

TWO EFFECTIVE METHODS

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Shlach. The parsha begins with Hashem telling Moshe: "Shlach l'cha anashim v'yasuru es Eretz Canaan asher Ani nosain livnei Yisroel (send forth men and they will spy the land of Canaan that I am giving to Bnei Yisroel) [13:2]." One man was chosen as a representative from each shevet (tribe) to report back about Eretz Yisroel.

Who were these men? The Ramban is puzzled that the tribes do not seem to be listed in any specific order. He explains that these leaders were listed according to their individual greatness. The very fact that Hoshea ben Nun, the talmid (student) par-excellence of Moshe was listed fifth offers us a glimpse of the colossal stature of these men.

There are a number of issues which need to be understood. Foremost, we know that these spies brought back a bad report, causing the entire nation to despair of entering the Land. How did these spiritual giants plunge to such a depth? Furthermore, we find that Moshe added the letter 'yud' to Hoshea's name changing it to Yehoshua. His name thereby began with 'yud' and 'heh', Hashem's name. This was a prayer that Hashem should help save him from the counsel of the meraglim (spies). Calev, the only other spy who didn't slander Eretz Yisroel, went and prayed at the graves of the Avos (Forefathers) that he shouldn't be influenced by their evil. Why didn't Moshe also pray for Calev, and why didn't Yehoshua also pray at the grave of the Avos?

Many of us can relate to the plight of Yehoshua and Calev in their situation. They found themselves among people with a very different agenda than they. We, too, often find ourselves among those with different beliefs, different values and different priorities.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that there are two ways to combat the effects of a negative environment. One, the more confrontational approach, is to clearly show that you stand against what they are trying to promote. The other, more passive approach, is to 'go underground'. To let them think that you are on their side.

Each has its advantages and disadvantages. The first approach doesn't allow for a watering down of one's principles -- it's me against them. However, with this openly declared warfare, one accepts a certain degree of risk -- in the case of the meraglim, the spies, even a physical risk. The second approach doesn't encounter any antagonism -- you are one of them. Additionally, they'll willingly give you the podium, allowing you to, at some point (much to their dismay) show your true colors in a clear and powerful way. The danger, however, is a 'cooling off' of your own fire as you outwardly

work along with them.

Moshe understood clearly the different strengths of Yehoshua and Calev. Yehoshua would declare open warfare against the slander they were trying to promulgate against Eretz Yisroel. He could be in physical danger. Moshe prayed that Hashem would save him from any scheme by the meraglim to cause him harm.

When the meraglim reached Hebron and were petrified of the giants they saw there, they decided to slander the land to make sure that we wouldn't try to enter. Calev at that point decided to act as if he agreed with them. This would allow him to foil their plot upon their return. Afraid of the spiritual danger he'd be in by appearing to be together with them, he needed to pray for himself. He went to the grave of the Avos and prayed for help in passing this difficult test.

When the meraglim returned, they immediately disqualified Yehoshua's opinion in that everyone else disagreed with him. When Calev arose to speak they readily directed the crowd to give him their full attention. Calev was then able to contradict all that they had said.

The Tosefta states that at times the Torah writes Yehoshua's name first and at times Calev is first. This teaches us that both approaches are equally valid. Every person must weigh their personal strengths and the particular situation that they might find themselves in, and act accordingly.

Let's return to the first question we mentioned. What went wrong with the meraglim?

The Zohar reveals to us the root of their stumble. They held positions of honor during the wilderness travels. "Rashei Bnei Yisroel haimah (Leaders of Bnei Yisroel they were) [13:3]." The Baal Haturim writes that the gematria (numerical value) of the word 'haimah', spelled 'heh' (5), 'mem' (40) and 'heh' (5), equals 50. They were officers in charge of fifty men. They knew that they would lose this position upon entering Eretz Yisroel.

We've discussed earlier how a person always wants a certain degree of honor and respect. Whatever level of honor a person holds, he'll defend that to the end. From an objective point of view, being an officer of fifty is not much to write home about! However, since that was their standing, they'd protect that at all costs.

Wherever the meraglim went in the Land of Israel, they saw the inhabitants very busy with funerals. This was a show of kindness from Hashem. The Canaanites were too busy to pay them any attention. This should have been very encouraging -- they could have seen that Hashem was guarding them while, at the same time, smiting their enemies.

The Steipler Rav writes that since they came with an agenda to preserve their standing, they perceived that very act of kindness as a proof that they couldn't enter the land! "It is a land that consumes its inhabitants! [13:32]", they exclaimed, even though this conclusion was totally illogical. If the land was consuming the inhabitants and there were constant deaths, the people would not have been so busied with funerals. The deaths would have become commonplace. The very fact that

such a big deal was being made about the deaths indicated clearly that they were relatively rare occurrences. Why were they happening so often right now? Clearly to help them, the meraglim. However, the meraglim refused to see that. Their agenda clouded their perception to the point that they thought they observed the exact opposite of what they actually observed.

Very often, the conclusions that we draw are not based on the 'facts' that we observe but rather on the preexisting views with which we observed those 'facts'. The very same situation can be a cause of distancing from Hashem for some people while being a source of chizuk (spiritual strengthening) for others.

Just a few days ago, I accompanied a friend to the cemetery for the third yahrtzeit (a yearly observance of the Hebrew date of a person's death) of his son, a"h. The very same situation, the death of a child, that wrecks some people's marriages, families and lives, for this family was a cause of >his'o'r'rus (intense spiritual arousal). The realization that we have no clue how long each of us will have the gift of life, was for them a cause for reckoning and attempting to make the most of the time that we do have. It's not what happens but how we view it...

Rav Eliezer Silver was one of the many Rabbis who visited the DP camps where Holocaust survivors were taken after the war. He was approached by a young man who defiantly announced, "Rabbi, I will never be a religious Jew!"

"What makes you say that?", asked Rabbi Silver.

"I saw something in the camp that I will never forget", he explained. "There was a man who called himself religious who had smuggled a siddur (prayerbook) into the camp. It was the only siddur in our group and a few people wanted to borrow it in order to pray. He agreed to lend it but only on one condition -- in return, he demanded half a day's bread!"

"And what happened?" asked Rabbi Silver curiously.

"Many gave their bread so that they could use the siddur!" he answered angrily. "I want nothing to do with a religion which people use to rob starving people of their bread!"

Rabbi Silver smiled at the young man and said: "Why do you concentrate on that one individual who had the siddur and made such a demand? Why don't you instead look at the devotion of all of those people who gave up their bread just to pray from that siddur!"

It's not what happens, but how we view it...

Good Shabbos,

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