

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Shelach

“SEND FOR YOURSELF MEN, THAT THEY MAY SPY OUT THE LAND OF CANAAN...” (BAMIDBAR 13:2)

ACCORDING TO RASHI, this *parasha* is written out of chronological order. In actuality, he tells us, the incident with the spies took place after – not before – the tragic *machlokes* of Korach. Rashi (see Sifsei Chachamim quoting Rabbenu Eliyahu Mizrachi) tells us that the Torah reversed the true order of events to draw attention to the juxtaposition of Miriam’s *tzara’as* with the story of the spies and to the important lesson to be learned from it: These spies saw that Miriam was punished for speaking *lashon hara* and they did not take heed.

Why change the sequence?

This explanation is puzzling. Why change the sequence? If the Torah would have kept the true chronological order – Miriam and Korach first and then the spies – wouldn’t we still have easily seen that the spies did not learn a lesson from Miriam’s punishment? Perhaps the lesson would have been even greater: They saw Korach speak negatively and rebel against Moshe, and they saw Miriam’s punishment, and yet they did not learn a lesson from these events. Why did the Torah need to reorganize history?

We are afflicted with a blind spot in our spiritual field of vision

Rashi, as explained by the Mizrachi, is revealing to us an amazing insight into the workings of the human mind. We are afflicted with a blind spot in our spiritual field of vision. We can notice the most hidden intellectual concepts and perceive the most delicate ideas. But when it comes to lessons in *mussar* and appropriate behavior, we are suddenly struck blind. The moral of the story can be staring us in the face, and yet we will not connect the dots and derive the message, unless someone takes a thick red marker and underlines the words for us. Our eternal nemesis, the *yetzer hara*, has the ability to distort our vision, and blind us to the correct path, so that we walk blissfully upon our way, oblivious to the obvious. The Torah had to break the chronological flow of history, set off some mental alarm bells and wake us up, to take note of the powerful *mussar* we can learn from the spies. Had the Torah not changed the order of events, even *Chazal* would have missed the obvious lesson.

This is a fallacy, a message sponsored by the yetzer hara

How critical it is for us to have friends and teachers to guide us when we stray from the proper path! We often feel secure in our perception of situations and smug in the righteousness of our actions. “If we need correction, we can do it without outside help,” we tell ourselves. “We will notice and self-administer any *mussar* lessons to be learned and improve ourselves.” This is a fallacy, a message sponsored by the *yetzer hara*. Our sages show us that great people, the spies, missed a crucial lesson and paid for it with their lives and the untold generations of suffering endured by our people. And even that lesson itself, how the spies were blind to the message, would have gone unnoticed by our illustrious sages, had the Torah not rearranged history to draw attention to it.

Let us not miss this lesson and instead may we take it to heart: our greatness lies in our ability to realize our human frailties, to love *mussar* and reproof, and to never feel complacent. Let us keep our eyes, ears and hearts open and awake to notice our shortcomings and welcome the constructive input of those who want to help us grow. In this way, we can hope to be guided to overcome our spiritual blind spots and see clearly the path to inner happiness, achieving our purpose and the complete realization of our incredible potential.