

Spotlight on...Shlach Lecha

Background:

Parashat Shlach tells the story of the meraglim, or the scouts, and their mission to go survey the land of Israel. Though the mission itself is successful, when they return they start to panic because they worry that they won't be able to defeat the people who currently live in the land. And so they report that the land is good but that the people are way too strong from them to defeat. The Israelites start to cry, and the situation clearly spirals into disaster. Hashem gets so angry at everyone that their punishment is that they will all die in the desert before they reach the land, which is why the journey takes 38 years longer than it was supposed to.

The mission begins with Hashem speaking to Moshe in Chapter 13:2. Hashem says:

שְׁלַח-לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיְתַרְוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר-אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִטַּה אַבְתֵּיךָ תִּשְׁלְחוּ כָל נָשִׂיא בְהֵמָּה:

“Send for yourself men to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people; send one man from each of their ancestral tribes, each one a chieftain among them.”

As the commentaries note, the language of “shlach lecha,” or “send for yourself,” is strange. If Hashem is commanding Moshe to do it then, then why does Hashem say “send for yourself?” Shouldn't Hashem say “send for Me” or “send for the people?”

Here are 3 possible explanations:

Ibn Ezra: Hashem says “shlach lecha” to teach us that Hashem was ready for the Israelites to go straight to the land, but they responded that they first wanted to send people to check it out.

Rashi: Hashem says “shlach lecha” to convey that Hashem wasn't commanding it, but it was a choice that Moshe could make if he wanted to send them. Moshe ended up sending the scouts because the people asked for it, even though Moshe already knew from Hashem that the land was good. He sent them to allow the Israelites to make their own mistakes, even if it meant that they wouldn't inherit the land themselves as a result.

Shadal: Hashem says “shlach lecha” to convey that it was for Moshe's benefit, so that they would know what the land was like before they arrived.

Questions:

1. These three explanations understand the words “shlach lecha” to all convey different attitudes. Pretend that you are Hashem speaking to Moshe - in what tone of voice would you say “shlach lecha” according to each opinion?
2. According to each of the 3 opinions, at what point in the mission did things go wrong? Who was to blame for it, and why were they punished?
3. Have you ever wanted to do something that your parents didn't want you to do because they thought it was a bad idea? Did you do it anyway? What were the results?