

## Everyone a leader among them. (13:2)

The word *Nasi*, prince, leader, is comprised of four letters which, when separated, make up two words which are opposites of one another. *Nasi* – *nun*, *sin*, *yud*, *aleph*: within these four letters are the words *yeish*, which means “there is,” and *ayin*, “there is naught.” *Otzar HaChaim* sees this as an allusion to the quality of a *Nasi*’s character. The *Nasi* who considers himself to be a *yeish* (there is; he is something), in actuality, has nothing; he is an *ayin*. The *Nasi* who views himself through the eyes of humility, who sees himself as an *ayin*, is thus a *yeish*. Such a *Nasi* has something to offer: his sterling character and humility.

What happened to the *Nesiim* that were sent as *meraglim*, spies, to reconnoiter *Eretz Yisrael*? These were once distinguished leaders, men of virtue and character. How did they fall from such an elevated spiritual perch to end their lives in complete ignominy? The *Steipler Gaon*, *zl*, explains that they fell prey to *gaavah*, misplaced arrogance, because they had been elevated to the position of *meraglim*. Rather than view themselves in their true context as *shluchim*, agents of the nation, sent to bring back a report, they suddenly decided that Hashem required their input. The nation could go no further until the *meraglim* returned with their report. They would determine the feasibility of successfully conquering *Eretz Yisrael*. It was all up to them.

How ludicrous! How audacious! How delusional could one be to believe that G-d Who brought Egypt to its knees required the assistance and advice of twelve puny men!

It all boils down to arrogance. A little bit of *kavod*, prestige, distinction, eminence, can destroy one’s ability to see clearly. The most astute and clear-thinking individual can become so self-absorbed, that what otherwise would be viewed as ludicrous suddenly becomes cogent. There is no question that a rational person would never have imagined that Hashem required his assistance to determine the Jewish army’s ability to conquer *Eretz Yisrael*. One who overnight rose from citizen to leader, from member of the tribe to its prince/leader, was sadly capable of falling into the abyss of arrogance. Once a tragedy like this occurs, the disease that results is often incurable without extreme therapy and, in the aftermath, can cause a person to lose sight of Who is the Creator and true *manhig*, guide, of the world.

A caveat which I think is appropriate. The Torah writes that a judge may not accept a bribe, *Ki ha’shochad ye’aver pikchim v’saleif divrei tzaddikim*, “For a bribe will blind those who see and corrupts words that are just” (*Shemos* 23:7). If the Torah writes it, one may accept it as an absolute verity. Bribery blinds; bribery perverts. Is there any greater form of bribery than a little *kavod* which leads to *gaavah*? One who becomes haughty is self-bribed. He becomes blind to himself because he begins to see through self-colored lenses. He now sees what he wants to see. Such myopic vision is a form of self-imposed blindness.