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PARASHAS SHELACH - TRUE LEADERSHIP

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We often associate leadership with a person of great bravado and braggadocio whose presence is always pronounced and prominent. However, in reading the account in Parashat Shelach about the ten wayward spies (*meraglim*) who issued an evil report about the land of Eretz Yisrael, it is possible to overlook the important role that was humbly played by Yehoshua Bin Nun, who was poised to become the next leader of the people, and who would successfully lead the next generation of the Jewish people into the promised land.

We first encounter Yehoshua at the beginning of the *parasha*, as one of the twelve *meraglim* (Bamidbar 13:8). His name is Hoshei'a bin Nun, and we are told a few *pesukim* later (Bamidbar 13:16) that Moshe added a *yud* to his name, changing it to Yehoshua. Rashi explains, based on the Midrash, that the change of name denoted the prayer of his mentor Moshe that Hashem (Whose name starts with a *yud*) rescue Yehoshua from the plot of his cronies.

Along similar lines, the Targum Yonatan comments, on the verse describing the name change of Yehoshua, that when Moshe saw the “humility” of Hoshea Bin Nun, Moshe changed his name to Yehoshua. The Divrei Shaul (Rav Yosef Shaul Nathanson) and other commentators explain that Moshe’s concern was that Yehoshua’s humility might cause him to subordinate his own opinions to the sentiments of those around him, and that is why Yehoshua needed extra protection to be shielded from their influence.

Indeed, in the Torah’s written account, the only scout who individually spoke up to counter the evil report of the *meraglim* was Calev ben Yefuneh. Yehoshua only makes a brief appearance afterwards, speaking together with Calev to tell the people that “*tovah ha’aretz me’od me’od*,” that the land is very wonderful and that they should not rebel against Hashem – after which the two of them were almost stoned by the people until the Divine Presence intervened (Bamidbar 14:6-10).

However, as the Talmud indicates, there is another piece to the narrative. The Gemara in Masechet Sotah (35a) states that Yehoshua did in fact speak up on his own. He was then silenced by the assembled crowd based on their taunt “*dein reish ketiyah yemalel*” – “should we allow the ‘chopped-off head’ to

speak to us?” Yehoshua was derisively referred to as the “chopped-off head” either because, as the Aruch explains, the letter *yud* that Moshe had added to the beginning of his name looks like it is chopped, or because, as Rashi explains, Yehoshua didn’t have any sons, so he had no personal stake in terms of inheriting the Land of Israel. Despite this denigration, Yehoshua managed to speak up first, helping Calev frame the words that would at least make a dent in the evil report of the other spies.

There are two important lessons to be derived from Yehoshua’s muted role in this seminal episode. The first is that the mark of a great leader is not necessarily to always be in the limelight and the forefront of every battle. Although Yehoshua would become the leader of the nation, he recognized, with the assistance of the prayer of his mentor Moshe Rabbeinu, that during the episode of the *meraglim* his role was to exercise quiet strength and forbearance. Secondly, a leader can contribute the most by weighing his words and actions carefully and deliberately. Yehoshua did not relinquish his leadership responsibility in the face of adversity and was in fact the initiator of a response in defiance of the spies who brought back an evil report. He simply stopped when he saw that further speaking would be futile, but he had set the stage for Calev’s stirring words.

Indeed, after the generation that had been tragically influenced by the evil report of the spies had died out, Moshe recounted the report of the *meraglim* to the next generation as they were about to enter the land by noting that the spies had said that the land was very wonderful – “*tovah ha’aretz asher Hashem Elokeinu notein lanu*” (Devarim 1:25). Rashi notes that this was not actually part of what the ten rebellious spies had said at all, but was a description of the words (“*tovah ha’aretz me’od me’od*”) that Yehoshua and Calev had registered before being threatened with their lives. Yehoshua’s realization that this statement needed to be placed on the permanent record, even though it would initially fall upon deaf ears, was the mark of a wise and prescient leader, who recognized that true leadership of Klal Yisrael is not about flamboyance and charisma, but about maintaining spiritual integrity in all situations, and meticulously planting the seeds for future redemption.

OUTLOOK AND OBJECTIVITY

Ephraim Meiri (18)

וַיָּלְכוּ וַיִּבְאֹו אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל כָּל עֵדָת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל
מִדְבָּר פְּאָרֹן קָדְשָׁה וַיַּשְׁיבּוּ אֶתְכֶם דָּבָר וְאֶת כָּל הַעֲדָה וַיְרֻאָם
אֶת פָּרִי הָאָרֶץ:
רְשֵׁי: וַיָּלְכוּ וַיִּבְאֹו - מַהוּ וַיָּלְכוּ, לְהַקִּשׁ הַלִּיכָּתָן לְבֵיתָתָן, מַה
בֵּיתָתָן בְּעֵצָה רָעָה, אֶפְתָּח הַלִּיכָּתָן בְּעֵצָה רָעָה:

The Torah tells us that the *meraglim* Moshe sent to scout out the land of Eretz Yisrael returned from their mission to report on the nature of the land and its inhabitants (Bamidbar 13:23). Rashi (*ibid.*) picks up on the unusual language used to describe their return: “*vayeilchu vayavo’u*,” literally “and they went and they came,” and notes that this language is used to teach us that the scouts’ initial departure (represented by “*vayeilchu*”) was done as part of an “*eitzah ra’ah*, a bad plan,” just as their return (“*vayavo’u*”) was part of a bad plan. What “*eitzah ra’ah*” did the spies begin with?

This “bad plan” referred to could be some nefarious plot on the part of the ten scouts that began from the beginning, but is also possible that it is simply referring to the people’s idea to send scouts at all, an idea that showed a lack of faith in Hashem (as explained by Rashi on Devarim 1:23). We are told in Sefer Devarim (1:22), during Moshe’s recounting of this event,

וְתַקְרִיבוּ אֲלֵיכֶם וְתַאֲמְרוּ נְשִׁלְחוֹ אֲנָשִׁים לְפָנֵינוּ...
“All of you approached me and said, ‘Let us send men ahead of us...’” It was truly the people who requested that scouts be sent; Moshe wasn’t really interested in sending them, but he feared that the people would be scared should he refuse their request, so he acquiesced.

Now that we understand why sending the scouts could be considered an “*eitzah ra’ah*”. We still must understand how that is relevant to the return of the spies; why is this important information for Hashem to tell us here? If we look at the next part of the *passuk* we cited from our *parasha*, we can see that when the scouts report on their findings, they don’t just tell Moshe and Aharon: they tell the whole nation. This is one of the many issues with the report of the scouts.

We can learn a lot about the proper way to send spies from how Yehoshua sends his spies in Sefer Yehoshua (2:1). He sends them of his own initiative and quietly, so that when they come back they only bring their report to him, and he can then talk to the people himself. It is important to have the leader be told first, because the leader can see the information and process it correctly. However, in our *parasha* it was the people who asked for the expedition, so the scouts report directly to the people. Reporting directly to the people did not turn out well. The spies, despite their greatness, misinterpreted information. When they saw burials in the land they saw an “*eretz ocheles yoshevha*” (Bamidbar 13:32), instead of seeing Hashem’s kindness. Had they left the interpretation of their intelligence mission to Moshe, he would have been able to see the Yad Hashem protecting the scouts

from being discovered, and the people would not be left in fear of the land Hashem had promised them.

With the phrase “*vayeilchu vayavo’u*” we are taught the importance of going to those with a greater Torah perspective for guidance. In the *zechus* of fighting the natural urge for independence, and instead humbly acknowledging that there are people greater than us to whom we should turn, may we merit to forever serve Hashem *kirtzono*, according to His will.

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Shema Koleinu would like to thank our outgoing staff for a wonderful year. Shema Koleinu will return *be”h* next year. Have a great summer!



שבת שלום!