

Volume II Issue #8

Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

Parshas Shlach 26 Sivan 5782

June 25, 2022

## On the Parsha

The Meraglim, the spies, were exceptional people. Rashi (Bamidbar 3:3) explains that the word “Anashim” which the Torah used to describe the Meraglim – indicates that, at the time, they were highly moral people. So what went wrong? How could they have attempted to undermine the entire purpose of coming to Eretz Yisroel and have made such a cataclysmic error by speaking negatively against Eretz Yisrael?

We can perhaps gain insight from one of the descriptions that the Meraglim had given of the land that they were sent to spy out. They described the land as, “*eretz ocheles es yoshveha*” – a land that devours its inhabitants. The Gemorah in Sotah (35a) tells us that the truth of the matter is that Hashem created a pandemic to divert the attention of the land’s residents so that the spies could go about their business undisturbed. The spies saw this and decided to look at it negatively.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt”l in his comments on the siddur derives a remarkable lesson. In the davening directly before the recitation of the Korbanos, the siddur states that a person should be a G-d-fearing person both in public and in private and that he should also always be “*dover emes bilvavo*” - speak truth in his heart. From the fact that the siddur felt the need to say that one should speak truth in his heart after it just said that one should be G-d fearing in public and private, Rav Chaim notes that it is possible for a person to fear heaven both publicly and privately, and yet still not speak truth in one’s own heart. This is possible because of the biases that we may harbor that can cloud our judgment.

In order to avoid catastrophic mistakes in judgment like what occurred with the Meraglim, we need to recognize that we have biases that affect both our perceptions and our decisions.

Our biases make us selectively gather and interpret evidence that may confirm a pre-conceived conclusion of ours. They also cause us to ignore evidence that might

disagree with what we want. At times, our biases and desires cause us to not admit the truth, even when we are directly confronted by it. In the case of the Meraglim, the meforshim explain that, on a subconscious level, they wished to remain in power. When Bnai Yisrael were to enter Eretz Yisrael, they feared that they might lose their leadership roles. This blinded them and influenced them to speak negatively against Eretz Yisrael.

True dedication to the ideal of *Emes* – also means recognizing and trying to eliminate the many biases that we have. Doing so will help us from making catastrophic errors in judgement.

## Chizuk - Inspiration

There are times when we can be inspired by observing examples of absolute integrity and honesty. Then there are times when we can be inspired toward Everyday Emes by seeing the consequences of actions and behaviors that we should avoid.

In one particular hospital, there was a patient on a heart-lung machine who was in a vegetative state. The attending physician stated that there was nothing further that could be done for the patient and that he should be disconnected from life-support.

A young resident who was present suggested that a certain operation be attempted on the chance that it may relieve the underlying condition. The Chief Physician, who was known for his medical acumen and brilliance, however, refused the young resident’s suggestion. The young resident brought his suggestion up again in front of the other senior physicians who said, “What do we have to lose?”

The operation was a success and the patient fully recovered. The Chief Physician however, never forgave the young resident and never spoke to him again. The Chief Physician eventually fell into obscurity. All of this happened, unfortunately, because he could not bring himself to admit that the young resident was right.

Sometimes, experts can not admit error which leads to a fall from grace.

## Halacha – Jewish Law

The Gemorah in Yevamos (63a) discusses the sad fact that Rav (an early Amorah who lived in Bavel after the

generation of the Tannaim) and his wife had a strained relationship. When Rav asked that lentils be prepared, she would prepare him peas. When Rav requested peas, she would prepare him lentils.

When their son Rav Chiya became of age, he would reverse his father's request when relaying it to his mother so Rav would get what he wanted and maintain shalom bayis. Rav told his son, "Apparently, your mother has improved."

Rav Chiya admitted to Rav, "It is I who reversed your request to her." Rav said to him, "... I should have thought of that idea myself. You, however, should not do so, as it is stated: 'They have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit sins...' (Yirmiyahu 9:4)."

Rav Nachum Yavrov zt"l explains in his work entitled, "Niv Sfasayim (Vol. II #2)" that the great sage Rav is telling Rav Chiya from this verse in Yirmiyahu as follows: Even though Rav Chiya, is technically not lying, as Rav Chiya is merely asking for lentils when he knows that he will receive peas, he is implying something untrue - that Rav himself had requested lentils which was not the case, and this could lead to the actual speaking of lies in other cases.

Rav Yavrov further elaborates that the Poskim deal with the question as to why Rav is telling Rav Chiya not to conduct himself in this manner if it is established that one is permitted to "change" from the truth mipnei hashalom - in order to maintain peace. There are a number of approaches.

- According to one understanding of the Yam Shel Shlomo (#46) the leniency of mipnei hashalom only applies on occasion, but not on a regular basis. In this case, Rav Chiya was changing his father's request on a regular basis.
- According to another understanding of the Yam Shel Shlomo, the leniency does not apply when performing a

shlichus (implementing the sender's instructions) and in this case Rav Chiya was implementing his father's instructions.

- The Meiri explains that the leniency is only permitted to prevent a catastrophic repercussion. But here, prior to Rav Chiya's intervention, Rav was dealing with his wife's rebellious act in a calm manner – therefore the leniency of lying to maintain peace would not apply and it is preferable not to adopt a method that could possibly lead to lying.

We see from all of the approaches above that the leniency of mipnei hashalom - lying to maintain peace is limited. It doesn't apply in the above scenario or any comparable ones.

## Mussar – Introspection

Please see below for a translation of Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l's selection on Emes from his Mussar Sefer Orchos Yosher (courtesy of OrchoTyosher.org)

Rabbeinu Bachya writes in Parshas Vayishlach, and his source is in Bereishis Rabba (78:14), that Yaakov Avinu tells his brother Eisav, "Until I meet my master in Seir."

Rabbi Abahu said, "We have searched the entire Torah and we have found no place [that states] that Yaakov Avinu travelled to meet Eisav in Seir in his entire life. Is it possible that Yaakov Avinu was a man of truth and deceived him? Rather, when was it that he comes to meet him [Eisav]? It will be in the future, and this is what it states (Ovadiah 1:21), 'And the saviors shall ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Eisav, and Hashem shall have the Melucha' - [the kingship where the entire world will recognize Hashem's rule]."

Even though he [Yaakov Avinu] acted according to the law, as it states in tractate Avodah Zara (25b), "When a Yisroel chances upon a non-Yisroel who inquires as to where he is headed, he should expand the distance of which he is travelling, nonetheless, Yaakov Avinu who was a man of truth did not say an actual falsehood. He intended that the meeting with Eisav would take place in the future, it is just that Eisav did not comprehend the statement.