

Shlach - Rabbi Lerner - June 10, 2012

Who were the spies and how did they err so badly?

This is the parsha of the Meraglim. There are large discrepancies between the version presented here and the one in Devarim - differences in who instigated the mission. But who are these 12 spies - what was their status and title; how could this possibly come to happen.

13:2: *Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel, One man each from this father's tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them.* The meforshim point out that from the language of Shlach Lechah that it is up to Moshe to decide who to send; Hashem is not telling him whom to choose for this mission. It should be Moshe's choice, not the people's choice. Moshe himself should choose who it should be. It should come specifically from Moshe. **Rashbam**: it is not you who should choose, but these are 12 people whose hearts have moved them to go; you should take these people who are moved to go. These are not the Nesi'im who are mentioned at the beginning of the sefer or who brought the korbanos in Naso. The words *Kal Nasi Bahem* - every one a leader among them - does not mean the Nesi'im that we are familiar with - such as Nachshon Ben Aminadav who was the Nasi of Yehuda - Calev goes instead. The word Nasi here means whosoever spirits lift them up to go; it is a dangerous mission; they are sending spies into a territory where they are aware the Jews are coming, they will not get a warm reception. There are major differences between the spy missions of Moshe and Yehoshua. With Yehoshua there were only two spies who tried to hide; here there were 12 who conspicuously carried with them the fruit of the land, exposing themselves to danger. So only motivated people were going. The Rashbam says they would wait for volunteers from the people, and Moshe would then pick from them. Since they would be exposed to danger, they had to decide from themselves who should go; Hashem designated the Nesi'im of the tribes, but He would not choose people for a dangerous mission like this - they had to want to go on their own.

13:3 **Rashi**: where it says *Kulom Anashim*, it doesn't just mean men - it means people of stature; at that moment, these 12 were good, important people. They were the heads of the Jewish people, known as great individuals. However, this contradicts what Rashi says later in 13:16, where it says that Moshe called Hoshea Yehoshuah, that he changed his name, adding a Yud to bring God's name into it, so that Hashem should save them from the council of the meraglim, implying they are evil, whereas Rashi says earlier that they were very important. There is another Rashi later that contradicts this: in 13:26 it says they went and came back - Rashi says that there was a link between their going for to check out the land and their returning to report about the land - just as they returned with evil council, they started out with evil intent. But what about Rashi's earlier comment that they were great people?

Ramban: these 12 people not only are different names, but also have an unusual order - jumping to Efraim after Yehuda, then Binyamin, etc - seems to jump all over the place. The Torah is counting them in a different way - not by the layout of their traveling, nor according to their birth order. They were counted by the rank of the spies, by the order of their greatness. They were the greatest of their tribes - they were not of equal standing, some were greater than others. There were some greater than others in wisdom and kavod. The one mentioned first had the greatest reputation because of his wisdom. It had nothing to do with the order or greatness of the tribes; it focuses completely on the individuals. This would make two greater than Calev, and

four greater than Yehoshuah, the talmid of Moshe! This perplexing order shows how great some were, and all the more surprising their report when they returned.

Rav Mordechai Brook: (Dorash Mordechai): these 12 went and did not camouflage themselves, as did the two spies with Rachav. There were numerous miracles when they were in Canaan to help save them; they were busy burying their dead, there was Kafitzas Haderech, etc. This made it even more difficult to understand their report. Even more difficult to understand, 39 years later Rachav tells the two spies not to worry because all of the Canaanite nations were trembling because of all of the stories that surrounded the Exodus - the plagues, the splitting of the sea. If they were still trembling 39 years later, then they certainly were fearful when the 12 spies came right after these great miracles. So how could this be the report they bring back? The Zohar says that from the pasuk of not taking a bribe because a bribe will make some say incorrect words we learn the reason for their report - they realized that when they get to Eretz Yisrael, they would no longer be Nesi'im; they would be out of a job; they had ulterior motives because they would be out of a job. They were great, but not great enough to resist this opportunity to save their positions. There would be different leaders in the land. So, realizing they would lose their greatness, they lost their credibility and righteousness, and gave a terrible report.

Rav Chaim Yaacov Goldvicht (Rav Simon's Rebbe): there is a famous idea that the Meraglim knew that when they came to Eretz Yisrael, things would change. Instead of the supernatural existence, there will be more of a natural life. They knew this, as the Meshech Chachmah says, because this parsha followed the story of Eldad and Midad who prophesied that Moshe would be replaced by Yehoshuah after Moshe will die before they enter the land - this sent shivers down the entire camp - Moshe was a supernatural person who could stay on a mountain without eating or drinking for 40 days, someone who had to separate from his wife. But Yehoshuah was not a supernatural person, so if he will be leading them into the land it will no longer be miraculous - they will have to fight to conquer the land, and this frightens the entire nation and certainly the spies.

Netziv: what made it even more poignant is that as a result of the crises that follow their leaving Har Sinai with the constant immediate punishments from Hashem, they decided that they wanted a natural rather than supernatural existence, because if you step out of line, you immediately get punished. They couldn't live with this type of strictness - they wanted to go from a miraculous to a natural existence; they wanted to create an army to fight in the land, and Hashem would withdraw; but once they made the decision to fight, they needed to send out the spies; then they realized they could not do it on their own because of the powerful nations in the land. So, they return with the realistic assessment that if they were to do it on their own, they could not conquer the land; it would not be possible. They decided that they can't live this way, and they can't live this way. They could not live with Hashem in their midst in a supernatural manner with immediate punishment for wrong doing; but, without Hashem's miracles, they come back with an honest military assessment that they could not conquer the land. So in effect, they gave an honest report. **Rav Nissan Alpert**: this is the answer to the contradiction in Rashi: at one point, when they left, they were great; when they returned they were evil. The problem was that they went with the knowledge that God was going to withdraw to the background; they were acting that God was going to withdraw all involvement. This is why when Moshe changed Yehoshuah's name, Rashi wasn't saying they were evil - they were going to make an accurate military assessment; but that was not what they should have done. Just because God was not going to do things in an open manner, it doesn't mean that He was not going to help them

conquer the land. God would be working undercover, and they did not realize that. Calev did understand that, that Hashem would still be on their side. This is what Moshe was wishing Yehoshuah - that he should not go on the mission as an ordinary spy who sees what their eyes see as the total picture; as a Jew, we should realize that God will make it happen, even though it will not be open. The spies bought into the lack of help from God and made a huge mistake.

Rav Goldvicht: the reason the Miraglim, who were great, holy Jews, with several greater than even Yehoshuah, erred was that they knew they would lose their jobs. They thought that the great leaders of the Jewish people is in the desert where there was an entire spiritual existence - all needs are taken care of miraculously - they didn't have to worry about anything; God provided them with water, with food, cover - all they had to concentrate on was learning Torah; all other preoccupations were removed, and they could learn Torah. That is why they knew they would lose their jobs - since they will have a more normal life, they will have to conquer the land, farm the land, harvest the food, etc - instead of a kollel-like life, they will have to run a country; they will have to make time for a lot of other things. They thus would not have a ruchnios existence requiring different leadership. These 12 are leaders for a spiritual existence; they are Rosh Kollel; they would now need people who could lead them in a physical life. So they decided that this was then a bad thing. To their credit, they wanted to continue a spiritual existence. But they did not want to go to Eretz Yisrael; they wanted to just sit and learn, and not change their life style. The problem was the change in the style of life - they did not want to protect and cultivate a land; they wanted to remain in the desert with the manna, etc. That is why they came back with a negative report, to keep them in a higher, spiritual existence and not go to the land with its natural existence. So, their intent was Leshaim Shamayim; but that is not what Hashem wanted for us. We were shown that the Torah was from shamayim, given with great miracles and power. The miracles were to establish God as the ultimate power, that the Torah was from shamayim; but the goal was to lead an existence that combines the spiritual with the physical world. The point of the Torah was to live in a normal world, and achieve greatness in both realms. Only two of the 12 spies got the message. The other 10 could not believe that it would be the better way. Ultimately, their view prevailed and the nation suffered because of it. A proof of this is that the Torah was given only to this generation of Jews - it was the miracle time; this is the only time the Torah could be given - but this was not to be the permanent way of life.

Rav Simon: Yehoshuah's name was changed to put Hashem's name at the beginning of it, to make it Ka Yoshiachah Me'aytzos Meraglim. The Gemorrah in Menachos says that there is a pasuk Ki Bekah Hashem Tzur Olamim - He is the creator of the world by this name; it is as if with these two letters he created two worlds - Olam Haze and Olam Habah - a physical and spiritual world. The Hey was for this world - it is a letter that is open on the bottom, where we can fall through. The Yud is a letter that is rising, like Olam Habah. The point of changing the name is because the name Yud and Hay is to be able to merge the physical and spiritual world. *Hashemayim Shamayim Lashem, Veha'aretz Nosan Livnei Adam* - we have to use the physical world and make it into a heavenly world. We can turn this world into a spiritual world by following the Torah. This was the battle between the 10 and 2 spies - can we achieve greatness only by living in the desert in a spiritual existence, or can we achieve greatness by combining the two worlds together. The proof that the latter is the correct one is near the end of the parsha where there is the mitzvah of separating challah - there are mitzvahs tied to every physical act; He is showing us that there is holiness in the physical by having us separate challah from the grain that we grew from the earth.