) What does the phrase, "for he destroyed {*sasar*} Hashem's actions," mean? How do we see the spies *destroying* Hashem's actions?

Rashi¹⁵ explains, "He disputed with and depicted (the enemy of) Hashem¹⁶ as a liar." However, this interpretation is valid only according to Rashi's version of the *Talmud's* text, "for he destroyed {*sasar*} Hashem's **words**," but **not** according to our version, "for he destroyed {*sasar*} Hashem's **actions**." (For by disputing Hashem's words and depicting (the enemy of) Hashem as a liar, he did not destroy Hashem's **actions**.)

*Maharsha*¹⁷ explains that "Hashem's actions" refers to the miracles and wonders that Hashem performed for the Jewish people at the time of the Exodus. Thus, "he destroyed Hashem's actions," means, "He concealed and **covered** them, as if he did not notice them." However, this interpretation is not altogether smooth because the *Talmud's* wording, "***sasar***" means "**destroyed**"

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ {"The enemy of Hashem," a euphemistic reference to Hashem, sometimes used by the *Talmud* in the context of saying something, as it were, deprecating about Hashem.}

¹⁷ In *Chiddushei Aggados, Sotah*, ibid.

¹⁸ (similar to the meaning of this word in the context of destroying a building). This is evident from the *Maharsha's* words themselves, for first he translates, “*sasar*” as “*hestir* {concealed},”¹⁹ and only afterward does he clarify, “and covered.”

b) On the words, “for he concealed {*hechbi*} Hashem’s words,” Rashi comments, “He concealed His words and did not relate them as they were.” This is difficult to understand. Nachbi did not conceal **Hashem’s words** by reiterating them imprecisely. Rather, only in his description of what he had **seen** in the Land of Israel, i.e., the goodness of the land, he had concealed the full picture.

c) Subsequently, regarding, “for he stepped over {*pissa*} Hashem’s attributes,” Rashi explains, “He stepped over, for he did not present them as they are.” But Rashi does not say what Divine attributes this spy glossed over, thereby failing to accurately report them to the Jewish people.

*Maharsha*²⁰ understands that “*hechbi* and “*pissa*” mean (not that Nachbi refrained from **relaying** Hashem’s words as they were, but rather) that “he concealed Hashem’s words” to himself. Meaning, in his psyche, the truth of Hashem’s earlier statement, “...that the land is good,” was concealed (i.e., he did not believe it). Additionally, “he stepped over {*pissa*} Hashem’s attributes,” meaning that inwardly, he “stepped over” (i.e., did not believe) in Hashem’s attribute of {justice} rewarding generously those who believe in Him.

But on this basis we need to clarify: What is the difference between the two expositions? Why did he “conceal {*Nachbi*} Hashem’s words” and “step over {*Vofsi*} Hashem’s attributes”? Seemingly, they both mean the same thing (according to *Maharsha's* interpretation), viz., he did not believe.

¹⁸ {*Tzeshtert*, in Yiddish.}

¹⁹ {Phonetically related to “destroyed,” in Hebrew.}

²⁰ In *Chiddushei Aggados*, “*Sotah*,” *ibid*.

4.

THE MANNER OF OUR FOREBEARS

The crux of the explanation is as follows:

Rabbi Yitzchak's intention in saying, "*lo alsah beyadeinu elah echad*" is (not that we do not know how to **expound** the spies' names, but rather) that the expositions and directives (with a bearing on the type of learning that leads to action, "*meivi **lidei** maaseh*")²¹ for the names of the other spies — "*lo alsah beyadeinu.*" Meaning, the expositions of the other names are not germane to us, as they do not help to bring **us *lidei* {to the hands of}** action, to deriving lessons that are applicable **to us**.

The homiletical teachings derived from the other names of the spies were relevant only to (the *avodah* of) our forebears. They needed to exercise caution not to repeat every one of the spies' mistakes (which are also implied by **these** names). However, "in **our** hands, we have... only **one**." We {given our lower spiritual stature} only need to avoid one mistake, *Sesur ben Michael*, i.e., that we should not "destroy Hashem's actions, etc."

To this Rabbi Yochanan adds, "We, too, can expound {an interpretation of the name} *Nachbi ben Vofsi*...." True, following in the same path as our forebears, we need only to avoid **one** mistake (*Sesur ben Michael*). However, the lesson from the exposition of *Nachbi ben Vofsi* is also relevant to us, but not in the same way as it was to our forebears (for we cannot attain those heights). Rather, "**we, too, can expound**" this issue as it relates to **our** spiritual standing.

²¹ *Kiddushin* 40b. {The emphasis in this nuance is on the word "*lidei*," which literally means, "to the hands of."}

5.

THE SPIES' MOTIVATION TO SIN

We will appreciate this by prefacing with a matter discussed in many places: The motive behind the spies' sin was that they did not wish to leave (the lifestyle of) the desert and enter the Land of Israel, "inhabited territory."²² They had been told,²³ "When you come to the land... six years you shall plant your fields..." This means that²⁴ "a person plows and sows..." — the people would need to involve themselves in materialistic pursuits. Or, in the terminology of *Chassidus*,²⁵ "They did not want to descend from the *world of thought* (into the *world of speech*, or more specifically) into the *world of action*."

As applied to our divine service, this represents the difference between the Torah study and *mitzvah* observance. Torah is "your wisdom and understanding..." That is, Torah study involves the mind and thought (and then articulating the thought). The underlying idea of *mitzvos* is **action**. The spies wanted to remain in the desert where the Jewish people were primarily involved in learning Torah. They balked at entering the Land of Israel where the primary *avodah* would be in performing *mitzvos*.

But ultimately, "Study is not the most important thing, but action."²⁶ Hashem's goal in Creation was to have a dwelling place in the **lower** world. This goal is (primarily) accomplished through divine service in the **lower** world, i.e., the performance of *mitzvos* with physical objects.

However, this is puzzling:

Since, "at that time, the spies were **virtuous**,"²⁷ how could they have been mistaken about something so fundamental, thinking that the *avodah* of *mitzvah* performance was unnecessary?

²² *Shemos* 16:35.

²³ *Vayikra* 25:2, 3.

²⁴ *Berachos* 35b.

²⁵ *Likkutei Torah, parshas Shelach, s.v., Vayomro*; see also pg. 38b, and the conclusion of the *maamer*.

²⁶ *Pirkei Avos* 1:17.

²⁷ *Rashi, Bamidbar* 13:3.

Therefore, we must say that they, too, were aware that the performance of *mitzvos* was necessary (and on the contrary, deeds are of prime importance). But they maintained that the performance of *mitzvos* as done in the desert sufficed. (For in the desert, too, the Jewish people kept many *mitzvos*, and also fulfilled the instruction concerning mundane matters, “Let all your **actions** be for the sake of Heaven.”) However, they believed that they did not need to be invested in *action* to the extent that they would if they entered the **Land of Israel**.

6.

“STUDY LEADS TO ACTION” — THREE METHODS

The explanation is as follows:

The deeper meaning of the teaching, “Study is not the most important thing, but rather action is,” is as follows: (Not only must a person learn Torah as well as perform *mitzvos* (as two distinct *avodos*), and of the two, performing *mitzvos* is the more important. But rather) a primary element of *avodas Hashem* in **general**, and of study also, is the progression into action. In other words: Even when performing an *avodah* that mandates a certain aloofness from the world (and the realm of action), we must appreciate that its purpose and goal is also to affect our *avodah* in the realm of action, as our Sages say, “study leads to action.”

But there are three ways that the principle “study leads to action” can be expressed:

a) Action, in a sense, can serve as the yardstick to determine whether one’s study (which leads to action) is being done properly. The breadth of reason allows rationales for both sides of a debate. The way to determine which rationale is conclusively true is if the rationale is validated by (and finds expression in) the *halachic* ruling — in **actuality**. [In simple words: Does this

rationale conform with the *halachic* ruling as stated in the *Mishnah*, etc., ***Shulchan Aruch* —“Hashem’s word is *halachah*.”]**²⁸

In one’s *avodah*, this applies as follows: What proves that a person truly meditated on a concept as he should (for example, about Hashem’s exaltedness and man’s lowliness)²⁹ is that his meditation leads to a “takeaway”³⁰ in practical *avodah*.

b) **Consummate study** depends on “(study leads to) action.” As we see in practice: In order for a person to decide which of the contradictory rationales under consideration is correct (and this decision is **imperative**, as it has a bearing on practical actions), he must again probe the rationales in ever greater depth until he can reach a decision. This is why we say, “**study is greater**, for study leads to action.” For this means (not only do actions serve as the way to assess one’s study, but rather) actions make the study **greater**, i.e., actions call forth a **greatness** {i.e., a higher dimension} in one’s Torah study.

However, both of these methods focus on the study and its advantages (as it is exemplified by, or strengthened through, action):

According to the first method, the **practical** action is irrelevant, for the method only views action as it stands within the framework of intellect: in a *halachic* ruling, the “takeaway” of the contemplation.

Even according to the second method, which specifically focuses on **practical** action, it only does so in terms of how action brings a wholeness to **study**, but does not express the virtue of **action** itself (and **of itself**).

But there is a loftier method:

c) Study (that leads to action) is (not for the sake of study, but rather) for the sake of **action itself**. The person draws the radiance of the intellect into the

²⁸ *Shabbos* 138b.

²⁹ *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” beg. of sec. 98.

³⁰ {In the original Hebrew, “*bechain*.”}

plane of action. In this way, while a person performs an action {which is *mitzvah*} — in fact while he performs **all** of his actions {even mundane ones} — he is suffused with the radiance of the intellect. These actions are those of a person who feels the powerful radiance of intellect in a revealed manner.

7.

TRUE *CHOCHMAH* TAKES OVER

How, in fact, can study, being intellectual, and in the mind, suffuse the entire person who is engaged in action?

The explanation is as follows:

When a Jew invests himself into study superficially, whereby he harnesses only the externalities of his soul, every faculty remains stuck in its place. Intellect remains in the mind, emotions in the heart, and action in the hands, etc. By this method, it is impossible for a person to experience intellectual inspiration at the same time as, and within, his actions. Therefore, while he invests himself in study, action **in and of itself** (being far inferior to intellect) cannot play a significant role for him aside from the way it aids his study.

However, a person can invest himself with his soul's inner dimensions into study to the extent that his study suffuses his **entire being**. Then, it is impossible for there to be a place in his soul that opposes his *chochmah*.³¹ With this method, not only does study affect his deeds (for which the decision alone would suffice, represented by *netzach* and *hod*,³² **outside** the body, i.e., the practical application) but even moreso, the two can coexist. A person's intellectual force is not diminished when he involves himself in action. [Or in the terminology of *Chassidus*, "*mochin d'gadlus*"³³ (the essence of intellect) causes the energy of intellect **in its purest form** to enter all of the other faculties as they stand **in their places** — even the realm of action.]

³¹ {*Chochma*. Lit., "wisdom," the *sefira* following *kesser*, the highest of the intellectual faculties.}

³² {Lit. "victory" and "splendor." The fourth and fifth of the seven emotional *sefiros*.}

³³ {Lit. "great intellect."}

On this basis we can better appreciate a nuance in *Rambam's* wording,³⁴ “**Just as** the wise man is recognized through his wisdom {...and in these, he stands apart from the rest of the people}... **so, too**, should he be recognized through his actions — in his eating...” A truly wise man is one whose *chochmah* influences his entire person to the extent that this characteristic (his being a wise man) is visible in **all** his affairs (and faculties) equally (“**just as... so, too...**”). Even when he busies himself with “his actions” (i.e., superficial matters which should not have any direct link to his *chochmah*), this is discernible.

[Not only will his *chochmah* affect his actions (as one entity impacting **another**), for then his involvement in his actions could only occur when he descends from his *chochmah*, and as a result he is then not so “distinct... from the rest of the people,” as he is when he involves himself in his *chochmah*; but —]

{furthermore, even when he busies himself with his actions} he is distinct from the rest of the people just **similar** to when he stands apart from them during the times of his involvement in “his wisdom and his temperament.” For when *chochmah* becomes his entire identity, even when he enters the realm of action, his standing of *chochmah* is undiminished.

8.

THE SPIES LACKED THE ULTIMATE

The underlying cause of the incident with the spies was (not their resistance to the performance of *mitzvos*, but) a flaw in their study itself:

The predominant occupation of the *Generation of the Desert* was Torah study. They were a cerebral generation,³⁵ living in the desert where they could

³⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Deyos*,” ch. 5, par. 1.

³⁵ {In the Hebrew original, “*dor deyah*”; lit. “a knowledgeable generation”; a title given by the *Midrash*, see *Vayikra Rabbah* 9:1.}

learn Torah in the ideal way. The spies, however, were missing the ideal form of “study that leads to action,” i.e., the loftiest of the levels mentioned above. *Mochin d’gadlus* (when a person’s whole being becomes overtaken by *chochmah*) precludes any division between study and action; even when the person invests himself into actions, the intellectual energy retains its full strength. Therefore, the spies’ investment into “study that leads to action” was — **not** in the manner of actually descending into the realm of action (the Land of Israel) and bringing the light of the Torah from the desert there, but — similar to how action was in the desert itself. Meaning, {for the spies} action played a role only as part of Torah (study), as explained in section 6.

9.

ACTION

On this basis — that the spies’ behaviour stemmed not from their opposition to deed, but rather from a flaw in their study, in the *avodah* of the mind — we can appreciate Rabbi Yitzchak’s statement, “We, however, have in our hand only one of those expositions”:

In the earlier generations of “our fathers,” *avodah* was {primarily} intellectual. So they needed to know how to ensure the proper implementation of this *avodah* — i.e., how to perfect their study (which is dependent on having consummate *bittul*)³⁶ — unlike the spies in whom there was a disconnect between their inward *avodah* (of the mind) and action.

[In the context of implementing this *avodah*, since there were differences between one tribe and another (each tribe had its own path and gateway in *avodas Hashem*), our forebears had to learn how to avoid the mistake of each of the spies. That is, the lesson to be derived from the mistake of each spy conforms with the path of his tribe’s *avodah*.]

³⁶ {*Bittul* — *Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego. It is the antithesis of *yeshus*.}

But in the later generations, following our fathers who were likened to angels,³⁷ after the spiritual level of people had fallen [specifically, when “the *sukkah* of David had fallen to the feet and heels”], the *avodah* of action (*mitzvah*-actions) became primary. In these times, it is no longer (so) necessary to forestall the spies’ mistake the way it manifested in its source and root. That is, in the **avodah** (of not mere study, but the ultimate perfection within study and within *bittul* also, to only desire to appreciate the truth of the subject being studied — the *avodah*) of the mind (wherein each individual works according to his spiritual capacity). In these subsequent generations, however, is important to forestall the {negative effect that the spies’ sin had on the} **outcome**, in the *avodah* of *mitzvos*. In this respect, “we have all one Torah and one law insofar as the fulfillment of all the Torah and *mitzvos* in actual performance is concerned.”³⁸

What lesson can be derived **equally** from all of the spies’ mistakes? The primary *avodah* must take place in the realm of action.

This is the meaning of, “We, however, have in our hand only one.” We have in our hands, in our *avodah*, from the names of the spies, the one matter and common point of all of them. That is, how the *avodah* needs to be in practical action; this point applies equally to **all** Jews in **all** generations, with no differences.

This lesson is hinted at in the name “Sesur, for he destroyed {*sasar*} Hashem’s **actions**.” Hashem created the world of *asiyah* {action} (referred to as, “Hashem’s **handiwork**) so that the Jewish people would build it up, i.e., transform it into a home for Him. Therefore, by not prioritizing *mitzvah*-actions, we **destroy** Hashem’s **actions**, Heaven forbid. That is, the world of *asiyah* remains destroyed, not built into a home for Hashem. Moreover, **similar** to the teaching of our Sages,³⁹ “Any generation in which (the *Beis Hamikdash*) is not rebuilt, it is deemed by Scripture as if they destroyed it.”

³⁷ {This phrase comes from *Shabbos*, 112b. The full quote reads as follows: Rava bar Zimuna said, “If the early generations are characterized as sons of angels, we are the sons of men. And if the early generations are characterized as the sons of men, we are akin to donkeys.”}

³⁸ *Tanya*, ch. 44.

³⁹ *Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma*, ch. 1, *halachah* 1.

This begs the question:

Since Hashem is omnipotent and unstoppable, and He created the world with this intention, how can a Jew, a created being, **destroy** Hashem's actions (by preventing this goal from being realized in every part of this world of *asiyah*)?

[Had this Divine intention not been expressed in Hashem's "speech," we could have answered that since Hashem's goal remained in His "thought" (which is beyond "an other" {entity}, i.e., the world), His "thought" would not have forced man's choice in this regard.

But since Hashem's desire that we should involve ourselves in the *avodah* of *mitzvah*-actions in a revealed sense was expressed in a **verbal directive**, and Hashem's "speech" is considered **action**, how can a Jew undermine a Divine "action"?)]

The answer: Sesur was the son of — i.e., a **derivative** of — "Michael, for he depicted Hashem as *weak* {*mach*}." The deeper meaning of this is as follows: This refers (not only to the spies' activities, but), so to speak, to Hashem Himself. In order for a Jew to have free choice, Hashem, so to speak, made Himself weak {*mach*} and feeble (in that His speech should not compel man's conduct). Hashem gave us the ability to act contrary to His desire, and to actually destroy Hashem's actions.

10.

REVEALING HASHEM'S ANIMATING WORDS

On this basis, we could mistakenly assume that the **only** matter that the later generations — following the earlier ones, following **our forebears** — must ensure, is that we should not fall short in **action**. In response, Rabbi Yochanan says, "We, too, can expound {an interpretation of the name} *Nachbi ben Vofsi*. *Nachbi*, for he concealed {*hechbi*} Hashem's words." **We**, too, need to take care

to avoid the fault expressed in the clause, “for he concealed {*hechbi*} Hashem’s words,” since specifically, in this way, will our **actions** be done appropriately:

“Hashem’s words” — “By the word of Hashem, the heavens were made,”⁴⁰ that is, the words of Hashem which animate every created being (Hashem’s **handiwork**):

We must be careful {in our actions} to avoid “*hechbi* {concealing} Hashem’s words.” Meaning, we need to perform our actions in a way that Hashem’s speech (i.e., Hashem’s **words**) which animates the action, is discernible.

Because as mentioned numerous times, in order for the Hashem’s home in the world of *asiyah* — which Jews build through the *avodah* of **action** — to be illuminated (meaning, for G-dliness to shine there in a **revealed** sense), a Jew’s action must “shine.” That is, in all of his actions, he must sense their animating word of Hashem. (Then., automatically he performs his *avodah* with alacrity, etc.).

Nachbi (who hid Hashem’s words) was a son of — i.e., a **derivative** of — “Vofsi, for he stepped over {*pissa*} Hashem’s **attributes**”: A Jew can, G-d forbid, *conceal* Hashem’s words (i.e., not sense the words of Hashem that animate every created being) if he “steps over” {neglects} the *avodah* of engaging his emotions, מידות {e.g., cultivating his love of Hashem} (which derive from Hashem’s attributes, מידות).

By a person awakening a love for Hashem, the G-dly light that illuminates his soul when he stands **higher** than the world {when learning Torah}, empowers him so that even when he {later} gets involved with physical matters (actions), he will not “conceal Hashem’s words” {i.e., he will not be insensitive to the G-dliness of the life-force that animates the physical}.

⁴⁰ *Tehillim* 33:6.

11.

WE TOO

Now we can appreciate the nuanced wording, “**We, too, can expound....**”

The **spies** concealed Hashem’s **words** because they had wanted to remain within the realm of **thought** (where Hashem’s thought shines) and not descend into the world of speech (corresponding to Hashem’s speech, which invests itself into the **world**). As a result, Hashem’s words would have remained **concealed** (*hechbi*) in the world.

As it relates to the **spies**, the deeper meaning of the exposition, “*Nachbi* {alluding to *hiding*} son of (i.e., {the concealment of Hashem’s words was} a result of) *Vofsi*, for he stepped over {*pissa*} Hashem’s attributes,” is as follows: The spies had sought to “step over,” bypass, the level of Hashem’s **attributes** which interrelate with the world (just as a person’s emotions connects him to others). The spies had wanted to elicit {divine effluence} directly from Hashem’s “Mind”⁴¹ which “**preceded** the world.”⁴² [For this caused Hashem’s words to remain hidden within the *sefirah* of *malchus*.]

In contrast, “we” need to steer clear of the fault implied by the name *Nachbi ben Vofsi*, in the **opposite** way. For us, action alone cannot suffice. We must also get involved in the **higher** levels of *avodah* — those levels alluded to by the terms, “Hashem’s words” and “Hashem’s attributes.”

⁴¹ {In the Amamaic original, “*mochin*”; lit. “brains,” an anthropomorphic reference to the “intellectual” attributes of Hashem: *chochmah, bina, daas*.}

⁴² See *maamer*, s.v., *Isa BeMidrash Tehillim*, 5553, ch. 2. (*Sefer Hamaamorim* 5708, pg. 271.)

12.

WE ARE THE FEET TO THEIR HEADS AND HEARTS

A Jew might think: True, in the later generations we must engage (not only in the *avodah* of deed but also) in the inward *avodah* of the mind and heart. However, since I find myself at the level of “feet and heels,” my *avodah* is not authentic (i.e., I am unable to work with the intellect **of the mind** and the emotions **of the heart** — but only with the intellect and emotions at the level of “feet and heels”). So how can my *avodah* fulfil the goal of making a home in this world for Hashem? After all, this objective requires (not only mere actions but also) the ***avodah*** of study, which illuminates the *avodah* of action?

The answer is this:

Since all the Jewish people of all the generations make up a single structure,⁴³ the *avodah* of the earlier generations serves as the head and heart of **our** *avodah* (“feet and heels”). Thus, concealed within our *avodah* of **action**, of *mitzvah* observance, are the {sublime} intentions of the *mitzvos* (the head and heart).

This question is addressed by Rabbi Yitzchak right at the beginning of his statement, “This matter is a tradition in our hands from our fathers: The spies were named after their actions”:

It is true that practically, for our *avodah*, “We, however, have in our hand only one” (as explained above at length). But everything that **our** forebears accomplished with their *avodah* is a **tradition in our hands**, i.e., it is in our hands, incorporated in our *avodah*. (Their *avodah* had also entailed taking precautions not to repeat those mistakes implicit in the names of all of the spies.)

[However, we have it {this *avodah* of theirs} in the manner of a **tradition**, a general tradition that is hidden. “We do not have..., לא עלתה” {literally, “it has

⁴³ *Derech Mitzvoisecha*, “*Mitzvas Ahavas Yisroel*,” ch. 1. {In the Hebrew original, “*komah echad*.”}

not arisen”}: This *avodah* has not surfaced out of the exile and concealments engendered by the falling spiritual stature of the later generations.

And in terms of **actual** *avodah*, “we have one in our hand” — the *avodah* of action.]

Therefore, through our *avodah* of action, we achieve the goal of making a home in the lower realm for Hashem.

-Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Shelach*, 5723 (1963) and Shabbos *parshas Korach*, 5728 (1968)