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3

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Parshah

The Financial Times headline said it all – ‘Theresa May’s hubris robs Britain of stability’ – The Independent called it ‘astounding arrogance’. No precedent does justice to the speed and depth of Theresa May’s political collapse. When she opted for a general election seven weeks ago, she had a poll lead that was larger than the Labour opposition’s entire share of the vote. The only question was whether her win would be comfortable or majestic.

The electorate reacted to her arrogance and complacency with disdain. She surely rues the day she became associated with the slogan ‘strong and stable’!!

להבדיל, this salutary lesson takes on a deeper meaning when we contemplate the equally rapid descent of the מרגלים from men of great spiritual stature to the ignominy of a painful death in the מגפה.

The Mirror Mashgiach R Yerucham Levovitz zt”l resolves an apparent conflict between two comments of Rashi. On the one hand, Rashi informs us that, at point of departure the spies were of pure motive – באותה שעה כשרים היו – and a few pesukim later, he infers that ‘מה ביאתם’ – in the same manner that they returned with evil design, their departure was similarly tainted.

To appreciate his response, we add an important sidebar. The Targum Yonasan explains the rationale for Moshe changing Hoshea’s name to Yehoshua with the following words – וכדי חמי משה ענוותנותיה – Moshe perceived Hoshea’s humility, and thereupon, altered his name. The significance of this attribute is central to the narrative. R’ Chaim Kanievsky Shlita explains this by way of a fascinating *chiddush* of the FR’ Yeshaya of Trani (the Mabit) in his monumental Hashkafa Sefer Beis Elokim. He states that at the time of *tehiyas hameisim*, the dead will be rejuvenated in order of their names. This explains רבינו משה’s reticence to add a yud at the beginning of his name which currently began with a hei, effectively delaying his תחיית המתים. However, adds the Mabit, that someone who achieves

true humility, in essence, spends his life ‘close to the earth’, aware of his frailties, and does not need to wait for his name to be called, thus Moshe was able to justify changing his name!

R’ Chaim Volozhiner zt”l asserts in his commentary to Pirkei Avos, that Moshe achieved his greatness in Torah exclusively as a result of his humility. His adduces this from the fact that of all his many qualities, the only one the Torah expressly singles out, is his *anava*, the implication being that this was the key to all his achievements. Indeed, R’ Chaim makes an astonishing claim – ואלו היה עכשיו - אדם עניו כמשה היה דאי זוכה לתורה בשלימות there to be a man alive today who is as humble as Moshe, he would certainly merit Torah in its entirety!!

In a fascinating aside, R’ Moshe of Coucy (the Semag)¹ counts arrogance as one of the 365 negative commandments – he writes that as he was finalising this seminal work, he was minded not to include haughtiness, for, as he put it, רבינו משה לא חיברו, Our Master Moshe (the Rambam) didn’t include it, then ‘I read in a dream, a nightly vision, you have omitted the main point! the *pasuk* ‘השמר לך פן תשכח את ה’ – be exceedingly careful, lest you forget Hashem, I reflected in the morning, and decided to incorporate it’.

To the extent that a person is genuinely able to be self-effacing, to minimise his own self-importance, he can act as a conduit for רצון השם.

Nowhere is this quality more essential that when one acts as a *shaliach*, an agent for another. The notion that I am merely acting

on behalf of another – וחוקה שליח עושה שליחותו – there is a Halachic assumption that an agent will endeavour to discharge his obligation with integrity, needs to be the motif that is our constant companion.

The Arizal reminds us that when we perform a mitzvah, we are, in essence, Hashem’s agents, charged with carrying out His mission, and by virtue of that connection to Him, we are therefore imbued with the purity and strength necessary to withstand the blandishments and temptations of sin. The maxim שלוליו של אדם כמותו - ‘the act of an agent is deemed to be the act of the commander’ acquires a new, profound significance!!

We can now return to R. Yerucham’s comments – the spies were indeed men of stature, yet their mission was doomed to fail, thus negative intent was imputed from the outset. How so? One crucial word right at the beginning of the Parsha enlightens us.

Hashem tells Moshe – שלח לך – you decide – I am not commanding you – in other words, this is not a mitzva, a cosmically connected act – anyone you send will not be my agent, but yours!!! No Divine protection afforded by the connection that a מצוה offers, their subconscious ego will inevitably trip them up irrespective of how great they are – אלמלא – without the heavenly help that IS the connection that a mitzva provides – אינו יכול – it is an absolute impossibility.

¹ ל”ת ס”ד

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