



An Amazing Revelation from the Arizal

The Neshamos of the Twelve Shevatim Attached to the Meraglim to Assist Them but Abandoned Them before They Sinned

This week, we read parshas Shelach, which contains one of the more difficult episodes in the Torah to comprehend, the story of the “meraglim.” Hence, we will explore the epic failure of the “meraglim,” who were sent to scout the land (Bamidbar 13, 1): **“וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, שלח לך אנשים ויתורו את ארץ כנען אשר אני נותן לבני ישראל, איש אחד איש אחד למטה. Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, “Send forth for yourself men, and let them spy out Eretz Canaan that I give to Bnei Yisrael; one man each from his fathers’ tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them.”**

The text makes it quite clear that the “meraglim” were not ordinary men. The men that were delegated were leaders of the people, men of stature. The Torah attests to this fact in the following passuk (ibid. 3): **“וישלח אותם משה ממדבר פארן—על פי ה' כולם אנשים ראשי בני ישראל המה” Moshe sent them forth from Midbar Paran by the word of Hashem; they were all distinguished men; they were leaders of Bnei Yisrael.** This makes the events that followed all the more surprising. How did men of such outstanding character fall prey so easily to the yetzer hara? It induced them to speak ill of the special land that HKB”H had promised to give to the descendants of the holy Avos. Clearly, the “meraglim” were subjected to a daunting test that they were not able to withstand.

It is evident from the following pesukim that Moshe anticipated the challenge they would face (ibid. 16): **“אלה שמות האנשים אשר שלח משה לתור את הארץ ויקרא משה להושע בן נון**

”יהושע—these are the names of the men whom Moshe sent to spy out the land; and Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua. Rashi comments: **He prayed for him: May G-d save you from the plot of the “meraglim.”** In other words, the task they faced was so trying that Moshe felt it necessary to pray even on behalf of Yehoshua, his trustworthy disciple.

This raises an interesting question that bothers many of the commentaries. Why didn't Moshe Rabeinu, the foremost of the neviim, see fit to pray for the success of all the “meraglim”—so that HKB”H would save all of them from the trap set for them by the troublesome, despicable yetzer? As we know, due to this epic sin, the people were not permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael as originally planned.

A Wonderful Chiddush from the Arizal

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a teaching from our great teacher, the Arizal, in Sha'ar HaPesukim. There, he explains simply why Moshe only prayed on behalf of Yehoshua. He was worried that the “meraglim” might kill Yehoshua if he attempted to prevent them from discouraging Yisrael from entering the land. Here are his sacred words:

“נוכל לפרש בדרך פשוט, ענין ויקרא משה להושע בן נון, כי סיבת תפלתו עליו בדוקא הוא, לפי שהם היו יודעים נבואת אלדד ומידד, שהוא משה מת ויהושע מכניס לארץ, ויחשבו המרגלים כי יבלבל עצתם ויסתור דבריהם בפני משה וישראל לתועלתו להכניסם לארץ, ואולי יתייעצו בהליכתם להורגו, ולכן

“מנשה גדי בן סוסי—and not in association with shevet Ephraim: “למטה אפרים הושע בן נון”. As explained, the neshamah of Yosef only attached itself to the delegate from shevet Menashe and not to Yehoshua, the delegate from shevet Ephraim. Perforce, Moshe had to pray a special tefilah to save Yehoshua from the plot and fate of the “meraglim.”

Accordingly, the Arizal explains the significance of the name change introduced by Moshe. He changed his disciple’s name to יהושׁע, in keeping with his tefilah: “י”ה—יושיעך מעצת המרגלים—an entreaty for divine protection and salvation. (Note: The name of G-d employed in this tefilah is יהי.) Now, the head of Moshe’s shevet, shevet Levi, had not yet attached to any shevet. After all, shevet Levi did not participate in the mission of the “meraglim,” since they were not allotted a portion of Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, by naming his pupil Yehoshua, Moshe was praying that HKB”H would send the neshamah of Levi—which should have rightfully attached to Moshe—to attach to Yehoshua, who was like a son to him. He felt that the attachment of Levi’s neshamah would help his pupil withstand the influence of the “meraglim.”

The Name יהי Alludes to the Leviim Who Sang on the Fifteen Steps

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to grab onto the coattails of the Arizal and elaborate on the choice of the name **Yehoshua**. As explained, with this name Moshe sought salvation from the name יהי, by having the neshamah of Levi attach to Yehoshua. Now, we learn in the Mishnah (Midos 2, 5) that in the Beis HaMikdash, there were fifteen steps ascending from the Ezras Nashim—where the women stood—to the Ezras Yisrael—where the men stood: וחמש עשרה מעלות עולות לעזרת ישראל, כנגד “וחמש עשרה מעלות שבתהלים, שעליהן הלויים אומרים בשיר.” We learn from this Mishnah that those fifteen steps correspond to the fifteen Songs of Ascents—Shir HaMa’alos—recorded by David HaMelech in sefer Tehillim (Mizmorim 120-134). Also, that is where the leviim stood when they sang on the festival of Succos, during the joyous water ceremony—Simchas Beis HaSho’eivah. On each step, they sang one of the Shir HaMa’alos. Concerning that joyous ceremony, we have learned in the Mishnah (Succah 51a):

“חסידיים ואנשי מעשה היו מרקדין בפניהם באבוקות של אור שבידיהן, ואומרים לפניהם דברי שירות ותשבחות, והלויים בכינורות ובנבלים ובמצלתיים ובחצוצרות ובכלי שיר בלא מספר, על חמש עשרה מעלות היורדות מעזרת ישראל לעזרת נשים, כנגד חמש עשרה המעלות שבתהלים, שעליהן לויים עומדין בכלי שיר ואומרים שירה.”

Chassidim and men of good deeds would dance before them with flaming torches in their hands, and say before them words of songs and praises. And the leviim, with their harps, lyres, cymbals, trumpets and countless other musical instruments, stood on the fifteen steps that led down from the “Ezras Yisrael” to the “Ezras Nashim,” which corresponded to the fifteen “Shir HaMa’alos” in Tehillim. For on them the leviim would stand with their musical instruments and utter song.

This is also described in Rashi’s commentary on the first of the fifteen Shir HaMa’alos (Tehillim 120, 1): **Shir HaMa’alos. It was to be recited by the leviim on the fifteen steps descending from the Ezras Yisrael to the Ezras Nashim. There are fifteen psalms included here in the Shir HaMa’alos (Songs of Ascents).** In the Ritva’s commentary on the Pesach Haggadah, he explains that this is the rationale for enumerating the fifteen good “ma’alos” in the Haggadah (Dayeinu).

It appears that we can deduce from the words of the Ritva why there were specifically fifteen steps in the Beis HaMikdash. Let us refer to an elucidation in the Gemara (Menachos 29b) related to the passuk (Yeshayah 26, 4): “כי ביה ה’ צור עולמים”—**for in יהי, Hashem, is the strength of the worlds.** The Gemara teaches us that Olam HaBa was created with the letter “**yud**,” and Olam HaZeh was created with the letter “**hei**”—the two letters that form the divine name יהי. Now, seeing as the Beis HaMikdash provided kedushah and life to the entire universe and both worlds, there were fifteen steps in the Beis HaMikdash, corresponding to the name יהי, with which both worlds were created. (Note: The numerical value of the letter “**yud**” is ten; and the numerical value of the letter “**hei**” is five. Their sum equals fifteen.)

We can now begin to comprehend the explanation of the Arizal. Moshe renamed his pupil יהושׁע in order to draw the neshamah of Levi to him via the divine name יהי. Let

us explain. Through their singing on the fifteen steps in the Beis HaMikdash, the leviim invoked the name **יה**, with which the two worlds were created. Therefore, it is fitting that this name alludes to the neshamah of the head of shevet Levi, whose descendants appealed to this name.

The Neshamos of the Shevatim Left the Meraglim when They Decided to Speak Ill of Eretz Yisrael

Following this sublime path of reasoning, we will continue to explore the revelation of our mentor, the Arizal. What exactly happened with the neshamos of the original shevatim that attached to the “meraglim”? In Sha’ar HaGilgulim (Intro. 5), the Arizal explains that there is a big difference between the reincarnation of a neshamah—a “gilgul”—and the attachment of a neshamah—an “ibur.” A gilgul comes to rectify a blemish or shortcoming from its prior incarnation. That soul enters a person’s body on the day of its birth and cannot leave it until the day of its death. It experiences and endures all the afflictions suffered by the physical body, including the suffering associated with death.

Occasionally, however, the neshamah of a tzaddik descends to Olam HaZeh and attaches to a person to help him through a difficult trial or situation; it has not come for its own sake or to rectify its own blemishes. In this situation, the neshamah does not enter the body at birth, it enters merely as an “ibur”—to assist the person temporarily in a time of need. Therefore, it is not compelled to endure the suffering of that particular body. Now, if the neshamah of the tzaddik derives pleasure and pride from the person’s behavior and actions, it remains with him for that short period of time. On the other hand, chas v’shalom, if the person sins and behaves improperly, the neshamah abandons the body prematurely—before it becomes tainted by the person’s flaws and transgressions. It announces (Bamidbar 16, 26): **“סורו נא מעל אהלי האנשים הרשעים האלה”**—**turn away now from the tents of these wicked men.**

Accordingly, the Arizal explains that the neshamos of the shevatim did not enter the “meraglim” as gilgulim but rather as iburim. They merely attached to them temporarily to help them withstand the difficult trial ahead of them. Hence, when the “meraglim” opted to speak ill of Eretz

Yisrael, the neshamos of the original shevatim left them even before they sinned; thus, they remained untainted.

In this light, the Arizal interprets that which is written after the return of the “meraglim” (ibid. 13, 26): **“וילכו”**—**they went and came to Moshe and Aharon.** Note the specific language of the passuk: Why does it say **“וילכו”**—**they went?** After all, they had just returned, as it is written (ibid. 25): **“ויושובו מתור הארץ”**—**they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days.** Hence, the passuk should have merely said: **“They came to Moshe and Aharon.”** Thus, the term **“וילכו”**—**they went**—relates to the neshamos of the shevatim, who left the “meraglim” and returned to Gan Eden. Whereas, the words **“they came to Moshe and Aharon”** relate to the “meraglim,” who returned with their disparaging report.

The Maor V’Shemesh Reconciles the Righteousness of the Meraglim

At this point, it gives me great pleasure to present a wonderful insight from the Maor V’Shemesh. He addresses the apparent contradiction and discrepancy concerning the stature of the “meraglim.” At the beginning of their mission, the Torah attests to the fact that they were distinguished men, leaders of the people: **“כולם אנשים ראשי בני ישראל המה”**. In fact, Rashi comments that whenever Scriptures employs the term **“אנשים”**, **it expresses importance; for, at that point in time, they were honorable.** In other words, at the outset, before they embarked on the mission, they were still upright, reputable men. Subsequently, however, it states (ibid. 26): **“They went and came to Moshe and Aharon.”** Here Rashi comments: **Why does the passuk state that “they went”? To compare their going to their coming. Just as their coming was with an evil intent, so, too, their going was with an evil intent.** In other words, already when they embarked on the mission, their intent was no longer honorable.

Based on what we have learned from the Arizal, the Maor V’Shemesh reconciles the contradiction very nicely. When they were initially chosen for the mission, the passuk uses the phrase **“כולם אנשים”**; Rashi comments that

this suggests that they were all honorable at that juncture. He was not referring to the actual “meraglim,” but rather to the neshamos of the shevatim that had attached to them; they were thoroughly righteous, consummate tzaddikim. The “meraglim” themselves, without their “iburim” were flawed; therefore, the Torah compares their going to their coming—both were characterized by evil intent. This concludes his explanation.

Let us add a fantastic point in support of this explanation. In summary, the Torah initially says: **“כולם אנשים ראשי בני ישראל—*they were all distinguished men, heads of Bnei Yisrael were they.*** We learned from the Arizal that the description “heads of Bnei Yisrael” alludes to the neshamos of the shevatim that attached to them. Therefore, Rashi commented appropriately that **they were honorable at that time**, due to the presence of the neshamos of the shevatim that had attached to them. At the end of the expedition, the Torah says: **“They went and came to Moshe and Aharon.”** Here, the Arizal explains that **“they went”** indicates that the neshamos of the shevatim left them. Therefore, comparing their going to their coming was also appropriate, since they themselves, without the attachment of the neshamos of the shevatim, went and returned with the same truly evil scheme.

Now, let us return to the words of the Arizal. In this manner, he interprets the praise HKB”H lavishes upon Caleiv ben Yefuneh from shevet Yehudah (ibid. 14, 24): **“ועבדי כלב עקב היתה רוח אחרת עמו וימלא אחריו—*but my servant Caleiv, because a different spirit was with him, he followed Me wholeheartedly.***

The Arizal explains: **The other “meraglim” were imbued with a different spirit related to the shevatim that had attached to them; but they didn’t follow after Me, and they left. This one, however, from the very outset, had a different spirit related to the “ibur” of Yehudah with him, and he didn’t sin. Therefore, he followed after Me and completed** (the mission properly), **at the end, like at the beginning. The reason for these two** (that did not sin) **is as follows: Yehoshua was aided by Moshe’s tefilah and the fact that he gave him this name** (Yehoshua) **on a permanent basis that would**

remain with him. And Caleiv was aided by the tefilah he prayed, as he prostrated himself on the gravesites of the Avos in Chevron; and (as a result) he did not sin with evil thoughts.

Yosef Hinted to His Brothers that They Would Reincarnate into the Meraglim

It now gives me great pleasure to share with you, my brothers, the wonderful, incredible nuances of the Torah, as revealed to us by the Arizal. When Yosef’s brothers went down to Mitzrayim to purchase grain during the drought, he says to them (Bereishis 42, 9): **“מרגלים אתם—*לראות את ערות הארץ באתם*—*you are “meraglim”; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!*** This remark is, indeed, surprising. Although Yosef intended to make them squirm and suffer for the sake of their atonement (for the sin of selling him); nevertheless, Yosef was the paradigm of a tzaddik and surely would not have violated the kedushah of his speech. So, how could he have uttered an out and out lie; he was fully aware that they were not “meraglim”?

Yet, based on what we have learned from the Arizal, Yosef HaTzaddik actually spoke the truth. With that apparent accusation, he was hinting to his brothers that they were destined to attach to the “meraglim,” who were delegated to scout out Eretz Yisrael in the future. Thus, what Yosef was really saying was: **“מרגלים אתם לראות את ערות הארץ באתם—*you are going to attach to the “meraglim” in the future, who are going to see Eretz Yisrael as a frightening, undesirable place.***

In keeping with this sacred interpretation, let us interpret the response of the shevatim to Yosef (ibid. 11): **“לא היו עבדיך—*מרגלים*—*your servants have never been “meraglim.”*** They responded that they took no part in the sin of the “meraglim.” They insisted that they would abandon the “meraglim” before they sinned, so as not to participate in the sedition. Notwithstanding, we will endeavor to explain Yosef’s purpose for mentioning to his brothers that they were destined to attach to the “meraglim.”

Concerning the profound intent of Yosef HaTzaddik, I had a wonderful idea. In Tiferes YehoNasan (Mikeitz), the great Rabbi YehoNasan Eibeschutz, zy”a, provides us with

a true gem. The passuk says (ibid. 8): **”ויכר יוסף את אחיו והם לא הכירוהו—Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him.** In Likutei Torah (Melachim 1), the Arizal teaches us that the neshamah of Yosef attached to his descendant Yeravam ben Nevat, from shevet Ephraim; however, before Yeravam sinned with avodah-zarah, Yosef’s neshamah abandoned him.

Accordingly, Rabbi Yehonasan explains that this is why the shevatim wanted to kill Yosef, but ultimately sold him into slavery instead. It was because they foresaw via their “ruach hakodesh” that the neshamah of Yosef would attach itself to Yeravam ben Nevat. Hence, they thought it best to remove him from the congregation of Yisrael and have him become an Egyptian. They did not, however, see that before Yeravam turned to avodah-zarah, the neshamah of Yosef left him. Yosef, on the other hand, saw future events more accurately and completely. As per the Arizal, Yosef foresaw that all of the shevatim would attach to the “meraglim.” In contrast to his brothers, however, he also saw that their neshamos would leave the “meraglim” before they sinned by issuing the disparaging report on Eretz Yisrael. Thus, he knew that they did not participate in the sedition.

This then is the implication of that which is written: **”Yosef recognized his brothers.”** Yosef recognized that his brothers were destined to attach to the “meraglim,” who spoke lashon hara regarding Eretz Yisrael. Nevertheless, he did not punish them on that account, because he

recognized that they did not participate in the sin of the “meraglim.” On the other hand, the text informs us: **”But they did not recognize him.”** They thought that Yosef’s neshamah would remain with Yeravam to the very end; for that reason, they sold him into slavery.

We now have cause to rejoice, because we have been enlightened! We can now comprehend the profound intent of Yosef HaTzaddik. His brothers sold him into slavery, because they foresaw that he was destined to attach to Yeravam ben Nevat, who ended up worshipping avodah-zarah. Therefore, he rebuked them: **אתם לראות את מרגלים הארץ באתם—**you, too, are going to be “iburim”; you are going to attach to the “meraglim,” who are going to see the land in a negative light.

To which they replied justifiably, as Yosef knew they would: **”לא היו עבדיך מרגלים.”** They asserted that they would not be culpable for the sin of the “meraglim,” because their neshamos would leave them prior to the sin. In this manner, he informed them that they had judged him improperly. While it was true that he was destined to attach to Yeravam to help him overcome the yetzer of avodah-zarah, he did not remain with Yeravam. Just as they would leave the “meraglim” prior to the sin, so, too, he would leave Yeravam prior to the sin. With this awareness, the shevatim made peace with Yosef and acknowledged his status as Tzaddik Yesod Olam.

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