



The Rest of The Story

When Moses tells the story of the spies, it's a whole different story...

The Two Versions

Have you ever heard two versions of the very same story from two different people? Neither one is lying G-d forbid, it's just that one, perhaps, forgot some important details that shed light on the whole story.

In the Torah we find a similar occurrence. In the five books of Moses, there is a difference between the first four and the fifth. The first four are simply our history — what G-d said to Moses and what the Jews did etc. Moses of his own accord said the fifth book, five weeks before his passing. Moses retells the whole story as he saw it. Hence, we get to see the whole story from Moses' standpoint, and this adds a whole new dimension, a new understanding to everything.

The difference between the written version and Moses' version is evident in this week's Parsha. This week we read about the spies. In the written version, G-d tells Moses that if he wants, he may send spies to scout out the land. Moses does send spies. But when they return and bring back frightening news, G-d's wrath is turned against His people and He swears that since they despised the land they will never see it!

However, in Moses' version, we find a whole new side to the story. As it turns out, the idea to send spies to scout out the land did not come from G-d, nor did it come from Moses. Moses tells us, "You all

approached me and said, 'Let us send men ahead of us to scout the land and report their findings to us.' Although Moses, and certainly G-d, knew that no good could possibly come from sending spies, they agreed to it, only because the Jewish people wanted it so badly. And Moses sensing that the mission would go wrong, prayed for Joshua, "May G-d save you from the council of the spies."

This story, however, demands an explanation. How did Moses know that sending the spies would have an evil outcome? Sending spies to scout out the land you are about to conquer seems to be a most reasonable and responsible thing to do. In fact, Moses himself sends spies at the very end of the forty years, as does Joshua before entering Jericho. Why then is sending spies such a terrible idea when it comes from the Jews?

We find a similar reaction to a request from the Jewish people by the prophet Samuel. At the very end of the Judges era the Jews approach their prophet, Samuel, and request that he appoint a king to rule over Israel. Samuel was personally offended by this request, but G-d told him, "It is not you that they scorn, it is Me." The prophet was so displeased with their request that he made it rain on that summer day to show them that they had done wrong in the eyes of G-d. (In Israel, it NEVER rains in the summer.)

Samuel's reaction, too, demands an explanation. Isn't there a mitzvah in the Torah, "When you enter into the land... you shall appoint a king upon you." Why was Samuel so indignant and why did G-d become angered?

Why Do You Want It?

The explanation is quite simple:

The Jewish people are supposed to want only G-d as their king. When G-d commands them to appoint a king they are supposed to scream,

“We are not interested in a king — we have You as our king!” When the Jewish people asked Samuel to appoint a king it wasn’t to fulfill the mitzvah of appointing a king. They did it because they were sick of Samuel!

This is also what happened with the spies. After having witnessed all of the miracles G-d performed for them in Egypt and at the sea, they should have had complete faith that Moses and G-d would bring them safely to the land of Canaan. And even if Moses were to suggest that they send spies to scout the land, the Jews should have responded, “We don’t need spies. G-d will guide us!” They should have reacted the way Kalev did, “Is this the only thing Moses has done for us? Did he not take us out of Egypt and did he not split the sea and did he not bring us the Manna and the Slav Birds?”

When Moses saw, however, that the Jews wanted to send spies, he realized that their faith was not up to par. He realized that they did not have what it takes to get the full miraculous protection from G-d. Therefore, he prayed for Joshua.

In the written version, however, there is no mention of this — because there was technically nothing wrong with this request. Technically it was only when the spies returned with their report that the Jews got into trouble. But the truth is that the whole idea of sending spies to scout the land of Israel was treif from the beginning.

Is There An Ulterior Motive

What is the lesson for us?

Generally, when a Jew wants to do a mitzvah, one should not inquire as to his motives. For example, if a Jew wants to give charity, we should let him give it, even if he does it for the recognition it will bring him. However, when it comes to a mitzvah that might cause harm to others, such as rebuking our friends (hocheach tocheach), we must

really search our motives to discern whether we are doing it because we have a burning desire to perform mitzvahs or if there is some other, ulterior motive here. In such a case, it would be wise to consult with an objective, impartial party whether the mitzvah should be done or passed over.