

Shelach: Unjust Criticism

- Nisson Shulman.

Proximity of Meraglim to Miriam's punishment. Criticism even if true, is wrong. Moshe Rabbenu and Yeshayahu Hanavi caught in this failing. Leading erring Jews back, gently. Rambam. Today's most important lesson to learn, is Haverim kol Yisrael.

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Rashi indicates that the ten meraglim who brought a false report were really great men. Each was a prince of his tribe. And yet they were reshaim? How so?

The answer is to be found in the proximity of this parsha to that of Miriam's criticism of Moshe and her punishment. She brought diba raah. The meraglim, apparently, in the same way, were constantly criticizing their followers. They were pessimists, not only about whether we could conquer the land. After all, they too had seen the splitting of the sea! They knew that if God wanted to, He could do anything! They lived through the Ten Plagues! But their problem was that they didn't think the people were worthy of God's favor and miracles.

Our sages warned us to be constantly on guard against criticizing the am kadosh, criticizing our people unjustly.

In fact, they warned us even against criticizing our people justly! Even when justified, such as in the case of Moshe and Yeshayahu, they warned us against criticizing our people.

When Moshe was called to his mission at the burning bush, he objected with two statements. First, Mi Anochi. To this the Almighty responded, ki eheye imach. But then Moshe continued to object, saying vechi otzi et Benei Yisrael meEretz Mitzrayim. Rashi points out Moshe's objection, beeyze zechut. Moshe was criticized because he thought the people did not merit redemption, and Hashem promised him that they would all merit standing around Sinai to receive the Torah, Behotziacha et haam miMitzrayim taavdun et haE-kim al hahar haze (Shemot 3:11-12).

Yeshayahu fell into the same trap. He stated, Betoach am temeif sefasayim anochi yoshev, and the angel flew to him with hot coals to touch his lips and to purify them from having criticized our people.

Hazal saw this as a failing. We are an am kadosh. We have failings, but they can be overcome. A leader must raise the people, encourage them, and do so by gentleness. The Rambam, telling of his work in Egypt, indicated that there is enormous work to be done, but with Hashem's help, by gentle urging the people will be brought closer.

We must encourage, and help and heal. Chiding and reviling will do nothing and achieve only negative results. We must have faith in Hashem: Im hafetz banu adoshem. But we must also have faith in our people, Veratza (davka) banu, vehevi (davka) otanu, alo naale: Let us rise, spiritually.

Let us grow more dedicated, closer, spiritually greater, and we shall surely inherit the land!

And - let us also remember that inheriting the land will also help us grow closer and spiritually greater! Let not the land come between us! Let us not, at a time of crisis like the present, criticize and castigate segments of our people, even if they do not agree with us. Let those who seek deeper religious commitment demonstrate indeed - demonstrate in their own lives and conduct how to live in such a way as to sanctify Hashem's Name!

At a time like the present the most important lesson to take to heart is that Haverim kol Yisrael, venomar amen! Then indeed with miracles happen that we would never dream about! Let us have faith in God's miracles, and let us also have faith in our people that we can deserve them, and we shall deserve them....