

Parshat Shelach Lecha 5776

ויקרא משה להושיע בן-נון, הושיע?

And Moshe called Hoshea Bin Nun Yehoshua (Bamidbar 13:16)

At the beginning of this week's Sedra, after listing the men chosen to go and spy out the land of Israel, we are told that Moshe changed the name of Hoshea, the spy selected from Ephraim, his disciple and student, to Yehoshua.

In explaining the significance of this name change, Rashi famously says that the extra Yud forms G-d's name 'י-ה' and combining this with 'הושיע' forms a Tefilla – 'may G-d save you from the plan of the other spies.'

Why is it that Moshe davened specifically for Yehoshua? Why was he, Moshe's closest disciple, at risk of being influenced by the negative views of his fellow spies?

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel has a very interesting comment. He says on the above Passuk, 'when Moshe saw his humility, he called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua'. Yehoshua, like his teacher, was a man of great humility; as a result, it seems that Moshe understood that he was more likely to be influenced by the other ten spies and needed to be protected from this. Why is it that his humility made him more susceptible to this?

On a simple level, one might suggest that due to his humility, he might not have felt that he could stand up to the spies, lacking the confidence or courage to make his opinion heard. This echoes Moshe's protests at the burning bush, where he says 'who I am that I should go to Paroh' (Shemos 3:11) and 'I am not a man of words' (Shemos 4:10); Moshe, himself the humblest of all men, felt himself unworthy and unable to stand up to Paroh. In Hashem's anger in response to these concerns, Moshe was taught that humility does not mean keeping one's head down, one's opinion to oneself and shying away from doing that which is right. Seeing that his Talmid, Yehoshua was also very humble, Moshe realised he needed pass this message on - humility is a fine middah, meaning that one does not think that one is better than anyone else or worth of honour, whatever one's achievements but it is not an excuse to keep quiet and not stand up for what you believe is right.

Another, very interesting explanation is offered by Rabbi Frand.

The spies famously placed their mouths, their opinions and biases, in front of their eyes, what the reality actually looked like, clouding their opinion of Eretz Yisrael. According to some, as the spies were described as 'אנשים', men of stature, they were fearful that entering Eretz Yisrael would mean that they would lose their position. The Jews were going to transition from a nation living in the desert to one going to war to claim its own land, from a nation living off Manna to one working the land and building its own economy and they were fearful that these changes would lead to new leadership and them losing their positions. This fear clouded their judgement and led to them reporting negatively about Eretz Yisrael in the hope that they wouldn't enter.

And in Yehoshua's case, Moshe was afraid that his judgement could be clouded, but for a totally different reason. In last week's Sedra, Eldad and Meidad prophesied that Moshe was going to die and Yehoshua would become leader and bring the Jews into Eretz Yisrael. Yehoshua reacted very negatively and demanded they be imprisoned. Moshe, on the other hand, was delighted and said 'would that all of God's nation be prophets' – Moshe was pleased that spiritual growth and prophecy was spreading amongst Klal Yisrael. Why did Yehoshua not see this? Rabbi Frand suggests that this reaction stemmed from his humility – Yehoshua's modesty meant that he did not want the position of leadership Eldad and Meidad predicted. Thus his instinctive reaction towards this prophecy was to dismiss it and even see it as a bad thing - his humility and averseness to leadership clouded his judgement of the situation.

Moshe was worried that Yehoshua's humility could also cloud his judgement when it came to spying out Eretz Yisrael. Going to Israel was going to lead to Moshe's death and Yehoshua taking over, and given his humility and resulting aversion to leadership, as well as his very close connection to Moshe, Moshe was concerned that Yehoshua's judgement might be clouded once again. Therefore, Moshe davened that Hashem help Yehoshua to see past this and report things for what they were.