

And let them spy out the Land. (1:22)

There are three words which can be used to make the same statement: “And let them spy out the Land”: *v’yasuru*; *v’yeraglu*; and *v’yachperu*. While it is true that, as synonyms, they all have a similar meaning, their connotations are different. In his *Pi Ha’Be’er*, *Horav Lazer Brody, Shlita*, draws upon the insights of *Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*. He explains that *va’yachperu* denotes a much more penetrating analysis of a given subject than *va’yaturu* and *va’yeraglu*. *Va’yachperu* means to dig deep, to search for something that, under normal circumstances, would be concealed. It can also mean looking for something for the purpose of revealing a negative aspect about a subject – very much like telling someone to “look for whatever dirt you can find.”

Rav Brody compares this to a newly-appointed *rav* in a community where Jewish literacy was at a premium. In other words, it was a community of *amei ha’aretz*, who knew little and probably did even less, yet maintained a *de’ah*, strong position, on how a Jewish community should be directed and what was to be expected of its rabbinic leader. This *rav* was highly successful in “renovating” the community’s standard of moral modesty – much to the chagrin of a couple of diehards who believed in the status quo and felt that the moral level of Jews should be on par with that of non-Jewish contemporary society. These people sought every opportunity to discredit the *rav*. They searched and searched, dug deeper, but found nothing negative to say about him.

They decided to dispatch three men to stand outside the *rav*’s house late at night. Perhaps they would find something negative to say about him. It was past midnight when they snuck up on his house and peered into his window. They saw the *rav* studying Torah with books piled high on his table. The next day, these three men excitedly burst into the *shul*, walked up to the *bimah*, lectern, and banged on it to get everyone’s attention: “We have an announcement to make about our rabbi. You think that he is erudite, but we discovered the truth. He sits up most of the night studying from the books. He really does not know more than us. He just studies up on everything.”

Obviously, we all understand the ludicrous nature of this complaint. Everyone should be so fortunate to have a *rav* that learns constantly. They were, however, looking for something disparaging to say about the *rav*. This is what is meant by *va’yachperu* – dig up something negative on *Eretz Yisrael*. Find it and search for it as long as necessary until you are able to present a jaundiced perception of the Land.’

Rav Brody draws a corollary between their sin and the ultimate manner of punishment they received. For seeking to dig up dirt on the Holy Land, they were barred from entering it. They all died in the wilderness. How? They all dug their own graves and lay down in the ground. The next morning, the ones who still remained alive arose and went about their lives for another year, when this process was repeated. They dug up *lashon hora*, slandered the Land. They were punished by having to dig their own graves.