



THE MERAGLIM'S MISTAKE

In Parshas Shelach we are told the story of the *meraglim*. In an effort to discourage the Jews from entering Eretz Yisroel, they claimed that the natives were so powerful that they were unconquerable. In fact, they stated that "*chazak hu mimenu*," literally "the nation is stronger than Him," which was a veiled implication that even Hashem would be unable to overcome the Canaanites.

How could the spies have entertained such a thought? After all, they had witnessed a constant stream of miracles from Hashem. Negative elements were dealt with miraculously; for example, the Aron would destroy the ferocious desert snakes that came their way. Moreover, many positive things also came about through miracles, such as the *mon* and Miriam's well. How could the spies suggest that Hashem was no match for the inhabitants of Canaan?

Perhaps one can argue that although the spies had seen the destruction of the Egyptians, they believed the thirty-one kings of Eretz Yisroel were much more powerful. However, in Az Yashir it was stated that when they heard about *Krias Yam Suf*, the inhabitants of Canaan "melted" in fear from the Jews. How could the spies say that Hashem would be unable to conquer them?

TO CONSUME, OR BE CONSUMED?

Chassidus explains that the *meraglim* wanted to remain secluded from the world. They were aware that everything would change once they entered Eretz Yisroel: instead of receiving food from Heaven, they would be compelled to farm the land; instead of their clothes being tended to by

the *ananei hakavod*, they would need to toil on everything themselves. Once occupied with the mundane activities of ordinary life, no time or energy would remain to reflect on Hashem's greatness and attain high levels of spirituality.

The spies feared that the *artziyus* of the land would "consume" its inhabitants, making them coarse and lowly as well.

They alluded to this when they described the land as "*eretz ocheles yoshveha*," a land that consumes its dwellers. When a person eats, the food is absorbed into the body and becomes part of him. Similarly, the spies feared that the *artziyus*, the "earthiness" that would typify this future life, would "consume" the land's inhabitants, making them coarse and lowly as well.

Calev responded to their concerns by stating "*lachmeinu heim*," they are our bread: Not only won't the land consume us, but, if Hashem wishes, we will consume it and turn it into a vehicle for holiness. The *meraglim*, however, didn't want to deal with physicality, preferring instead to maintain their spiritual desert lifestyle.

LIMITED BY NATURE

The *meraglim* further extended their argument to the viability of conquering Eretz Yisroel. They reasoned that just as life in Eretz Yisroel would involve dealing with worldly matters, conquering that land would also follow a worldly, natural process.

The spies clearly saw the hand of Hashem in all the miraculous phenomena they had experienced in the desert. This was something they did not deny. However, they held that this was only true in the desert. Just as the *avodah* of Bnei Yisroel involved being separate from the world, Hashem similarly acted with them in a miraculous way, beyond the limits of nature.

Once they would arrive in Eretz Yisroel, however, all these miracles would end (and the land would "consume" them, putting an end to their spiritual progress). Similarly, entering that land would also involve natural means. And if that were indeed the case, conquering them was impossible; now that miracles were obsolete, they were no match for the natives.

PARADOXICAL CONQUEST

Calev's response to this was that "*tovah ha'aretz meod meod*," the land (*artziyus*) is very, very good. Hashem wants us to perform *mitzvos* specifically within the framework of physicality and the rules of nature.

The spies were willing to forgo the numerous *mitzvos* that can only be performed in Eretz Yisroel, as long as they could spend more time focusing on the divine. Calev, however, declared that it is "*eretz*," using the *gashmiyus* for *mitzvos*, that is "very good." Moreover, while the Jewish invasion of Eretz Yisroel would follow the natural order, that order would be imbued with a supernatural conduct.

This explains the method in which the Jews conquered Yericho (which subsequently opened up the rest of the land before them): they were told to circle the city's walls with the Aron, ultimately causing the walls to collapse. If this was supposed to be a heavenly feat, why have soldiers circle the walls, as if they were engaged in a military excursion? There should have been no need to do anything at all!

While the Aron consisted of specific measurements, those very measurements defied space. Similarly, while Eretz Yisroel

would be conquered using what appeared to be natural means, they were permeated with a supernatural conduct.

FOLLOWING THE RULES ... SORT OF

The story of the *meraglim* teaches us an important lesson.

A person might think that he is only connected to Hashem when learning Torah and when davening, when he is standing before Hashem and divests himself from physicality. Then, he is indeed beyond the boundaries of nature. However, once he enters the realm of business, things work differently. Then, he will cheat a bit here and infringe on someone's livelihood a bit there. After all, now he must follow the rules of nature, and that's how one makes a living!

Within the everyday world of business, we must realize that Hashem is operating *teva* on a plane that transcends *teva*.

It is true that we should not remain separate from the mundane; we must enter the world of business and follow its rules. However, within the everyday world of commerce, we must realize that Hashem is the one giving us the power to succeed, and He is operating *teva* on a plane that transcends *teva*.

For further learning see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, pp. 1041ff.

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