

Parshat Devarim 5779

Sefer Devarim is also known as *Mishneh Torah*, which is usually translated as Repetition/Review of the Torah (from the perspective of *Moshe Rabeinu*). This review commences at the very start of the first *perek* and of this week's *Sedra*. Amongst the first episodes to be reviewed (critically), is that of the spies, which is originally recounted in *Parshat Shelach*. There are several additional insights that can be gained by comparison of the two accounts of this unfortunate episode, which directly led to the *B'nei Yisrael* spending an additional 39 years or so in the *midbar*, prior to entering *Eretz Yisrael*.

All of you approached me and said, "Let us send men ahead of us and let them spy out (v'yachperu) the land and bring word back to us: the road on which we should ascend and the cities to which we should come" (Devarim 1:22).

When the Torah first records the story of the spies in *Bamidbar Chapter 13*, there is no mention of such a request by the people. In fact, there it is presented as a command of *Hashem* to *Moshe*. However, *Rashi*, on the words *shelach lecha*, utilises the *pasuk* quoted above, to explain that this was not so much a command, but a reaction to the people's request, having earlier told them that the land is good, but now giving them room to err through the words of the spies, so that they shall not take possession of it.

Then, in contrast to *Parshat Shelach*, where the Hebrew verb ל ת ו ר is used, our *pasuk* uses the verb פ ר ח ל. Both verbs mean to spy or more precisely to investigate a territory by means of traversing it. *Rav Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg*, in his Torah commentary *Haketav VehaKabbalah*, explains that the former has as its objective, to find positive aspects and the latter to find negative aspects.

The latter part of the *pasuk*, the detail of which is again absent in *Parshat Shelach*, is considered (by *Ramban*) to be valid reason for sending spies because of the strategic nature of the information being sought. Given that the land would yet have to be conquered, it would have been imperative to gain advance knowledge of the lie of the land – the roads and approaches to the cities, which city to battle first and from which direction to most effectively wage war. The importance of such reconnaissance was emphasised to my wife and I on a recent visit to the D-Day Museum in Portsmouth, where we were astonished to learn that the nation was asked to forward photographs and postcards of the Normandy coastline, to assist with planning the invasion!

The idea was good in my eyes, so I took from you twelve men, one for each tribe (Devarim 1:23).

Rashi's comment on the first part of the above *pasuk* is that, whilst the idea was good from *Moshe's* viewpoint, it did not meet with *Hashem's* approval. But *Rashi* then asks, why though would *Moshe* mention within his rebuke, something that had a positive element to it? *Rashi* answers his own question by effectively suggesting that *Moshe* also did not approve of the idea, but that he was attempting some reverse psychology, by readily agreeing that spies should be sent, in the hope that such readiness would lead to a retraction!

Ramban's comment on the latter part of the *pasuk* is to observe that unlike in *Parshat Shelach*, when the men were selected to be spies, *Moshe* did not now praise the men, by mentioning their status as leaders or of their being heads of *B'nei Yisrael*, because once they had acted wickedly, it was no longer appropriate for *Moshe* to speak of them praiseworthy. In contrast, *Ramban* later notes that whereas in *Parshat Shelach*, we are informed that the 10 evil spies died of the plague (*Bamidbar 14:37*), in *Parshat Devarim*, *Moshe* does not specifically mention their punishment, merely that the whole generation, other than *Yehoshua* and *Calev*, would not see or enter *Eretz Yisrael*, this in order not to speak about the disgrace of individuals – *Moshe Rabeinu*, the leader *par excellence*, speaking in measured terms, appropriately neither praising nor shaming.

The foregoing represents just a few of the differences between the two accounts of the spies in *Parshiyot Shelach* and *Devarim*, but it is apparent that they complement each other and provide insights by comparison, that are not available by considering either one alone.

We learn that after hearing the evil report of the spies, the people wept that night (*Bamidbar 14:1*). It transpired that night was *Tisha B'Av*. *Hashem* said, "You wept without reason; I will therefore provide you with a cause. The 9th of Av will become a time of national mourning. On this very date, both the 1st and 2nd *Beis Hamikdash* will be destroyed." (*Gemara Ta'anit 29*). May *Tisha B'Av* become a festive instead of a fast day, by virtue of the 3rd *Beit Hamikdash* being built, *bimheira beyameinu Amen*.