

HEAVENLY HELPER

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And Moshe sent them out from the desert of Paran, according to the word of G-d; all of them were men, they were heads of the children of Israel." [13:3]

The commentators explain that there was no command to send out spies, but rather G-d gave His permission if they wished to go. Thus Rashi says that "according to the word of G-d" means that He gave permission and did not prevent it. Rashi further explains that when individuals are referred to as "anashim" (men) in the Torah, this indicates that they were important, leading men. These were some of the greatest scholars of that generation.

These leaders, given permission to go and spy out the land of Israel, were "the cream of the crop." And yet, as we see in the Torah, they made a terrible error - they believed G-d would not fulfill His promise to the Jewish people. They, who had witnessed such great miracles, did not believe that they would continue to occur. And thus they themselves never conquered the land, but died in the desert.

Our commentators explain that these men, on their exalted level, should have seen no need to spy out the land except on G-d's command. They saw G-d part the Sea of Reeds (often mistranslated as the Red Sea), and they saw G-d descend upon Mt. Sinai. Did G-d need military information to conquer the Land of Israel? Did He rely on strategic data and physical strength? So the very fact that they decided to go spy out the land - given their great status - was the beginning of their downfall.

By comparison, Rabbi Yeruchum Levovitz draws our attention to the Haftarah, which describes the two spies sent by Yehoshua (Joshua) forty years later, to "repair the damage" done by the first. Their mission, say the commentators, was only to determine whether the inhabitants feared Israel. And in Jericho, they found Rachav, a lowly innkeeper, who was willing to risk her life to shelter them. She did so because - having only heard about the great miracles which accompanied the exit of Israel from Egypt - she did believe that G-d would keep his promise, and she believed that G-d could protect her as well. She, unlike the original spies, was completely certain that Israel would conquer the land without difficulty.

What was the final result? The spies, the great scholars, died in the desert. Rachav, the innkeeper, arose and joined the nation of Israel, living with them on a high spiritual level, in the land that

became truly hers.

Specifically in spiritual matters, says Rabbi Levovitz, we see that a person is guided "in the direction he wishes to go." The Talmud tells us that it works both ways. "One who comes to purify himself, they help him." "One who comes to sully himself, they help him." The spies who were so great, descended. The innkeeper who was so lowly, arose.

Thus we see that it often matters less where a person finds himself or herself today, vs. the direction he or she is going. A lowly individual who is ascending and attaching herself to the Divine can be far greater than leaders who are losing their trust in HaShem's promises.

It is clear that Rachav was "coming to purify herself" from a great deficit beneath the "coming to sully themselves" of the spies. Meaning not only was her actual spiritual level far below, but the impact of her one act of faith and trust could hardly bring her to the level to which the spies might fall by believing they needed strategy and plans. Nonetheless, because she was "coming to purify herself," she rose further than she might have imagined possible, while they experienced just the opposite.

Where we find ourselves today is less important than the direction in which we are headed. So our first obligation is to focus on where we want to go. Once we do so, G-d will help us to travel the distance.

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