

Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan. (13:2)

The incident of the *meraglim*, Jewish spies – who left the wilderness as *tzaddikim*, wholly righteous individuals, and returned spewing slanderous statements against the Land – is one of the greatest tragedies recorded in the Torah. I use the term tragedy because the transformation that occurred in these men, the ripple-effect that it had on the nation, and the ultimate disastrous punishment that resulted are nothing less than tragic. Obviously, the Torah records this incident due to the lessons we are to derive from it. The first and foremost question that must be resolved is: How did this happen? *Shlach lecha anashim*; “Send men for yourself,” means that Moshe *Rabbeinu*, with his penetrating vision, which could detect any spiritual abnormality, should choose *anashim*, men of spiritual worthiness. He certainly did. What happened was not supposed to happen. These righteous men were supposed to go to *Eretz Yisrael*, spy out the land and return with a favorable report.

Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita, quoting the *Lomza Mashgiach, Horav Moshe Rozenstein, zl*, adds to this query: “What about *Klal Yisrael*? How did an entire nation fall for the slanderous lies and react with such negativity? From Egypt until that moment, they had experienced countless miracles. What more does Hashem have to do in order that their spiritual impression endure? They added oil to the fire when they asserted that Hashem took them out of Egypt only to have them destroyed by the Emori! This complaint was beyond ludicrous. Indeed, it sounds like the ravings of an unhinged person.”

The *Mashgiach* teaches us a powerful lesson that resolves these questions. It is all about the *yetzer hora*, our built-in evil inclination, whose power is beyond us. When one is not circumspect, he trips and falls into the net of the evil inclination. Sadly, the holier they are, the harder they fall. The *yetzer hora* knew that this was no ordinary mission. How did he achieve his devastating goal? *Horav Shmuel Rozovsky, zl*, explains that the *yetzer hora* looks for any possible kink in a person’s spiritual armor. As soon as he locates that failing, he gets to work burrowing through the weakness until he succeeds in “owning” the person. After that, it is too late, almost impossible to extricate oneself from his clutches. They had one kink in their armor: They feared losing their exalted positions once the nation settled in the Land. They would no longer be *Nesiiim*, Princes. They would be “ordinary” people, without their unique status distinguishing them from everybody else. *Kavod*, honor – which they deserved – was where the *yetzer hora* burrowed his hole. Sadly, he succeeded.

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, observes that the *kavod* the *meraglim* sought was not the type of *kavod* to which ordinary men ascribe. They sought *kavod* for purposes of *Shomayim*, Heaven. Yes, they convinced themselves that they were acting for the sake of Heaven. Hashem’s glory would be exalted as a result of their *nesius*. They were situated in such an elevated spiritual place that the nation had so much more to gain from them – rather than from a replacement. They convinced themselves that the nation needed them, that Hashem needed them. No one could spiritually

inspire the nation as they could. They thought they were doing the right thing. This was their mistake. The *yetzer hora* did not ignore their failing. As a result, we are still suffering today.

All this might be true, but how does one, in the space of a few days, go from *igra rama*, the apex of spirituality, to *bira amikta*, the nadir of depravity? I think the answer lies in their leaving the Jewish camp, where they had been ensconced in a spiritual bubble, immune to the *yetzer hora*'s guile, impervious to the effects of the outside world. This does not mean that the *yetzer hora* cannot/does not penetrate the spiritual bubble. The level of protection is greater, making it more difficult for the *yetzer hora* to achieve his nefarious goal.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, observes that the Torah records two commands by Hashem to build a structure: the *Teivah*, Ark; the *Mishkan*, Sanctuary. The *teivah* was built for the purpose of protecting its inhabitants from the Flood waters. The *Mishkan* was created for the purpose of spiritual ascendancy. It was a place where the Jew could go to elevate himself spiritually and to strengthen his relationship with Hashem.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that the difference between the *Mishkan* and the *Teivah* is analogous to the difference between the *yeshivos* of old (prior to World War II when Orthodox Jewry, for the most part, lived a much more sheltered and isolated life) and the *yeshivos* of today. In "those days," *yeshivah* boys came from a protected environment to attend *yeshivah*, so that they could build their knowledge and spiritual relationship with Hashem. It was their *Mishkan*. Today's *yeshivos* are different. We live in a society where 'everything goes.' Whoever thinks the "street" and its rogue, immoral culture has not penetrated into our world should open his eyes and ears. Our communities are exposed to the harsh culture that pervades contemporary society. Thus, today's *yeshivos* serve a dual purpose: First, they are a *teivah*, sheltering their students from the deluge of immorality and bankrupt ethics. They are also a *Mishkan* where the students *shteig*, grow in Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, ascending the ladder of spirituality.

Yeshivah education is not arbitrary, necessary only for those who hope to take positions of spiritual leadership throughout the world. *Yeshivah* is for everyone. The *Chazon Ish, zl*, commented that, in his day (1950), to expel a student from *yeshivah* required the *psak*, *halachic* ruling, of a *bais din* consisting of twenty-three *dayanim*, judges – the same number required for *dinei nefashos*, cases of capital punishment. Sending a boy away from *yeshivah* – or a girl from *Bais Yaakov* – is not an easy decision. Yet, we will find situations in which the head of school (whatever title he has) is dealing with an inflated ego which does not permit him to listen to anyone. He must have the best school, with the finest reputation. *Chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, should a prospective parent refuse to send their "tzaddik" to his school because of the "environment." After all, this one boy or girl is a "poison" that is destroying "his" school.

He is neither interested in – nor does he care about – the long-term effects that expelling this student will have on him, his parents and even his siblings. The primary issue is the school and his personal reputation. He must show the community that he does not tolerate any infraction

whatsoever (unless, of course, it is the son or daughter of an influential member of the community). Meanwhile, a boy or girl will have been destroyed, and this head of school will have contributed to his/her spiritual/emotional demise. Sadly, it does not bother him. His conscience remains unperturbed. After all, it is not his child.