

Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan...They brought forth to the Bnei Yisrael an evil report on the Land that they had spied out. (13:2, 32)

One of the most difficult narratives in the *Torah* to understand is the incident of the *meraglim*, spies. They went to *Eretz Yisrael* on an ill-fated mission, to slander the land, Moshe *Rabbeinu* and even Hashem. The *Yalkut Shimoni* refers to these *meraglim* as "*kesilim*," fools. They were actually the *nesiim* of their respective tribes, men who were *gedolim*, great leaders, whose reputation until that moment had remained untarnished. What happened? What transpired that suddenly changed a *tzaddik* into a "*kesil*"?

Chazal cite the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* 10, "One who slanders /spreads *lashon hora* is a fool." They say that although when they left they were *gedolim*, the *meraglim* transformed themselves into fools. *Chazal* reveal to us that they were not actually foolish, but rather, they acted foolish. They made themselves into fools. How does a wise man, someone who has *seichel*, common sense, suddenly become a fool? **Horav Shmuel Truvitz, Shlita**, suggests that the answer lies in Moshe's rebuke to *Bnei Yisrael*. In *Sefer Devarim* 1:26,27, Moshe recounts *Bnei Yisrael's* transgressions throughout their journey in the wilderness. He addresses the times that they "tested" Hashem, when they displayed a certain lack of trust or a deficiency in faith. In regard to the sin of the spies, Moshe *Rabbeinu* says, "But you did not wish to ascend, and you rebelled against the word of Hashem, your G-d. You slandered in your tents and said, 'Because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Emori to destroy us.'" The word, "*vateiragnu*," "(and) you slandered," implied a different form of slander. **Rabbeinu Yona** interprets this verb to describe the behavior of one who constantly finds fault, who is always complaining. He grumbles about everything and everyone. He blames others for his plight. Even if his circumstances are not negative, he perceives them as bad. Moreover, he convinces himself that people are always cheating him, rejecting him, disparaging him. This form of depression is a disease in which the individual can never have any enjoyment, because he thrives on being miserable. Indeed, he needs to find fault in his own behavior to justify his punishment.

The *meraglim* grumbled, "Hashem hates us - and indeed, He has every reason to despise us. Did we not worship idols in Egypt? He is taking revenge against us." They were so obtuse in their depression that they perceived a positive sign as a negative omen. They saw funerals taking place in *Eretz Yisrael*. Rather than viewing this as Hashem's form of intervention to distance the inhabitants so that they would not see the strangers, they looked at it from a negative perspective. This was their utter foolishness. They convinced themselves that Hashem hated them and wanted to destroy them. It is no wonder that their vision was so myopic that everything looked sour.

With this idea in mind, we can understand why Moshe prayed for the welfare of Yehoshua but did not pray for the other spies. One would think that Moshe was displaying favoritism. *Horav Truvitz* cites the *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* who says that Yehoshua's exceptional humility

catalyzed Moshe's prayer on his behalf. Simply, Moshe was concerned that, as a result of his diffidence, Yehoshua would not take a stand against the other spies. Thus, he would defer to their sinful intentions. *Horav Truvitz* suggests that Yehoshua's humility determined his worthiness for blessing. Because he was humble, he viewed everything that occurred in his life as a gift from Hashem. He saw the positive in everything. He was the type of person that deserved Moshe's blessing. The *meraglim*, on the other hand, were bitter, unhappy people. They could be exposed to the most positive expression of Hashem's beneficence and distort it with their negative perspective. Someone who cannot appreciate Hashem's gift does not really deserve to receive it. Moshe prayed on behalf of the individual who would appreciate and value his prayer.