

Parashat Shelach Lecha 5777, 2017:

Hatred, Love and Hope

Rabbi David Etengoff

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, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Shoshana Elka bat Eiel Dina and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The beginning of our *parasha* offered the possibility of the immediate implementation of Judaism's ultimate goals: Moshe would have been the *Mashiach* (the one true Messiah) who led our people into *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), the *Beit Hamikdash* would have been built and remained intact forevermore, and the entire world would have recognized the truth of monotheism and our people's singular responsibilities as G-d's chosen nation.

What exactly took place that so violently and, nearly irrevocably, brought G-d's plan to a screeching halt? The answer is starkly clear: Our people failed to live up to Hashem's expectations. Rashi (1040-1105) teaches us that, as a compromise to the people's nagging insecurity and immature *emunah* (faith), Hashem gave Moshe permission to send the leaders of each tribe to do a thorough reconnaissance of *Eretz Yisrael*:

Send for yourself: According to your own understanding. I [Hashem] am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send. Since the Israelites had come [to Moses] and said, "Let us send men ahead of us," as it says, "All of you approached me..." (*Sefer Devarim* 1:22, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

At first, everything went quite well. After all, these were mighty and prestigious individuals who were dedicated to the task before them. These great tribal princes were called “*anashim*” (“men”). Rashi suggests that this was an honorific appellation based on the *Midrash Tanchuma*’s interpretation of *Sefer Bamidbar* 13:3: “Every instance of the term *anashim* that appears in the text of the Torah is a term of distinction [literally, importance]. At that time they were righteous.” These great leaders of the *Dor Hamidbar* (the Generation of the Desert) set out to explore, search and discover the Promised Land. Thus, in 13:2, 13: 21, and 13:25, we find the expressions “*v’yaturu*,” “*vayaturu*,” and “*meture*” - terms of exploration and discovery, and the infinitive form of this verb, “*latur*” (to seek out or to discover) is found in 13:16.

Unfortunately, however, it all went terribly wrong. Inexplicably, these great leaders, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, ceased to be *anashim* and morphed into *meraglim* (spies). This transformation is clearly represented in the first chapter of *Sefer Devarim*:

And I said to you, “You have come to the mountain of the Amorites, which the L-d, our G-d, is giving us. Behold, the L-d, your G-d, has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the L-d, G-d of your fathers has spoken to you; you shall neither fear nor be dismayed.” And all of you approached me and said, “Let us send men ahead of us so that they will search out the land for us and bring us back word by which route we shall go up, and to which cities we shall come.” And the matter pleased me; so I took twelve men from you, one man for each tribe. And they turned and went up to the mountain, and they came to the valley of Eshkol and [they] spied it out. (20-24)

The *Meraglim* failed to maintain the proper perspective. As a result, they squandered one of the greatest opportunities ever given to mankind. Instead of fulfilling their mission of exploration and discovery in a G-d-infused fashion, they acted like lowly spies on a “black-ops” military mission.

How did this happen? The *Meraglim* looked at everything through the lens of the laws of nature, and forgot that they were representatives of G-d's *Am Hanivchar* (Chosen People). As such, they failed to understand that our entire existence was, and is, dependent upon our being *tachat kanfei HaShechinah* (under the Divine wings of the Almighty's protection). Little wonder then, that the *Meraglim* returned to the people and issued a report that focused upon what they saw, i.e. "the facts on the ground" – rather than upon the potential of that which might be. In short, their myopic vision prevented them from seeing a glorious, G-d-inspired future.

The people's despair in response to the Spies' report tragically changed the course of history:

The entire community raised their voices and shouted, and the people wept on that night. All the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the entire congregation said, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this desert. Why does the L-rd bring us to this land to fall by the sword; our wives and children will be as spoils. Is it not better for us to return to Egypt?" They said to each other, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt!" (*Sefer Bamidbar* 14:1-4)

In turn, our forebears' all-but complete capitulation was met by swift and angry words from the One True Judge:

The L-rd said to Moses, "How long will this people provoke Me? How much longer will they not believe in Me after all the signs I have performed in their midst? I will strike them with a plague and annihilate them; then I will make you into a nation, greater and stronger than they." (Ibid., 11-12)

Once again, however, Moshe interceded and saved our nation:

Now, please, let the strength of the L-rd be increased, as You spoke, saying. "The L-rd is slow to anger and abundantly kind, forgiving iniquity and transgression, Who cleanses [some] and does not cleanse [others], Who visits the iniquities of parents on children, even to the third and fourth generations." Please forgive the iniquity of this nation in

accordance with your abounding kindness, as You have borne this people from Egypt until now.” And the L-rd said, “I have forgiven them in accordance with your word.” (Ibid., 17-20)

Mishnah Ta’anit 4:6, and the subsequent discussion in the Babylonian Talmud, teach us that the Spies returned from their journey to *Eretz Yisrael* on the night of Tisha b’Av. Although the people were saved through Moshe’s intercession, their shameful response to the Spies’ report led to the Divine decree that forbade the *Dor Hamidbar* (Generation of the Desert) from entering *Eretz Yisrael*: “*B’tisha b’Av nigzar al avotainu she’lo yichnasu l’aretz.*” Our Sages note that *lail Tisha b’Av* (the night of the 9th of Av) was set aside for destruction ever since that woeful time. As such, the monumental failures of the Spies, and the faithless reaction of our ancestors, have continued to reverberate until our own historical moment.

We live in an age of *pirood* (separation) and *sinat chinam* (groundless hatred). Each one of us is labeled and defined by others as to what kind of Jew we are and where we stand on the religious spectrum of belief and observance. The result of this kind of thinking is alienation from our fellow Jews. Instead of banding together in *achdut* (unity) and tolerance, we distrust one another and perceive those who differ from us as less than ourselves. I believe that we can rightfully view this as “*Meraglim*-thinking,” since this is the exact kind of behavior that our ancestors manifested when Caleb and Joshua disagreed with the Spies’ report:

Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had scouted the land, tore their clothes. They 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.” The entire congregation threatened to pelt them with stones, but the glory of the L-rd appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the children of Israel. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 14:6-10, underlining my own)

Given the above, I believe that one of our main tasks as Jews today is to reject “*Meraglim*-thinking” out of hand and embrace an entirely different mode of behavior. To this end, we need to focus upon the famous idea of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook *zatzal* (1865-1935): “If we were destroyed [during the Second Holy Temple period], and the world was destroyed with us, due to baseless hatred - *sinat chinam*, we must return to rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with love without cause - *ahavat chinam*...” (*Orot HaKodesh* vol. III, p. 324, translation, <http://ravkooktorah.org/TISHA-AV-70.htm>, with my emendations)

May we be *zocheh* (merit) to integrate Rav Kook's words into our lives, so that the Jewish people, and the entire world, may finally flourish in love and devotion to the Master of the Universe. May this time come soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org> They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Megillat Esther* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3)