

HAFTORAH OF THE WEEK : שלח לך

*This week's Haftorah is taken from Sefer Yehoshua,
and is the whole of Chapter 2, that is, verses 1 — 24*

1. The connexion between this week's Sidra and the Haftorah is obvious. In the Sidra, Mosheh our Teacher sends people to find out about Eretz Yisroel and so, too, in the Haftorah, Yehoshua bin Noone, Mosheh's successor, sends spies to ascertain the situation in Eretz Yisroel. But this Haftorah gives us a chance to contrast the men that Mosheh sent with the spies sent by Yehoshua.
2. Firstly, Mosheh did not intend the men that he sent to be military spies or scouts. The word he used to describe their mission was "לְתוּר" that they were "to tour" the Land. They were twelve Princes sent as representatives of their Tribes who were to bring back confirmation of how the Land was suited to each Tribe's characteristics and needs. The two spies sent by Yehoshua, on the other hand, were indeed to report, if not on the military situation, then at least on the frame of mind of the inhabitants of the Land now that the Jewish People was on their doorstep and poised to re-possess the Land.
3. Secondly, Mosheh sent those men as a direct result of the demand of the people whereas it would seem that Yehoshua made a personal decision and sent these spies secretly, not divulging to the people generally that he was doing so. Yehoshua's choice of Pinchos and Kolayv was understandable. Both these great people had earned their credentials: Pinchos when he stood up fearlessly before the whole assemblage and avenged the honour of HaShem at the recent debâcle with the daughters of Mo'av. And Kolayv was the second of the two men out of the twelve who remained loyal to HaShem in the face of the rebellion of those men sent by Mosheh to tour the Land. (The first was, of course, Yehoshua himself.)
4. Because of the spiteful refusal by the people of our brother Aysov to let us pass peacefully through his territory into Eretz Yisroel from the south, we had to traverse along the south and travel northwards. We were now encamped in the Plains of Mo'av and the plan was that we were now going to come into the country through the town of Yericho.
5. By today's standards, Yericho was not a very big city (it had at that time about eight thousand inhabitants) but it was one of the oldest-established cities in the world and was strategically important in that region and it was known that he who took Yericho

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would also have the whole country. The inhabitants of Yericho knew this too and therefore the two spies intended to find out the psychological state of the people of Yericho as this would indicate the state of mind of the country as a whole.

6. The spies came to the house of Rochov, an innkeeper whose house was built into and was part of the very walls of the city. The walls round fortified cities were not only high but often they were very thick, too, to permit a patrol mounted on horses to gallop round on the top of the wall to ensure that all was well. In the case of Yericho, the wall was almost as thick as it was high so as to make it impossible to push it over — even by the use of heavy battering rams — and in places, complete houses were accommodated within the wall itself. (Of course, any windows facing out would have to be high up in the wall.) Rochov's inn was such a house. Being a place of transit for travellers coming and going, the spies thought that they could pose as travelling salesmen of pottery ware without arousing suspicion. In this, of course, they were wrong and it is an indication of the nervousness and worry of the people of Kenaan that as soon as they had come to the house of Rochov, the local Kenaanite king was told straightaway that two strangers had arrived and he immediately sent a troop of soldiers to find out who they were — so scared were the people of the imminent Jewish invasion.
7. Rochov had understood straightaway who the men were and why they had come and as soon as she saw the king's men coming, she took the two men up into her loft and hid them there. When the king's men came knocking on her door, Rochov didn't deny that the foreigners had been there (which would have been foolish as obviously people had seen them) but she told them that as she didn't know that the purpose of their coming was anything other than it appeared, she had helped them on their way. She sent the soldiers on a wild goose chase, telling them that the men had left and had gone in the direction of the crossings of the River Yardayn. Meantime, she warned the men to lie low in their hiding place till the hue and cry would die down. As a result of her brave action, the lives of these two men were saved and in return Rochov asked for a promise that when the invasion would actually happen, she and her family and friends should likewise be spared. A secret sign was arranged by which the Jewish people would be able recognize Rochov's house (she would hang a scarlet thread from the same window that the two spies had used to make their escape) and thus kindness was repaid with kindness.
8. When the two spies returned to the Israelite camp, they went directly to Yehoshua and were able to confirm to him how the whole population of Kenaan were petrified of the Jewish people. As Rochov had told them (and as they themselves could see) the miraculous events of the Ten Plagues of Egypt and the splitting of the Reed Sea had demonstrated to all the Nations of the world the Almightiness of HaShem and how He

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wrought miracles for His Chosen People and they were still afraid of the Jewish People even after forty years later. The recent defeat by the Jewish People of Si'chon and Og, the two mighty protectors of Ammon and Mo'av, only reinforced the peoples' dread of the coming invasion.

9. From this episode we learn a further lesson in how far we are “to do our bit,” as follows: Mosheh had sent men to tour the land but this had been in response to the doubts of the people and their lack of trust in the ability of HaShem to drive out the inhabitants of the land and furthermore it was an attempt to allay their suspicions about the land. Yehoshua, on the other hand, sent his spies not out of any doubt or lack of trust in HaShem's ability to conquer the inhabitants but was merely “doing his bit.” For even if HaShem has promised that He will help us in conquering the inhabitants of Eretz Yisroel, we still have to go through the motions of doing things ourselves. In such a situation, it would be quite expected to send scouts ahead to find out the level of confidence of the inhabitants. After all, one is not allowed to rely on miracles. One has to do what is expected — but having done it, one is to be mindful always that regardless of our own efforts, everything is accomplished by HaShem.
10. Our Chachommim tell us that Rochov herself rejected idolatry and became a convert to Torah. Considering her prominence — she was intimately known to almost all the warlords and powerful rulers of her day — this was a great Kiddush HaShem and she was rewarded with some very great people being descended from her, including the prophets Yirmiyohu and Yechezkel, Boruch ben Neriah and Chuldah the Prophetess, to mention just a few.