

Sblach

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This is officially the 2,000th edition of Perceptions, *boruch Hashem*, a personal milestone. It is hard to believe that I have done this 2,000 times. Thank You God for the opportunity, all the incredible insights, and the pleasure of sharing them. I wonder if anyone who received the first one is still here for this issue.

I want to thank Rabbi Yehudah Landy, *sblita*, for first approaching me about writing a *parsha* page for his new Neve Tzion Alumni web page back in 1993. Perceptions was born from that request, and it was there that Torah.org, then called Project Genesis, discovered it and contacted me about sharing it with them.

I very much appreciate Torah.org for weekly publishing Perceptions since the beginning, introducing me to so many readers I otherwise would never have met. Thank you also to my editors over the years who helped me as a *chesed* and labor of love (including my own father, *z"l*, and mother).

And of course I thank *you*, my readers, without whom I'd only be writing only for myself every week, which is not nearly as inspiring.

Ironically, it is also *Parashas Meraglim*. When I first began writing Perceptions back in 1993, the *parsha* of the spies was no more special to me than any other *parsha*. I was already living in *Eretz Yisroel* at the time, which considering I had once not liked the place at all, was significant. But I had yet to get involved with End of Days material, or to appreciate the centrality of the land in general and its importance at this time of history specifically.

Now it feels like some kind of anniversary for me every time the *parsha* comes around. I learned that Jewish history made a serious turn when the spies came back

and delivered their evil report about the land, and we've been suffering for it ever since. The generation of the spies is long gone, but their impact is alive and well and holding us back until this very day.

Sometimes we have suffered because the exile has been so hard, making a life of Torah and *mitzvos* difficult. Sometimes we have suffered because the exile has been so good, making it difficult to keep our eye on the Torah ball while being distracted by the niceties of *Olam HaZeh*—This World. The body of Judaism has remained over the millennia somewhat, but the soul has been sucked right out of us either because of the bad, or because of the good.

But after writing on the *parsha* about 38 times, what else is there to say? I've always felt it was kind of cheating to republish earlier versions of Perceptions, even though many of the readers have changed over the years. Mostly I felt I was cheating Torah that always has something new to say, some new insight to share, whether I do or not.

Someone recently asked me if, after writing over 100 books and thousands of essays, I ever get Writer's Block. I told him, "How can I? If I had to make everything up on my own, I could see how the well of ideas could run dry. But I draw from the well of Torah, an endless stream of knowledge and ideas. That, together with Divine assistance, I just have to put pen to paper, fingers to keyboard, and let Divine Providence take of the rest."

That is as good a place as any to begin discussing what went wrong with the spies.

Shabbos Day

FROM THE SIMPLE reading of the story, it seems as if the spies were just some great people headed off on a great mission. It sounds as if things only went wrong after they reached *Eretz Yisroel*, at which time 10 of them capitulated to their fear of the new and tried to dissuade the nation from marching forward.

Until that is, you pay closer attention to the cracks. The first one, that God did not initiate the mission, lead to this comment by *Rasbi*:

"Send for yourself: According to your own way of thinking. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you can send. Since the Jewish people had come and said, 'Let us send men ahead of us,' as it says, '*All of you approached me...*' (*Devarim* 1:22), Moshe spoke with the *Shechinah* and it said, 'I told them that it is good, as it says, '*I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt...*' (*Shemos* 3:1). By their lives I will give them the opportunity to err through the words of the spies, so that they will not

inherit it.” (*Rashi, Bamidbar 13:1*)

Well, that certainly tipped off Moshe *Rabbeinu*. We see this from the fact that he renamed Hoshea, Yehoshua, *which* Rashi explains means:

“He prayed on his behalf, ‘May God save you from the counsel of the spies.’” (*Rashi, Bamidbar 13:16*)

And no one else noticed? No one said, “Hey, Hoshea. . .or Yehoshua. . .whatever your name is! Why did Moshe change your name now?”

Or did they notice, ask, and Yehoshua decided to keep the name change personal, only answering, “I don’t know. Maybe because Moshe *Rabbeinu* likes the new name more. . .”

Then of course there is the crack that *Rashi* tells us about, but it is not clear if the spies noticed it:

“They went, and they came to Moshe and Abaron and all the congregation of the Children of Israel in the desert of Paran, to Kadesh. They brought them back a report, as well as to the entire congregation, and they showed them the fruit of the land.” (*Bamidbar 13:26*)

“What is meant by, ‘*They went*’? To compare their going with their coming. Just as their return was with evil intent, so was their departure with evil intent.” (*Rashi*)

Did they really conspire from the beginning to sabotage entry into *Eretz Yisroel*, and the mission was just a pretext to later justify their complaints and “suggestions”? Or, was this a case of something going on so deep in the heart that the conscious mind doesn’t notice it until it later surfaces?

We all know that feeling. You know, when you don’t really want to do something but you can’t just get out of it, so you go along with it until you can find an out. Sometimes our acting job is so good that we even convince ourselves that we’re in when really, in our heart of hearts, we don’t want anything to do with it. Was it the same for the spies?

The answer comes from somewhere else in the *Chumash*, from some time else in history. But it also had to do with spies, except that time the 10 tribal leaders were not spies, just accused of being so by the viceroy of Egypt, a.k.a. Yosef *HaTzaddik*, their long lost and thought-to-be-dead brother. The *GR”A* points it on the verse:

“And Yosef remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them, and he said to them, ‘You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land.’” (*Bereishis 42:9*)

Seudas Shlishis

ACCORDING TO THE *Gaon* of Vilna, the Torah tells us that Yosef remembered his dreams to inform us that all that Yosef was about to do was not personal revenge, but doing his part to fulfill the will of God. Unlike his brothers, Yosef had seen his dreams as messages from God about His plans for the future. Seeing them come true before his eyes and being in a position to fulfill what he dreamed, he set a course of action to do exactly that.

If you look at it and analyze it though, even the harsh treatment is over the top. To make a long story short, Yosef wanted to be discovered. But though he was prepared to help the brothers make that discovery, he was not prepared to hand it to them on a silver platter. They had to work towards it, not for Yosef's entertainment but for their own *tikun*.

But there is something they call today "motivated perception," which basically means that a person *sees* what they *want* to see, but not necessarily what they're looking at. It is true that Yosef had changed significantly in the 12 years he had been gone, and he was probably well disguised in Egyptian garb. Still, it seems from the *Ohr HaChaim*, they should have been able to at least wonder about the man standing before them making absurd and false accusations.

"Now Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." (Bereishis 42:6)

Not only because, the *Ohr HaChaim* explains, Yosef was so well-disguised, but their assumptions about what God wanted and was doing did not allow them to perceive their brother. People mistakenly believe that their perceptions are objective when in fact they are the brain's interpretation of reality based upon its assumptions about reality. Faulty assumptions result in faulty perceptions, or at least incomplete ones.

This is why we say in our prayers on *Shabbos*, "Purify our hearts so that we can serve You with truth." Did it ever cross a person's mind to serve God with falsehood? No, but they have done it anyhow. Just think about how many times people have marched out to do deeds in the "Name of God" which, in fact, were the exact opposite of what God wanted.

What we're really saying is, "God, help me to get the proper assumptions about life so that my perceptions will be accurate and I can do what You truly want, not my personal and biased interpretation of what you want." Falsehood can provide some initial security, but it comes back to haunt us, as it did Yosef's brothers and, much

later in time, the spies.

That's how a whole generation could believe that rejecting *Eretz Yisroel* would be okay to God. They misunderstood what He really wanted, which warped their perception of reality until reality came crashing down on them, as it always does, and always will.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 53

IT'S THE DIFFERENCE between only knowing *Ain od Milvado* and living according to it. We "know" God is one. We "believe" He runs the world. We "understand" that everything is a function of *Hashgochah Pratis*, and that there are no accidents. Yet our lives don't completely reflect all of this.

People who have *tzuris* (troubles) wonder about their level of *yiddishkeit*, thinking that God is disrupting their lives to send them a message to improve. Others whose lives seem to be running relatively smoothly assume that God is okay with their level of spiritual life, and that the little *tzuris* they have is only "natural" and not *mussar*. So they just continue with the status quo because God "seems" okay with it.

While there is no question that God never expects more from a person than they can achieve, there is also no question that He expects everyone to live up to what they *can* achieve. He also expects people who know better to act better, and when necessary to lead others who do not know what they do.

The *GR*"A says that, even though there were no prophets to tell the Jewish people it was time to go back to *Eretz Yisroel* in Koresh's time, there were enough signs to indicate it. But the bulk of the nation chose to act as if there were no such signs, and this shut the door on redemption after only 52 years of exile. They viewed the events as nothing significant because that was the way they wanted to see them.

We didn't expect it, and we did not really see it coming, but history today is changing rapidly, especially in *Eretz Yisroel*. We don't have prophets to help us interpret the events, but we have signs telling us the direction of history. Everyone will see them differently because everyone has different assumptions about life. Now more than ever, it is important to check their accuracy, to make sure that when we serve God, we serve Him with truth, and deserve to be redeemed because of it.