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Parshat Shelach: On Spies, Daughters, and Claiming our Inheritance

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Parshat Shlach is replete with tales of mutiny, betrayal, and disobedience; the tale of the spies, the punishment of the people, and the story of the Shabbat desecrator.

Yet, there is a moment right at the beginning of the Parsha – where one little word has a critical impact in our understanding of the story of the *meraglim*, the spies.

The Parsha begins with the verse:

“Send men **for yourself**, and they will scout out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to Bnei Yisrael”
שְׁלַח-לְךָ אַנְשִׁים, וַיִּתְרוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי
נֹתֵן, לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

The question is what is the significance of that word – לך – for yourself?

The beauty of our interpretive tradition gives us a multitude of explanations of exactly what this simple two-letter word means in this context.

One famous idea quoted by Rashi from Tractate Sotah 34b points to the word *Lecha* as Hashem chastising Moshe and saying, “You Moshe, you need to send spies, but were you to have faith in me, you would not need to send these men”.

Another idea, taught to us by the Seforno, is that Moshe himself should be the one to choose the spies, and not to allow the people to choose these men.

But perhaps the most surprising interpretation comes to us from the Kli Yakar – Rebbe Shlomo Efraim MiLuntshiz, a 16th Century Polish Scholar. While he offers several explanations of the verse, two of his interpretations of why the word *Lecha*, “for you”, is used stand out, as they seem at odds with one another.

His first explanation begins by quoting Chazal, who ask the question of why the section dealing with the spies is placed next to the section of the Torah that deals with Miriam’s slander against her brother Moshe. He explains, quoting Tractate Kiddushin 49b, that women are chatterers and are often speaking *lashon harah*, slander. Therefore, God instructs Moshe to choose men, as men do not speak *lashon harah*, and so they will not speak badly of the land.

However, in his second explanation, the Kli Yakar explains that God is saying to Moshe – “*Lecha* - you Moshe will choose men, but were it up to me – I would choose women!” Why? Because women love the land of Israel more than men do, and they would never speak badly about the land!

And here the Kli Yakar is relying on the Midrash in Yalkut Shimoni Parshat Pinchas, where we are told that the Daughters of Zlofchad come to demand their rightful inheritance of their father’s share in the Land of Israel. Here the Midrash tells us –

רבי נתן אומר יפה כח נשים מכח אנשים. אנשים אומרים נתנה ראש ונשובה מצרימה ונשים אומרות תנה לנו אחוזה.
Rabbi Natan said: The power of women is greater than that of men, for the men say "let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt" while the women said "Give to us a share in the land!"

The Kli Yakar interprets this statement by Rabbi Natan to prove that women love the land of Israel more than men do, and hence Moshe would have done well to send them in the place of men.

While we may feel heartened by the Kli Yakar's explanation about the superiority of women, in truth, this explanation is as problematic as the explanation about women being idle chatterers. In a way, by making women extraordinary in their love for Eretz Yisrael, they remain outside the realm of אנשים – the average people who make up the Jewish Community.

However, perhaps there is still a way to understand the Kli Yakar's desire to elevate the Daughters of Zlofchad without marginalizing them to "other".

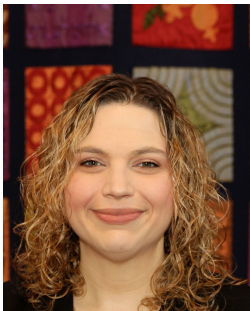
Interestingly, the Midrash uses an important word in describing the Daughters of Zlofchad. Unlike the Kli Yakar's use of the word "love" of the land, the Midrash uses the word *Koach* – the "power" of women is greater than of the men.

What was the power of Bnot Zlofchad here? I would suggest that the Bnot Zlofchad were faced with a reality that seemed unjust to them, a reality that they could not accept, and they had the strength - and indeed this takes great strength - to see past their current reality, to a new and a different possibility, where they could receive their rightful inheritance in the land.

The *meraglim*, the spies, on the other hand, failed in that exact arena. They were sent to spy out the land, and they could not see past their own fear. They could only see the reality that they were faced with, and their own inadequacy. Therefore, when they come back to the people, they are unable to bring with them any hope for the future, or any possibility of a different national reality.

Perhaps the Midrash is deliberately contrasting the event of the *Meraglim* with the Bnot Zlofchad in an effort to help us to understand that our own reality, our own *koach*, power, is determined by how we choose to see ourselves. If we see ourselves as weak and powerless, that is who we will be; we will want to return to the reality that we knew and understood, and we will stay confined in our own personal Egypt. However, if we step up and step into our power, if we demand our *Achuza*, our portion, then we will truly merit to receive it. That is a true showing of *koach*, of inner strength, and of faith.

May we all merit to see past those things that confine us, and allow ourselves to utilize our own power to inherit the blessings that are waiting for us.



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