

SPECIALIZED SCRUTINY

This week's פרשה is centered around one of the Jewish People's biggest transgressions during their time in the wilderness- the sin of the spies (חטא המרגלים), where משה, questionably by G-d's command, sends twelve spies into Eretz Canaan "לראות את הארץ מה היא" *to see what the land is like*." The spies, after exploring the land for several days, make up a negative report about the land which scares the nation and causes them once again to regret leaving Egypt. Only through the efforts of the two righteous spies כלב and יהושע, can משה convince the Jewish People to continue on their journey and beg forgiveness from G-d.

I would like to focus on what I, based on many מפורשים, believe was the biggest sin the מרגלים committed; telling לשון הרע on ארץ ישראל. If we look in the פסוקים, it is clear that the spies' report is presented in a negative light:

וַיַּצִּיאוּ דְבַת הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר תָּרוּ אֹתָהּ, אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
(במדבר י"ג:ל"ב) *And they spread a [negative] report on the land they had spied in to Bnei Yisrael*

וַיִּבְכוּ הָעָם, בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיִּלְנוּ עַל-מֹשֶׁה וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן, כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
(י"ד: א'-ב') *And the nation cried out on that night and they complained to Moshe and Aharon*

So, we see that the spies' report is seen straight out in the פסוקים as a negative, and it had huge repercussions with the attitude of עם ישראל changing literally overnight to "מביא אתנו אל הארץ" *Why did G-d take us out to bring us to this [dangerous] land?* Some even go as far as to say that "הלילה ההוא" was the 9th of אב, a day forever marked in our calendars as a day of tragedy, as it also commemorates the destruction of both Temples and many other calamities- it would be appropriate that a day of mourning the loss of our land would be the same day that בני ישראל mourned having to enter that land.

Rashi at the beginning of the parsha (י"ג:ב'), asks about the juxtaposition of the story of the מרגלים with the last story of the previous parsha, that of מרים and אהרן's הרע לשון against משה רבינו. He answers that it shows us the evil of the spies, that even after seeing the results of the הרע לשון that מרים and אהרן said against משה, they still went ahead and slandered G-d's Promised Land in a negative report.

Rav Soloveitchik, in an essay entitled *The Singularity of the State of Israel* (published in *Reflections of the Rav*, edited by Rav Abraham Beisdin), takes this idea further by delving into another aspect of מרים חטא- the singularity of משה רבינו, whom she spoke against. According to the Rav, משה רבינו was a סגולה, a very special and unique person among the Jewish people on a much higher level than the rest of the nation. As a result, it was not appropriate for מרים to judge משה on the same level as any other Jew, even compared to the relatively higher levels of herself and אהרן. When משה passes away at the end of

we are told " *there was never another prophet like Moshe in Israel*" (דברים ל"ד:י') - no other נביאים, not even משה's brother and sister, were close to his high level, and it was therefore inappropriate for מרים and אהרן to judge משה as a regular Jew, without taking his high status into account. Furthermore, we see at the end of פרשת בהעלתך that מרים' לשון was negative and focused only on one of משה's faults without also discussing his amazing strengths. One of the biggest lessons in the first פרק of אבות, as taught by Rav Yehoshua Ben Parchia, is (אבות א'ו') "[and] judge all people for good" - והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות" lack of זכות was one of the more iniquitous parts of their sin, which led to מרים' צרעת.

Rav Soloveitchik continues by saying that these two elements were also amiss in the מרגלים' report on their trip to ארץ כנען. When telling בני ישראל of their findings, they neglected to mention and focus on the uniqueness and holiness of ארץ ישראל, and even forgot to mention the positive aspects of it, focusing only on the scary giants and negative parts of their trip. The spies should've learned from the story of מרים of the consequences of slander, especially against the land that G-d had promised us, but instead they ignored the סגולה of ארץ ישראל and blinded themselves to ignore any positives of dwelling there, and a result, they are dealt their just desserts and G-d eventually forgives עם ישראל for their loss of faith, and the Jewish nation continues on into the מדבר.

I believe that we must internalize the lesson of The Rav for our times as well. It is often very easy to look at the current State of Israel and see its faults. It is a secular country not run according to Torah law, there is a lot of promiscuity in parts of the country, etc- the list could go on and on. However, we've already from our פרשה how G-d feels about an attitude like this. When we think about מדינת ישראל, before judging it (if we are worthy to do so), we must remember that ארץ ישראל and those who live there are a סגולה to the rest of the world and are on a higher level that cannot be understood to those who try to question it. There are different challenges here than anywhere else in the world, and anyone who tries to generalize Israel as "any other country," is not only being unfair and inaccurate, but is most likely sinning. Furthermore, we've learned above from Rav Soloveitchik of the importance of judging each other favorably and looking at each other's strengths as much as we look at each other's faults. If we use these standards when assessing our fellow Jews, then all the more so we should use these standards when judging Israel, the land promised to אבינו by G-d, won back fair and square under the leadership of יהושע בן נון, returned to Jewish control in 1948 by the לישראל. We should remember the positives when thinking of Israel, remembering that it is **THE ONLY** country in the world run by Jewish People by Jewish standards, with a Chief Rabbi and national Kashrut supervision. We must remember that it is the only country in the world with religious Jews in the legislation, and also

the only country with a mandatory military draft which exempts religious students from serving, even as most of the Ultra-Orthodox world is complaining that the number of exemptions is being lowered. If we go on and are critical of Israel despite these and many more positives, and despite the fact that it is a סגולה and cannot be compared to anywhere else in the world, then maybe we should be concerned that we, too, could be bringing upon ourselves a plague similar to that of the מרגלים.

We should be זוכה to see all of ישראל עם giving the proper כבוד to ארץ ישראל, so that there will be no more slander against Israel, and through this זכות and the resulting positive attitude towards the Holy Land, we will see an increase in the return of Jews to our Promised Land, and through this, we will merit the coming of the גאולה very soon. Shabbat Shalom