

Shlach - Rabbi Lerner - June 12, 2011

The Story of the Meraglim

Abarbanel: What was the nature of what the spies did wrong? What was the evil they perpetrated in the eyes of Hashem? Seven different possibilities:

1) In 13:26 it says that they came to Moshe and Aharon and to the entire nation, and reported their findings and showed them the fruit they brought back from Eretz Yisrael. This tells us that they were corrupt and created this terrible accusation against Eretz Yisrael; while it is true that Moshe charged them with a job and they did it, when they came back they should have reported just to Moshe - instead, they gathered the whole nation to tell them of their mission - this was the first major blunder. Moshe wanted this to be a confidential mission - they were to report just to him; it was to be kept quiet; Moshe wanted to hear the report first, so he could plan on how to present it to the nation. Instead, they made it known to all at once and sowed fear in all of their hearts, and as it says, "they melted their hearts." They wanted to do this with the maximum publicity, not giving Moshe a chance to address their concerns.

2) They used the words in 13:27 to say that they came to the land that you, Moshe, sent us to, instead of saying that it was the land God had given to us, the land promised to our forefathers. They were convinced they were not going to inherit this land, as if it was not promised to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov, that it was not the land Hashem told Moshe about at the burning bush. It was a tremendous put down to the land, as if it was an alien land that had no connection to the nation.

3) Among the questions asked by Moshe was to see if the Canaanite were strong or weak. When they returned they said that they were "Az" - they were ferocious. The Meraglim were building up the Canaanites as if they were supermen, and yet, we know that they were not amongst the strongest of nations or leaders, like Og, Sichon, or the Egyptians.

4) They claim that not only are the people strong, but the cities are fortified greatly with huge walls. In reality, when we read Sefer Yehoshuah, we see this was not the case - only Yericho was fortified with a formidable wall and required God's intervention. They did not find great fortified cities of note - they exaggerated the situation and lied in order to frighten the people; they made the picture more bleak than the reality. This explanation, however, is difficult because in Devarim, 9:1, Moshe in fact tells the people that they are about to cross the Jordan River and capture great, fortified cities. But, there is a big difference - Moshe said this after 40 years, after Sichon and Og had already been defeated, and the people see that Hashem was behind the people and will help them to destroy the Canaanites. In the time frame of parsha, they had only fought one battle against Amalek whom they just weakened; in their eyes at this time, the report frightened them greatly.

5) They used the word *efes* in 13:28 - it means *but* - however, it also has the connotation, after listing the land's positive qualities, of wiping out all the positive things they had just said. Just as the word *efes* can mean zero, nothing, they were saying that all of those positive things were nothing compared to the difficulties involved with capturing and living in the land. They negated all of the positive things they had started with in their report.

6) In 13:28 they talk about the giants and nefilim who live there, as if this was the entire population. This was an outright lie - there were in reality, only three of these giants - Achiman, Shayshai, and Talmai - and yet, in their desire to frighten the people, they say it was impossible

to conquer the land because the people were ferocious, the cities were fortified to the heavens, and they have giants fighting in their armies.

7) Finally, the land is surrounded by Amalek, the Chiti and Yevushi, the Amori and Canaani who dwell in the immediate adjacent countries - there is no way in to fight the 7 nations living there - there was no route of attack since the land is surrounded by their allies.

Why was it so critical to change Yehoshuah's name and give a special blessing of chizuk by Moshe? He was the one who had led the battle against Amalek, and Moshe realized that if he fell in line with the other spies and said it would be impossible to fight these nations, including a nation that he had previously defeated, then the nation would have lost all hope.

Why did they want to go on this mission in the first place? We know that there is a big discrepancy in this version of the story and the one recounted by Moshe in Devarim. Here it seemed to be Hashem's idea, while there it is the opposite, it is the people's idea and demand. Why is it not mentioned here that the people wanted it? **Maharal**: the reason it is not mentioned at all here is because when they made the suggestion initially, Hashem said no, and Moshe turned them down. This happened in parshas Baha'alosechah in 10:29 when Moshe invited Yisro to join the Jews, and in 10:35 they broke camp and began to move forward - it was at this point that they first asked for spies and Hashem said no. It was only after Baha'alosecha when they asked again, after the story of Miriam who spoke Lashan Harah. She was smitten with leprosy for speaking Lashan Harah against Moshe. Hashem wanted the people to first learn the lesson about the sin of Lashan Harah and the punishment for it; He hoped they would not repeat this sin when they go out to spy out the land. God wanted the spy mission to be successful, so He waited until after this Miriam incident so that they would perhaps not fall into the same trap. However, they did not learn from the lesson of Miriam.

Akeidas Yitzchak (Rev Yitzchak Arama): the sin of the meraglim is that they had contempt for the land of Israel, they made the land out to be disgusting. What is this feeling of disgust, of Mi'us, that they felt? It was not really the land that they detested - they abandoned God and turned away from Him. Hashem presented to them a package of how the people should live, with proper behavioral boundaries that the Torah gives, and that this is the holy land where they are to live the ideal life with these laws. Here they would create their beautiful lives, with the holy land and holy laws of Torah - that would take them to Olam Habah. These were the two holy gifts that God gave us, in order to achieve the third, Olam Habah. But the people did not want this lifestyle. They said they cannot go up there, they would rather go back to Egypt - they yearned for the old Egyptian lifestyle (without the slavery part) without Torah and its restrictions. We get this idea from the Beha'alosecha when they immediately begin to complain during their initial journey - they complained about the delicious variety of food they had in Egypt. And then Moshe hears the people in 11:10 "*crying in their families.*" This was infuriating to Hashem and to Moshe. It is the only time Moshe complained to Hashem that he was sick of these people and couldn't carry them any more, and would prefer to die than lead them. What was it that provoked Moshe and Hashem so much? The people complained about the restrictions of sexual morality that the Torah was imposing on them. Eretz Yisrael was being taken away from the Canaani nations because of their sexual immorality - the land was vomiting them out, and the Jews were expected to follow these laws with the inherent Kedusha. The people here were rebelling not against the land, but against the lifestyle that would be required of them to live in that land; that is why they did not want to ascend to the land. They did not want to be the holy people that had to live this way. They wanted to buy their way out. The whole generation sinned

because they felt they could not make this transition to a life of holiness, and that is why they were condemned.

Netziv: he links the story of the meraglim to the point when they left Har Sinai. The shechina and cloud was with them. There were three incidents in a row where the people sinned in a more minor way and were immediately punished; the people cannot take it - they feel they cannot live in this way where God is in their midst and every time they stray they would be immediately punished. They wanted breathing space, and that is why they asked to send out meraglim - instead of the miraculous path where God is leading them directly to the land in a supernatural manner, they wanted to downgrade to a more natural way where they would capture the land the way humans would. They wanted to back off from the intense close spiritual attachment to God, and Hashem allows them to do it. The response that the spies have after seeing the land and its people is that the land cannot be captured by natural means, and that therefore they should go back to Egypt. **Rav Nissan Alpert:** This explains a conflicting opinion in Rashi. When they first return from their mission, Rashi said in 13:26 that just as when they returned it was with evil counsel, they had begun with an evil intent. But, an earlier Rashi in 13:3 said that they left as righteous Jews. When they left it was not evil - they just wanted a natural means of attacking the land, and Hashem said okay. But even when using natural means, there is still always God's provenance - Hashem is always still behind human actions; they didn't acknowledge this. They were righteous people when they left; they didn't leave with an intent to slander the land.

Meshech Chachmah: Eldad and Meidad were prophesying independently; their prophecy was that Moshe would die and not cross the Jordan, and that Yehoshuah would lead them. This is what frightened the people - Moshe was always associated with a supernatural relationship with God, while Yehoshuah was a natural way of fighting, as with Amalek. This frightened them.

Some meforshim say that the issue was that the life they would have to live in the land was a comedown, it was no longer going to be the supernatural life that they led in the desert. This they did not want and this is why they rebelled against going into the land.