

Shelach

Chasing after Honor

Avraham Pudles

Lakewood, NJ



"*Kulam anashim rashei Bnei Yisrael heima* – They were all distinguished men; heads of Bnei Yisrael were they." (Bamidbar 13:3)

The Torah tells us that the *miraglim* were not just regular people. According to most, they were the heads of their tribes; great *tzadikim* and the *gedolei hador*. No matter what you say about their intentions once they left for *Eretz Yisrael* – when the Torah first introduces the *miraglim*, Yehoshua and Calev were included in the group, showing how great these people really were. What caused them to fall so far in such a short amount of time to the level that they said, "We cannot go up to the nation (in *Eretz Yisrael*) for they are stronger than us!" - even with the help of Hashem, as the *Gemorah* in *Sotah* explains?

The *Mesilat Yesharim*, quoting the *Zohar*, writes that it was chasing after honor that brought down the *miraglim*. They were afraid that once *Bnei Yisrael* entered *Eretz Yisrael* that they would lose their status, and their jobs would no longer be necessary. They felt that they had to do all that they could to prevent the people from entering *Eretz Hakodesh*.

R' Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l writes in "*Sichot Musar*" that we can see how low a person will sink to make sure that there is no blemish to his honor. It can cause the greatest people to lose sight of their goals and stray off the correct path. The desire for honor, as R' Chaim explains, is the "poison which causes death" and you can become totally unaware and uncaring about the repercussions at hand. As the *Mishna* in *Avot* says: "Honor removes a person from this world."

"Who is called a *chacham* (wise person)? One who learns from everyone." (*Avot* 4:1) The *Bartenura* explains that the reason this person is deserving of the name *chacham* is because he is not concerned about his honor and will learn even from the lowest of people. This shows that his intentions are totally for the sake of Heaven. From here, and from the *miraglim*, we can learn a very important lesson. When we act like we are greater than others and chase after anything that raises our social status – our end will be a bitter plunge into the level of the lowest of lows, even levels of heresy as was the case here. However when we realize that it is only Hashem who is deserving of honor and that all people are created *B'tzelem Elokim*, everything we do will be *l'shem Shamayim*.

As Am Yisrael sits in exile, one of the things we must work on is having *Klal Yisrael* work together. If everyone has their own intentions and chases after their own honor, we might be stuck for a long time. Once we merit uniting Jews all over the world, and everything we do will be for the correct reasons – we will merit the coming of *Moshiach* and the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*.