

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM said to Moshe, saying, "Send (Shelach) for yourself men who will scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel. You shall send one man each for his father's tribe; each one shall be a chieftain in their midst." (Bamidbar 13:1-2)

What happened to the spies? What had they done so wrong? They were sent by Moshe and they returned with, what they assumed, was an honest assessment! Every job has a definition and description. The initial job description was as messengers, "M'shulachim". They were sent! In the end they are known forever as "Meraglim"- spies. What's the difference between the two?

We can begin to analyze the subject according Loshon HaKodesh- the Holy Language-Hebrew. This ancient study is not less than the science of understanding the real purpose for which anybody or anything is created. The assumption is that words in Loshon HaKodesh are not random or arbitrary societal assignments of convenience. The name tells you the essence of or the highest value of that particular object or relationship.

Let us take a simple pedestrian example that relates to our topic. A table is conceptually simple enough. Everyone knows what we are talking about when we say "table". It's probably constructed of four legs and has a flat top so you can eat on it! Here's where the Holy Language departs dramatically. That may well be a practical description of this "four legged creature we dine on" but what is its real purpose? What is its highest function?

A table is called a "Shulchan". It comes from the word for "Send" "Shelach". What role does a table have in sending? When a Jew sits down to eat he makes a Brocho before and after! That eating is not just for physical nourishment. It is a show case for delicious well prepared food. We are meant to be inspired by its beauty and aroma and all of the culinary qualities. It's a gift to us from HASHEM! What's our response?

At a birthday party there is sometimes the ceremonious moment when the gifts are opened. Everyone sits around with piqued interest. When that magic moment finally arrives, the wrapping paper is swiped off the box, the sweater is violently torn from it and held up to see if it's a near fit before the birthday boy or girl is running hungrily to the next gift. The wise parent overseeing the event will inevitably intervene, understanding that the feelings of the giver of the gift are being trampled in a selfish feeding frenzy. That good parent will then remind the little child that there is something he forgot to do handing them the envelope that flew off when the gift was being ravaged

from the box. The pace of the party now slows to a precious and poignant punctuation.

The envelope is opened. The beautiful card is revealed and the words are read slowly and aloud for all to hear. "To our favorite nephew Andrew- Happy Birthday- love, your Uncle Bob and Aunt Helene." A tear wells up in the eye of the recipient. There's a spontaneous hug. The gift is temporarily forgotten. The giver and the receiver are united. The gift then is understood to be a means of connecting the two and if even for a brief moment.

A table is a launching pad. Ruchanios-Spirituality is translated into Gashmios- Physicality in the form of delicious food. It is then returned and converted back from Gashmios- Physicality to Ruchnios! This exchange takes place at a table. It is place where heaven and earth meet and embrace! How had the Meraglim- spies failed? They moved horizontally from the spiritual universe of the Midbar -Desert where the Torah was received and into the dark material land of the Canaanites. They returned with a tainted -physical description, not a translation back into the language of Torah. They departed from their job description as Meshulachim, pure messengers and relapsed into mailmen, bearing clusters of raw data- information, like human reporters, justifying their earthy agenda. So even in an "age of information" it is possible to not know **what's really going on.**

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