

Good Shabbos, everyone.

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- Peshie and Mendy Vim, in honor of the engagement of their grandson, Raphael Moshe Vim (Rafi), to Estie Schick, and wishing mazel Tov to the parents, Mordechai Vim and Mr. & Mrs. Avi Schick. May they be *zoche* to build a *bayis neeman beYisrael!*

May all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

The central theme of Parshas Shelach is the *cheit ha-meraglim*, the reconnaissance mission that went terribly wrong. Twelve men were sent into Canaan to scout out the Land, and unfortunately, their report caused mass hysteria within the Jewish people and brought about catastrophic results.

The Torah describes this mission in great detail and characterizes the *meraglim* as important people, held in great respect by their peers and by the leaders of their tribes. Moshe asked them to report on the inhabitants, the cities, and the land. When they returned, they reported to Moshe and to the Jewish people addressing all those questions. The Land is indeed flowing with milk and honey. However, they said, the Land is inhabited by giants who dwarfed us. They are a mighty people, heavily armed, and their cities are powerfully fortified. This is what they saw, and what they reported.

וַתִּשָּׂא כָּל־הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶת־קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ הָעָם בְּלִילָה הַהוּא וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו נַתַּנָּה רָאשׁ וַנְּשׁוּבָה מִצְרָיִם:

The Jewish people responded to the report with hysteria and desperation. They began weeping. Some even demanded to return to *Mitzrayim*. As a consequence of their report, Hashem became angry with the entire people and against the ten *meraglim* who issued the report. It was then that God determined that the Jewish people would wander in the desert for 40 years before finally arriving in Canaan. In addition, a plague would strike the people, and that entire generation would die in the desert.

This story is well known but is, nevertheless, quite puzzling. The Jewish people were punished in a very harsh manner. The *meraglim* were sent by Moshe with Hashem's agreement. They reported what they saw and answered all the questions they were asked. They did not lie or tell one untruth. Why should they be punished for telling the truth as they saw it? And why were all the rest of Klal Yisrael punished?

I would like to share one answer given by **Rav Shaul Yisraeli**, a great religious Zionist Rosh Yeshiva and thinker. Rav Yisraeli emigrated to Palestine in 1934 and lived through the miraculous days leading to the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, and later served as the Rosh Yeshiva of Mercaz HaRav. His approach to the *cheit ha-meraglim*, in his sefer *Siach Shaul*, is particularly inspiring because of the time period in which he lived. He offers a general perspective on what it takes to conquer the Land of Israel and also to remain in control of the Land. It is important to keep this perspective in mind as our right and connection to the Land are questioned both externally and internally. (The newest Pew study found that just 58% of American Jews say they are "very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel.")

Rav Yisraeli points out that after the *meraglim's* initial report, another conversation ensues, which sheds some light on what was really going on. After the initial report, Calev declares emphatically that the strength of the inhabitants is not a barrier to moving forward. He insists that they can conquer the land.

וַיִּהְיֶה כָּל־לֵב אֶת־הָעָם אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ עָלֵינוּ וְעַל־הָעָם הַזֶּה:

**Rashi** explains that Calev was stating emphatically—we will succeed! Even if we have to build ladders to heaven...even if we have to do what seems impossible!

רש"י: עלה נעלה - אפילו בשמימה והוא אומר עשו סולמות ועלו שם נצליה בכל דבריו:

The other ten spies disagree and insist that the land cannot be conquered. Frantically, they claim:

לא נוכל לעלות אליהם כִּי־חַזַק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ. *We cannot advance, for they are stronger than we.*

The Torah continues to comment on their words ...

וַיֵּצֵאוּ דַבַּת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּרוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר עָבְרָנוּ בָּהּ לְתוֹר אֹתָהּ אָרֶץ אֲכָלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הִוא וְכָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־רָאִינוּ בְּתוֹכָהּ אַנְשֵׁי מְדוּת:

*Thus they spread lies among the Israelites about the land they had scouted, saying, "The country that we traversed and scouted is one that devours its settlers. All the people that we saw in it are men of great size..."*

**Ibn Ezra** comments on דיבה as דבר שלא היה, something invented. But what was invented? What did they make up? It appears to be a factual presentation. It appears that they reported back truthfully...they encountered strong people...and let the nation know that.

But their next phrase sheds light on the perspective, and it helps answer our question about the truthfulness of their report.

לג (וְשָׁם רָאִינוּ אֶת־הַנְּפִילִים בְּגֵי עָנָן מִן־הַנְּפִלִים וְנָהִי בְּעֵינֵינוּ כְּחַגְבִּים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם:

*We were like tiny grasshoppers in our own eyes, as well as in their eyes."*

**Rav Yisraeli** points out the strange construction in that *pasuk*. "We were like tiny grasshoppers in our own eyes, as well as in their eyes." If the spies objectively were like midgets compared to the huge giants they encountered, why didn't they just say, "we were like tiny grasshoppers compared to them"?

Rav Yisraeli writes that in reality they were not significantly smaller but they felt so weak and insignificant that they assumed others saw them as weak and insignificant.

זה היה החטא! הביטול העצמי, חוסר ההערכה של הסגליות הישראלית, של כוחות הנפש העצומים הגנוזים בעם זה...

And as we well know, when we think we **cannot** do something, it shapes the way we view things and the way we act, and then that thought becomes the reality. When we see ourselves as small and inadequate, others begin seeing us that way as well, and we diminish ourselves, and it colors the way we see things. Others appear stronger than they truly are. Even when Hashem gives us strength, if we choose to ignore it and determine that we cannot do the job, it will not be done This is a "self-fulfilling prophecy." Conversely, when you are **confident** that you can face a challenge, no matter how formidable, that sense of certainty actually empowers you to accomplish the task. You see the obstacles as small and manageable and find a way to get it done.

But beyond their slanted way of seeing things, ultimately, they had misunderstood their entire mission. Moshe sent them to explore the Promised Land and to report back on the beauty of the land. Their mission was not to decide whether to conquer the Land, because that wasn't a question, but how to best accomplish the task, and how to get the nation excited about this next step.

**Rav Asher Weiss** related this to the **Gemara in Tamid 32a** which records that Alexander the Great of Greece was in Jerusalem and asked the Sages for advice on the best way to travel to conquer Africa. When they answered, you cannot do it, he responded, I did not ask if it was possible—I simply asked the best way to get there. Lehavdil—that was what was expected of the *meraglim*; to approach the task with confidence.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת תמיד דף לב עמוד א. אמר להן: בעינא דאיזל למדינת אפריקי! אמרו ליה: לא מצית אזלת, דפסקי הרי חשך. אמר להן: לא סגיא דלא אזלינא, אמטו הכי משיילנא לכו, אלא מאי אעביד?

The **Malbim** wonders why Moshe sent princes on this mission and not military spies. The Sefer **Hakesav Vahakabala** explains that indeed they were not sent to spy. He writes that the word *la'sur* is different from *le'ragel*. It implies looking for the good—the best way to approach, the best features of the land—it literally means “touring.” In contrast, *le'ragel*, means to look for problems...and strategize on how to overcome those problems.

הכתב והקבלה במדבר (פרשת שלח) פרק יג פסוק טז: לתור את הארץ. יש הבדל בין תר למרגל לרשד"ל, האישי אשר יתור הוא מבקש הטוב, לתור להם מנוחה, לתור לכם מקום לחנותכם, אל ארץ אשר תרתי להם, וכן ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם לרדוף אחרי התענוגים; ובהפך המרגל יבקש את הרע, כמו מרגלים אתם, לראות את ערות הארץ באתם, וכן הלא בעבור לחקור ולהפך ולרגל הארץ באו עבדיו אליך, וכן וירגל בעבדך אל אדוני המלך, לא רגל על לשונו, כולם ענינם גלוי הגנות והרע. והנה מרע"ה בשלחו שנים עשר אנשים לראות ארץ כנען, ידוע הדבר כי לא לצורך שלח אותם, כי היותה ארץ זבת חלב ודבש פי ה' דבר, והיות העם היושב עלי' חזק או רפה מה מעלה ומה מוריד וה' ילחם להם, אך שלחם לתור את הארץ למען יראו את טובה ויגידו כבודה אל עם הארץ, ויחזקו ידיהם ללכת אחרי ה', והמה השחיתו התעיבו עלילה והפכו מחשבת שולחם. ע"כ אנחנו קוראים להם בשם מרגלים, גם כי בפרשת שליחותם לא נקראו כ"א בשם תרים. ואולם במשנה תורה כתוב לאמר ויבואו עד נחל אשכול וירגלו אותה, כי באמת כן היה הדבר, כי מעשה מרגלים עשו ולא מעשה תרים, גם כי לתור נשלחו ולא לרגל,

**Rav Yisraeli** continues:

הדור אשר ראה נפלאות בארץ חם, נוראות על ים סוף, אשר שמע קול אלקים חיים מדבר אליו מתוך האש, דור זה שכח את גדולתו ותפארתו. ענקי הרוח מתחילים להסתכל על עצמם בביטול ובלעג, הם רואים את עצמם כחגבים. לעומת זאת, וכתוצאת מזה, הם רואים את האחרים כבני ענק. הם אינם רואים אינם יכולים לראות, מה שראו יהושה וכלב, כי ענק זה עומד על כרעי תרנגולת. . .

*This generation, who saw so many miracles performed for them and heard the Divine voice of Hashem on Har Sinai, forgot who they were. A nation that was chosen by God and declared to be His first born felt insignificant and small. Because of that, the Meraglim saw the inhabitants as giants and, therefore, they saw the Land as unconquerable. They were limited in what they could see, and their vision was skewed, their perception colored by this feeling of inadequacy.*

זה היה החטא: הביטול העצמי, חוסר ההערכה של הסגולתיות הישראלית של כוחות הנשפר העצומים הגנוזים בעם זה. זהו שהוליד את הפחת מפני התגשות עם עמי נכר ועם תרבויות נכר...לא נוכל לעלות אל העם כי חזק הוא ממנו... "

He continues: *This was their great sin. They forgot who the Jewish people are, their great strength because of where they have been, their connection to God, and the great destiny assigned to them. That made the inhabitants look stronger than they were and made the cities look impenetrable—not because of the objective great strength of the enemy, but because of the Meraglim's skewed self perception. Because of their insecurity, they saw themselves as small and insignificant.*

יותר ראוי שיהא זה לימוד לדורות שבימי מבחן נדע שלא להתפס לרגשות של ביטול עצמי ופחד מפני אפשרות עמידה במערכה. שנדע שהיעוד הישראלי מודרך על ידי ההשגחה האלוקית...

And he concludes: *This is a lesson for all time: When Jews believe in their significance and in their destiny, they can overcome all obstacles; they can achieve great things.*

However, when the Jewish people think of themselves in small terms—like grasshoppers—then any enemy will be tough to defeat. When we are unsure of our claim to the Land, and unsure about our future and our destiny, then obstacles will loom larger, and our goals will become unattainable.

The great sin of the Jewish people, as demonstrated by the episode of the *meraglim*, was that they did not appreciate who they were. They did not appreciate the significance of their position as a chosen nation. They did not appreciate their destiny in the Land of Israel and their connection to God through His *mitzvos*. Throughout Jewish history, when we forget who we are were and what we are supposed to be doing, catastrophe occurs. Similarly, in our lives, we too ought never to ask “if” we can overcome life’s travails. We must ask “how” can we overcome life’s hardships.

But the question of the hour is: How does one gain such absolute, unwavering confidence? How does one acquire the strength to face every challenge? We see two approaches in this episode of the *meraglim*. What kept Yehoshua and Calev strong, even in the face of the peer pressure to never doubt themselves and Hashem’s promise?

Before they went, Moshe had added a letter of Hashem's name to Yehoshua's name. This is one way to stay strong. Connecting to Hashem, and strengthening our faith can instill in us the complete certainty that we have all the abilities and resources that we need to fulfill our mission, our divine calling. Our absolute faith in God and His promises to us should infuse us with the firm confidence that we can face every challenge placed before us.

Calev went to Chevron to daven at the *me'aras hamachpela* (where the *avos* and *imahos* are buried), to connect to Jewish history--our ancestors, our unique mission--for support. For us as well, connecting to Hashem through our history and our heritage can give us the ability to transcend the immediate hardships and overcome the present challenges. With this attitude, we can project confidence and courage. When we see ourselves as powerful – armed with faith in God, empowered by standing on the shoulders of giants – then everyone around us will also see us as powerful.

And this attitude should change the way we approach challenges. **Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau**, the former chief Rabbi of Israel, describes his first visit to the U.S. in 1974. This was shortly after the Yom Kippur War had demoralized Israel. He was then a rabbi in a small shul in Netanya, outside of Tel Aviv, and he went to Brooklyn to see the **Lubavitcher Rebbe**. In middle of their conversation, the Rebbe asked him about the mood in Israel during this hard time. Rabbi Lau replied that Jews were asking each other "What will be?"

The Rebbe grasped Rabbi Lau's arm and vehemently declared: "Jews don't ask what will be. They ask: 'What are we going to do!'" "What will be" is the question of a victim. "What are we going to do" is the question of a proactive person. We have a choice--to be overwhelmed or confused by the difficulties around us or to overcome them and grow through them--to see ourselves either as grasshoppers or as messengers of God.

No message is more appropriate today, when we confront such troubling questions as: What does the future hold for Israel?

With the unrest in the Middle East and the rise in anti-Semitism in America and around the world, we must strengthen our connection to Hashem and our heritage. We must have absolute confidence in the Jewish people and the Jewish story and the Jewish future. Rav Shaul Yisraeli lived in Israel of 1948 and saw the Jewish resolve to conquer the Land of Israel once again, to establish a Jewish government and to rebuild Yeshivas. He understood that the secret of Jewish survival is an unwavering commitment and awareness of who we are—our history and destiny. He identified that as the key feature of the sin of the *meraglim* and that generation.

Unfortunately, we live in times where many Jews question our connection to God and our connection to the Land of Israel. That is very dangerous. The Pew study showed that 20% of American Jews do not believe in a higher Power, and that same percentage of the American Orthodox community feel detached from Israel. We must make sure now and always that we are aware of who we are as the Jewish Nation and our special connection to the Land of Israel, and that we transmit this message to our children.

We are part of a holy nation that was freed from Egypt and stood at Sinai, and was given the Land of Israel as our birthright. We have survived countless attempts—throughout the generations--on our lives and our faith. We emerged from the ashes of Auschwitz, only to rebuild and, against all odds, to flourish in Israel and in Jewish communities throughout the world. As we continue our journey in the desert of *galus*, marching towards the Promised Land, our ultimate goal— we must know, that no matter how daunting the challenge, by connecting to God and our heritage we have the power to succeed. And we will succeed. May we merit to join together with all Jews, in *Yerushalayim ha-beniuya...bimhera viyamenu...amen*.