

Parashat Shelach Lecha 5774, 2014:

*Kalev ben Yefuneh: A Hero for Our Time*

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shmuel David ben Moshe Halevy, and the refuah shlaimah of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka.

Our *parasha* begins with what appears to be a command from Hashem:

The L-rd spoke to Moses saying, “Send out for yourself men who will scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel. You shall send one man each for his father's tribe; each one shall be a chieftain in their midst.” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 13:1-2, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself on *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Sefer Bamidbar* V, however, maintains that our verse does not contain a *tzivui*, a command. In his estimation, the phrase, “Send for yourself,” was merely a statement of consent on Hashem’s part for that which He knew Moshe desired to do:

**Send for yourself:** According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send. Since the Israelites had come [to Moshe] and said, “Let us send men ahead of us,” as it says, “All of you approached me...” (*Sefer Devarim* 1:22), Moshe took counsel with the *Schechinah* [Hashem’s Divine Presence]. He [Hashem] said, “I [already] told them that it is good, as it says, ‘I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt... [therefore, there is no need to send any scouts]’” (*Sefer Shemot* 3:17, underlining and brackets my own)

One of the 12 great men Moshe chose to send was Kalev ben Yefuneh, the representative of the Tribe of Yehudah: “For the tribe of Judah, Kalev the son of Yefuneh.” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 13:6) In some ways, however, Kalev is a mysterious figure. For example, *Talmud Bavli*, *Sotah* 11b questions his very lineage:

“And Kalev the son of Hezron begot Azubah-Ishah and Jerioth, and these were her sons: Jeshar, and Shobab, and Ardon.” (*Sefer Divrei Hayamim* I:2:18) “The son of Hezron!” He was the son of Yefuneh! ... Still, he was the son of Kenaz, as it is written: “And

Othniel the son of Kenaz, Kalev's younger brother, captured it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter for a wife.” (*Sefer Shoftim* 1:13, Talmud translation, *The Soncino Talmud* with my emendations)

Rava, the renowned fourth-generation Babylonian *amora* (teacher,) clarified Kalev’s seemingly ambiguous patrilineal descent by stating that he was, in fact, biologically “ben Yefuneh.” Yet, he was at one and the same time “the stepson of Kenaz” (“*chorgo d’Kenaz hava*”). As a result, Kalev had at least two powerful influences in his life, namely the genetic endowment from his father and mother, and the environmental factors inherent in having been raised by his mother in his stepfather’s home.

As the poignant and heartbreaking story of the Scouts-turned-Spies unfolds, we learn that Kalev was dedicated to the defense of the glory of the Land of Israel, and unconditionally convinced of our people’s ability to conquer the Land as per Hashem’s divine plan:

They [the Spies] told him [Moshe] and said, “We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the land are mighty, and the cities are extremely huge and fortified, and there we saw even the offspring of the giant. The Amalekites dwell in the southland, while the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountainous region. The Canaanites dwell on the coast and alongside the Jordan.” Kalev silenced the people to [hear about] Moshe, and he said, “We can surely go up and take possession of it, for we can indeed overcome it.” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 13:27-30, brackets and underlining my own)

In the next chapter, our passage is followed by the combined efforts of Yehoshua and Kalev to convince the people to remain loyal to Hashem and the authenticity of His promise:

They [i.e. Yehoshua and Kalev] spoke to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, saying, “The land we passed through to scout is an exceedingly good land. If the L-rd desires us, He will bring us to this land and give it to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. But you shall not rebel against the L-rd, and you will not fear the people of that land for they are [as] our bread. Their protection is removed from them, and the L-rd is with us; do not fear them.” (14:7-9)

The Torah's narrative continues with the dialogue between Hashem and Moshe wherein the destruction of the Jewish people seemed imminent. Moshe responded with his fervent prayer to save our nation, replete with the repetition of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy that G-d had taught him following the Sin of the Golden Calf. Hashem acceded to Moshe's prayer and stated: "I have forgiven them in accordance with your word." (*Sefer Bamidbar* 14:20) Nonetheless, the entire *Dor Hamidbar* (Generation of the Desert), with the notable exception of Kalev and Yehoshua (*Ibid.* , 30) was now prohibited from entering the Land. This decree is immediately followed by the rationale for Kalev's exemption from Hashem's judgment: "But as for My servant Kalev, since he was possessed by another spirit, and he followed Me, I will bring him to the land to which he came, and his descendants will drive it[s inhabitants] out." (*Ibid.* , 24)

The phrase, "since he was possessed by another spirit" ("*hayitah ruach acheret*") at first appears rather straightforward, yet, on measure, it is the second Kalev mystery that we encounter. True, it seems that Kalev never wanted to take part in the machinations of the Spies, and that he was always aligned with Yehoshua and his mission. Yet, Rashi, based upon *Talmud Bavli, Sotah* 34b, provides us with an entirely different interpretation based upon his analysis of verse 13:22:

"They went up in the south, and he came to Hebron, and there were Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of the giant. Now Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan of Egypt." **and he came to Hebron:** Kalev went there alone [hence the singular "he came"] to prostrate himself on the graves of the Patriarchs [in prayer] that he not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel. Thus, it says, "I will give him [Kalev] the land on which he has walked" (*Sefer Devarim* 1:36), and it is written, "They gave Hebron to Kalev" (*Sefer Shoftim* 1:20).

Rashi's level-one problem in this instance is quite straightforward. The expression, "They went up in the south, and he came to Hebron..." demands an explanation, since it begins

with the plural “they” and concludes with the singular “he.” The word “they” refers contextually to the Spies, leaving *Chazal* (our Sages) and ourselves to wrestle with the meaning of “he.” Therefore, based upon the texts in *Sefer Devarim* and *Sefer Shoftim*, our Sages concluded that the “he” in question was none other than Kalev. While this explication takes care of the grammatically confusing aspects of our *pasuk* (verse), a very significant conceptual problem remains: Why, to paraphrase Rashi, did Kalev need to go to prostrate himself on the graves of the Patriarchs [in prayer] so that he would not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel? After all, “he was possessed by another spirit, ” and aligned with Yehoshua!

The Malbim (Rabbi Meïr Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser, 1809-1879) was greatly troubled by our problem. In order to solve it, he cites our earlier-quoted folio from the *Gemara*, namely, *Talmud Bavli, Sotah* 11b. Therein, when Kalev is mentioned as the son of Yefuneh, the anonymous *amora* adds the explanation of the name “ben Yefuneh” itself: “the son who removed himself from the counsel of the Spies” (“*haben sh’paneh ma’atzat meraglim*”). The Malbim highlights this explanation and notes that “ben Yefuneh” can be seen both as a statement of Kalev’s lineage and as a play on words foreshadowing Kalev’s most heroic act – the rejection of the counsel of the Spies. The Malbim then suggests that the appellation of “ben Yefuneh” denoting this meaning was, in and of itself, problematic for the unnamed *amora* of our passage since, Yehoshua also separated himself from the Spies in both his words and deeds. Therefore, why was he not also called “ben Yefuneh?”

The Malbim answers this question in his characteristically brilliant and inspiring manner:

There was a singular difference that obtained between Yehoshua and Kalev. Moshe [not Yehoshua, himself] prayed for Yehoshua [to remain steadfast in his resolve and not to fall into the clutches of the Spies: "... and Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua," which is interpreted by *Talmud Bavli, Sotah 34b* to mean,] "Hashem should save you from the counsel of the Spies." In stark contrast, Kalev distanced himself from the advice of the Spies – rather than through the vehicle of Moshe's prayer. Therefore our Sages said that initially the Spies caused him to err and to follow their advice. In order to extricate himself from their cause, he went to Hebron to pray at the graves of our Patriarchs. (Translation, brackets and underling my own)

Given this interpretation, the Malbim now explains the authentic meaning inherent in the phrase, "*hayitah ruach acheret*:"

This means that at first Kalev had a completely different orientation and was duped by the Spies into joining their cabal. He, however, conquered his evil inclination and chose, instead to follow Hashem. [As the text states]: "...and he followed Me, I will bring him to the land to which he came, and his descendants will drive it[s inhabitants] out" (*Sefer Bamidbar 14:24*) and Hebron was given to him as a permanent inheritance.

Based upon the Malbim's elucidation, we are now prepared to appreciate Kalev's genuine greatness. Kalev was an authentic champion, one who had initially fallen into malevolent counsel and then, by himself, heroically overcame both that influence and his own *yatzer harah* (evil inclination). As Ben Zoma memorably taught us all: "Who is a hero? The one who conquers his evil inclination." (*Pirkei Avot 4:1*)

May the Almighty give us the strength, wisdom, and discernment to emulate Kalev ben Yefuneh in our words and deeds, so that we can become bona fide heroes in our own time who are true to Hashem and His Torah. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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