

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## Parshas Shelach

### How Many Spies were Sent to Canaan?

#### BACKGROUND

The central episode in our parsha is that of the sending of spies to the Land of Canaan and the ensuing events and repercussions. Verse 2 of chapter 13 states that “אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִטָּה אֲבִתָּיו תִּשְׁלְחוּ” – One man each from his father’s tribe shall you send.” Since the Jewish people comprise twelve tribes, and each tribe sent one man, the delegation of spies apparently totaled twelve people.

However, the matter does not rest there. The Yerushalmi in Massechet Sotah<sup>1</sup> records a dispute among the sages as to how to relate to situations where the Torah repeats a word. Are we to relate to the second word as an additional unit, or do we rather say “דיברה תורה כלשון בני אדם” – the Torah speaks as people do,” i.e. repeating a word may be simply a way of speaking, without necessarily adding an extra element. The Yerushalmi states that the differing opinions on this matter will have implications for our understanding of how many men were sent to the land of Canaan, seeing as our verse refers to them with the double expression “אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד”:

- ▷ According to R’ Yishmael, who holds that the Torah speaks as people do, there was only one man per tribe that was sent.
- ▷ According to R’ Akiva, who holds that the Torah does not speak as people do, the double expression indicates that two people from each tribe were sent.

Needless to say, R’ Akiva’s position requires some contemplation. Granted it is appropriate for each tribe to be represented in this delegation, but why would it be necessary to send two men from tribe? Surely one would suffice!

In fact, there is a deeper problem with R’ Akiva’s view, for it seems to be contradicted by the verse itself. In Parshas Devarim, Moshe reviews the episode of the spies in the context of his words to the generation that is about to enter the land. There, he says:<sup>2</sup>

וָאָקַח מִכֶּם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר אַנְשִׁים אִישׁ אֶחָד לְשִׁבְט

*I took from you twelve men, one man for each tribe*

<sup>1</sup> 7:5, cited in Tosafos, Sotah 34a s.v. *turtani*.

<sup>2</sup> Devarim 1:23.

We see that Moshe states not only that one man from each tribe was chosen ,but that they were twelve men in total! How, then, can R' Akiva maintain that twenty-four men were sent?

### **AN UNLIKELY CEREMONY – THE NAMING OF NACHAL ESHKOL**

In the course of their tour of the land, the spies took some fruit – a cluster of grapes, a pomegranate and a fig – in order to bring back and show the people. Verse 24 then states:

לְמָקוֹם הַהוּא קָרָא נַחַל אֶשְׁכּוֹל עַל אֲדוּת הָאֶשְׁכּוֹל אֲשֶׁר כָּרְתוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*They named that place the Brook of Eshkol, on account of the cluster that the Children of Israel cut from there.*

It is most interesting to note that in this verse the spies are referred to as “the Children of Israel.” While it is true that they were from the Children of Israel, nevertheless, all the other verses in this parsha refer to them simply as “the men,” or just use the pronoun “they”! What is behind this “official” sounding title in our verse?

In truth, a seemingly more pressing question is: What was the goal of naming this brook in the first place? After all, these men are meant to be keeping a low profile as they scout out the land. They are not meant to be holding name-changing ceremonies – to which we can only hope no-one turned up!

### **A DUAL MISSION**

In order to answer these questions, let us go back to the verses which describe Moshe’s instructions to the spies, which he concludes by saying:

וְהִתְחַזְקֶתֶם וְלָקַחְתֶּם מִפְּרֵי הָאָרֶץ

*You shall strengthen yourselves and take from the fruit of the land.*

The simple translation of the word “וְהִתְחַזְקֶתֶם” is, as we have indicated, “you shall strengthen yourselves.” However, the *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* translates this word as: “וְתַעֲבֹדוּן חֲזַקְתָּא”. The concept of *chazakah* is a formal acquisition of land through an act that demonstrates ownership thereof.<sup>3</sup> According to the *Targum Yonasan*, the taking of the fruit was not only for purposes of bringing it back to show the people, but was also an initial “*chazakah*” act of acquiring the land on their behalf!

It emerges that the mission of the men sent by Moshe to Canaan was twofold:

1. To bring back *information* concerning the land.
2. To initiate the people’s *acquisition* of the land.

Now we can understand why the verse which describes the cutting of the cluster of grapes calls them “the Children of Israel.” For unlike the scouting element of their mission, in which capacity they served as twelve “men” seeking to bring back information *to the people, with the cutting of the grapes they were acquiring the land for the people. In this capacity, they were no longer twelve individuals, but rather twelves emissaries representing the entire “Children of Israel”!*

Indeed, this will give us insight into the significance of the re-naming of the place from here they took the fruit, as this too was an act of proprietorship, representing the transition of the land into new hands.

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3 See also Seforno who explains this word to mean: “להיות מוחזקים בה – to be established there.”

Moreover, once we appreciate that there were actually two missions to be accomplished, we can begin to understand why each tribe may have actually sent two representatives.

### **“SEND FOR YOURSELF MEN... EACH ONE A PRINCE AMONG THEM”**

The end of verse two describes those who are to be sent as “כל נשיא בהם – each one a prince among them.” However, when we then consider the names of the men that are given in verses 4-15, we see that they are not the same names as the *nesi'im* (princes) recorded in each of the three opening parshiyos of Bamidbar!

1. Why does Hashem tell Moshe to send *nesi'im* and then list a group of people who are not *nesi'im*?
2. Additionally, what is the meaning of the phrase “each one a prince among them”? If the group is made up entirely of princes, then whom exactly are those princes “among”?

When we consider the question of who from each tribe should be sent on this mission, the answer will depend on which aspect of the mission we are referring to:

- ▷ The one chosen to spy out the land does not need to hold any official office; he merely needs to be qualified to assess its nature and the strength of its inhabitants.
- ▷ The one who makes an acquisition on behalf of his tribe should be the *nasi* who represents them.

In this light, we can look at verse two in a completely new light, for it actually refers to two groups of people:

- ▷ *Send for yourselves men and they will spy out the land* – this refers to the men who were sent to bring back information regarding the land.
- ▷ *One man, one man from his father's tribe shall you send* – according to R' Akiva, these words indicate that two men are to be sent from each tribe; the second one per tribe being...
- ▷ *Each one with its nasi among them* – for purposes of initiating the acquisition of the land.

Having introduced the two groups, verses 4-15 proceed to mention the names of the first group. This is not necessary for the second group, as the names of the *nesi'im* are well known to us from previous parshiyos.

### **MOSHE'S WORDS**

With this in mind, let us return to the verse in Parshas Devarim where, as we noted, Moshe explicitly states that he chose twelve men from among the Bnei Yisrael. We asked, in light of that verse, how can R' Akiva say that twenty-four men were sent? However, once we understand that the two delegates from each tribe were sent to fulfill two different functions, that verse is no longer problematic. Moshe in that context is focusing on the aspect of that episode that began with the people's initiative to send people to spy out the land, with his rebuke directed toward the false report brought back by those spies; therefore, he mentions only them, and not the accompanying delegation who were sent to initiate the acquisition. As we have seen, even R' Akiva concurs that only one man per tribe was sent to spy out the land. Thus, Moshe states that in response to the people's request, and upon Hashem's instruction, he selected “twelve men, one man for each tribe.”