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## A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

### פרשת שלח לך

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה מִמִּדְבַּר פָּאָרָן עַל פִּי ה' כָּלֵם אַנְשִׁים רֵאשֵׁי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה וְכוּ'. וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשִׁיעַ בֶּן נוּן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכוּ'. וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֶהֱרֹן וְאֶל כָּל עֵדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכוּ'.  
(במדבר יג, ג, טז, כו)  
*Moshe sent them forth from Midbar Paran by the word of Hashem; they were all distinguished men; they were heads of the Bnei Yisroel... And Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun "Yehoshua" ... They went and came to Moshe and to Ahron and to the entire assembly of Bnei Yisroel... (Bamidbar 13:3, 16, 26)*

In this week's *Sidrah*, we learn about the story of the Meraglim. Twelve leaders, one from each tribe, were chosen to scout the land. However, they returned with a report that demoralised the people and caused them to lose faith in their ability to conquer Eretz Yisroel. As a consequence, the entire generation was condemned to die in the *midbar*, and their entry into the Land was delayed for nearly forty years.

Rashi explains that every instance of the title אַנְשִׁים indicates importance, revealing that the Meraglim were all righteous at the time they set out. He further clarifies that when Moshe changed Yehoshua's name, it was a form of prayer, expressing the hope that Yehoshua would not succumb to the spies' conspiratorial influence.

The Shelah HaKadosh poses several questions concerning this *parshah*. Firstly, he asks how Rashi's statement that all the spies were *tzadikim* at the time of their appointment aligns with Rashi's comment on the words וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ, which indicates that they were already scheming upon their departure?

Additionally, why did Moshe feel it necessary to daven for Yehoshua's protection from the spies' plans if they were all righteous? What doubts did Moshe have at that time, leading him to believe Yehoshua needed safeguarding?

The Shelah explains that when the spies set out, they did not intend any evil or scheme to return with a negative report. However, as the Zohar explains, they held biases against entering Eretz Yisroel due to their fear of losing their positions of leadership. Given the principle that עֲבִירָה גוֹרֶרֶת עֲבִירָה, *one sin leads to another*, their underlying desire for honour and to maintain their status led them to eventually spread slander about the Land.

At the moment of their appointment, they were indeed righteous and did not foresee any sin. However, the inclination to stray was present, and Moshe suspected that their inner motives might lead them astray. Accordingly, he davened for Yehoshua to remain unaffected by these corrupt tendencies. Therefore, when Rashi states that they went with bad intentions, it does not mean that they intended to sin. Instead, it reflects their existing prejudice against entering Eretz Yisroel.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* elaborates that this concept can be found in the Gemara (*Avodah Zorah* 18b), which provides insight into the opening phrases of Tehillim (1:1-2). The *possuk* states: אֲשֶׁרִי הָאִישׁ

אָפּר לאַ הַלֵךְ בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים וּבְדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד וּבְמוֹשָׁב לְצִיִּים לֹא יָשָׁב, *Praiseworthy is the man who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and in the path of the sinful did not stand, and in the session of scorners did not sit.* Many Meforshim explain that the order of these actions is listed from the most serious to the least serious, praising the individual who not only refrained from following the ways of the wicked but also from (the lesser evil of) standing amongst the sinful or sitting in the company of scoffers.

However, the Gemara questions the straightforward meaning of the *possuk*, asking: If a person did not walk (in the ways of the wicked), where did he stand? If he did not stand there, how could he sit? And if he did not sit, how could he scoff? The understanding should therefore be as follows: If one walks in the counsel of the wicked, he will eventually come to stand with the sinful, which will lead him to sit and then to join in the mocking. According to this interpretation, the Ibn Ezra clarifies that the phrase lists actions from bad to worse, beginning with one who goes *בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים*, which leads to standing *בְּדֶרֶךְ חַטָּאִים*, and ultimately to sitting *בְּמוֹשָׁב לְצִיִּים*, which represents the lowest level.

Chazal describe the departure of the Meraglim with the phrase *הַלִּיכְתָּן בְּעֵצָה רָעָה*, *their going was with an evil scheme.* The Rosh Yeshiva emphasises that this wording is identical to the phrase in Tehillim, *הַלֵךְ בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים*. Given the background from the Gemara, this similarity is significant. When the Meraglim set out to spy the land, they were motivated by concerns for their personal honour, fearing for their positions, which were at risk upon entering Eretz Yisroel. Thus, although they were initially righteous and had not yet committed any wrongdoing, they were going *בְּעֵצַת רָשָׁעִים*. This led them to a gradual decline, ultimately resulting in a terrible spiritual downfall as they spread slander about Eretz Yisroel.

What is the antidote to ensure that one does not become ensnared by following the ways of the wicked, which can cause a person to stumble further and fall even lower? The answer lies in the guidance provided by Dovid HaMelech in the second *possuk* of Tehillim: *כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' חִפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיָלֵה*, *Rather, in the Torah of Hashem is his desire, and in his Torah, he meditates day and night.* By immersing oneself in the study of Torah and adhering to its ideals, one can become immune to the risks of succumbing to the influences of the wicked. This is especially true when the Torah one studies becomes *תּוֹרָתוֹ*, *his Torah* – when one engages with it deeply and formulates novel Torah thoughts.

We learn from the above that even slight inclinations and motives can lead a person to fall into the pitfalls of sin. What caused the Meraglim, who were great and righteous leaders of Klal Yisroel, to sin so gravely by spreading *loshon horah* about Eretz Yisroel? It was their desire for honour and fear of losing their positions which led them to develop a biased outlook against entering the land. A small leaning in perspective can result in a terrible decline. May we examine our inclinations to ensure they align with the ideals of the Torah, which will undoubtedly help us maintain our spiritual levels.

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