

They were all distinguished men; heads of Bnei Yisrael were they. (13:3)

There are many episodes in the Torah which are not easy to explain; yet, we try to explain them. The *chet ha'meraglim*, sin of the spies, is an *aveirah*, collective sin, which begs elucidation. Once we understand the sin, acknowledge its ramifications, and prepare for the consequences of its actions, we still must focus on its origin. Why did we act this way? What compels us to sin? How have we changed?

Much has been written concerning the *chet ha'meraglim*. While the actual sin has been addressed, the “why” needs to be explained. These were no ordinary men. These were holy Jews, leaders of the nation, Princes of *Yisrael*. To ascribe sin to them is farfetched. How did men of such noble stature, men of spiritual distinction, commit spiritual suicide which caused them to lose both worlds? The dream of entering *Eretz Yisrael* became their nightmare, and *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, was also taken from them.

The **Zohar Hakadosh** makes what seems to be an ambiguous statement: *Kulam anashim*, “All of them, men” – worthy men, heads of the nation. They convinced themselves to accept faulty advice. Why did they accept misplaced, misguided and erroneous counsel? (Why would well-meaning intelligent men of stature accept a recommendation that ran counter to everything which they believed to be true?) They conjectured: If we enter the Holy Land, we will lose our leadership positions. Moshe *Rabbeinu* will transfer our positions to others who will be appointed in our stead. We are worthy of leadership in the wilderness. (In the land, it becomes an entirely new story. There, we will not be leaders.) Since they followed this distorted line of thinking, they ended up sinning, so that they perished in the wilderness.

The *Zohar* seems to minimize their sin. The Torah presents their sin as rebellious in nature. *Ach b'Hashem al timrodu*, “But against Hashem, do not mutiny” (*Bamidbar* 14:9). The *Zohar* presents them not as mutineers, but as selfish leaders whose entire focus was on themselves and their loss of position upon entering the Land. They were transgressors, but not rebellious. What is the *Zohar* implying?

Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, suggests that the *Zohar* is not addressing the extent of the sin, but rather, is focusing on its origin and how the aforementioned distinguished Princes of *Yisrael* plummeted to such a nadir of iniquity. He demarcates between two types of authority: the *menahel*, director/manager; and the *manhig*, leader who guides. There are instances in which a leader guides from an office, making decisions which are executed by others. There are managers who innovate, who do not actually themselves follow the directive issued from above. In unique circumstances, we have a hands-on leader who is prepared to take hold of the rudder and steer the ship.

Their positions are essentially different from one another. The *menahel* is someone trained to steer the ship, manage the business. He is able to achieve the necessary goal of the operation which he is directing. He is trained in carrying out the planned mission according to the prepared blueprint. When it is necessary to change course, to adopt a new initiative, to pioneer new vistas, to travel through uncharted waters, the *menahel* is often at a loss for such an undertaking; a *manhig*, true innovative leader, is required.

The *manhig* is a man of initiative, passion, drive, charisma, who can rally the troops as he charts new frontiers for his charges. The *manhig* is endowed with a Heavenly inspiration which allows him to transcend – and even grow from – his challenges. The obstacles that block the path of the *manhig* are actually opportunities which enable him to apply his unique powers of innovation for greater growth and development.

Having distinguished between these two forms of leadership, Rav Weinberg analyzes the statement in the *Zohar Hakadosh* concerning the *meraglim*. It is not as if they feared losing their position of leadership upon entering *Eretz Yisrael*. This was not a selfish – almost insecure – decision. Their sin was not comprised of fear borne of diffidence; or apprehension resulting from being troubled and unconfident. This was not their sin. It was, however, the reason that they lost their ability to lead. Their apprehension led to abdicating their positions as *manhigim*. They were now on the *menahel* level. As *menahalim*, they could successfully carry out their mission in the wilderness. Leadership in *Eretz Yisrael* would demand much more of them – something for which they were no longer equipped. A *manhig* must have the ability to rise up over personal interests which becloud his decision. It is all about his flock – never about himself. The *meraglim* could no longer claim that it was all only about the people. Thus, they were no longer permitted to lead.