

# הַיְשִׁיב דַּרְדַּר THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## ERETZ ISRAEL IS ACQUIRED THROUGH TRIAL AND EFFORT (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**O**ne the verse that states, "Send for yourself men" (Numbers 13:2), Rashi writes in the same of the Sages: "'Send for yourself.' if you judge them useful, you may send them if you want to. Myself, I do not order you to do so." One may refer to what commentators have said concerning this subject, since it is not within the scope of this article to deal with the subject in depth.

However, there are several points that we should try to understand:

1. If the Holy One, blessed be He, did not command Moses to send the spies, why then did he do so?
2. It must be understood why Moses gave Hoshua bin Nun the name Yehoshua ("Joshua" – Numbers 13:16). Moses added the letter yud to his name and prayed that G-d protect him from the evil designs of the spies. He therefore knew that they had evil plans and would relate wicked things about Eretz Israel, as the Sages in fact confirmed by their statement: "Their going is compared to their coming" (Sotah 35a), which implies that they left with harmful intentions. In such a case, why did Moses send them?
3. The most difficult question of all concerns the following statement: "They were all distinguished men; they were heads of the Children of Israel" (Numbers 13:3). At that point their intentions were still good (as Rashi writes). Consequently, how is it possible that all of a sudden they damaged the holiness of both themselves and the land by means of slander?

Let us try to explain all this as best we can. Moses was afraid to have all the Children of Israel enter into Eretz Israel at one time because he knew that there were giants living there. If everyone entered, the fear they would experience would greatly weaken them, and they would begin to speak badly of the Holy Land even while in it. This risked bringing about a great punishment, from which thousands of the Children of Israel would have died as a result, not to mention the punishment that future generations would have experienced.

This is why Moses decided to send the spies to observe the land. He told them that there were giants and other

curious things in the land, but added that there was nothing to fear. In reality, Moses wanted to battle the enemy by natural means, without having to resort to G-d's help. Now to wage war by natural means, a precise plan is required. Moses therefore thought that these spies could prepare a battle plan for fighting against the enemy in Eretz Israel, and that in this way all the Children of Israel would be encouraged and fight like lions. Yet despite all this, he still felt that the spies were not very strong, for they were not yet accustomed to normal living, meaning that they were not used to a life which comprises trials that must be overcome when there is no way to avoid them. Moses perceived their weakness in this area.

This is why the spies were righteous while they were still in the camp. However the great trial began when they had to leave, for they knew that if they entered Eretz Israel, they would lose their positions as commanders. Thus for them, it was a formidable test to renounce their status for the good of the Children of Israel (and even to report nothing but good things concerning the land), in order to be of service to their brothers who suffered in the desert. However, Moses was cognizant of their weakness, and doubted if they would be capable of renouncing their status. This is why he decided to conduct himself according to the natural order of things in exploring the land in order to prepare a battle plan, a plan in which the spies (who were commanders) would also participate. They would have therefore learned to confront their pride, lowering themselves for the sake of all the Children of Israel, and reporting good things about the land. Even if they were to have encountered strong people, or giants, in Eretz Israel, they would not fear because "the L-RD is a man of war," and with His help one can conquer the enemy.

This is why Moses asked them to see how "the land is that they dwell in ... and how the cities are in which they dwell; are they open or are they fortified" (Numbers 13:19). He wanted to know all this in order to follow the natural order of things. If they had fortified cities, heavy armament would have been required, and if they had open cities, the army's requirements would be less.

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Despite everything, he decided that it was good to add the letter yud to the name of Hoshua, for he suspected the weakness of the spies and didn't want Joshua to be influenced by them to his detriment. Moses wanted to spare him from acting out of pride (as did the spies) for pride is proper only for G-d, as it is written, "The L-RD has reigned. He has donned pride" (Psalms 93:1). Moreover, the Hebrew word gaavah ("pride") has the numerical value of 15, meaning that of the Divine Name Yud – Hei. This is what Moses told Joshua, namely "May G-d [Yud – Hei] protect you from the evil designs of the spies, in order that you not become proud."

Consequently, we understand everything. Moses did not want to bring the Children of Israel into Eretz Israel under a cloud of testing and slander, which is why he sent the spies (who at that time were upright and just men) even though Moses knew that they were already morally weak. One finds an allusion to this in the words shelach lecha ("send for yourself"), for shelach ("send" – ???) is formed from the same letters as chalash ("weak" – ???). He therefore wanted to strengthen their faith in G-d and send them to observe the land to prepare combat plans according to the natural order of the world.

In reality, since the text relates that the spies stayed in the land for 40 days (Numbers 13:25), this proves that they themselves loved Eretz Israel. If the opposite had been true, they could have immediately come back to Moses and told him, "We came into this land and saw the Nephalim there, descendants of giants. As well, we saw enormous fruits and were terrified. This is why we came back right away without delay." If they stayed there for 40 days, it was because they themselves loved Eretz Israel. They were good and upright at the start of their journey, for in their hearts they were attached to the land, even if they later maligned it. Nevertheless, they were weak, which led them to pride and the desire for honor, which was the cause of the terrible catastrophe that stuck all the Children of Israel in the desert, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua. These two were self-effacing before Moses, affirming that the war depended on the Eternal and that "they [the inhabitants of the land] are our bread. Their protection has departed from them and the L-RD is with us" (Numbers 14:9). These two were protected from harm.

And if we are correct, this explains the connection between Parsha Beha'alotcha and Parsha Shelach.

Rashi writes in the name of the Sages: "Why does the account of the spies follow Parsha Beha'alotcha? Because Miriam had spoken of Moses and was punished with leprosy. Now the wicked ones noticed this, yet did not draw a lesson from it." The connection between these two events must be understood. Miriam had spoken ill of a man and was punished. Notwithstanding, the spies had spoken ill of an entire land! The question then becomes, how could they have learned from Miriam's lesson?

It seems that the answer to this lies in that which is written concerning Moses, namely that he "was very humble, more than all the men upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). Consequently, he considered himself as if

he were made of the dust of the earth. Hence if Miriam spoke ill of Moses, it was as if she had said spoken ill of the earth. (The Hebrew words for "man" – adam – and "earth" – adamah – are similar because man originates from the earth). From this, the spies should have understood that it is forbidden to slander an entire land! This is the criticism that was made of them, namely that they could have learned from Miriam's lesson, yet completely failed to do so. Then they followed an evil path and did not overcome their test. This is why Moses did not want to risk endangering all of the Children of Israel (see Shabbat 32a), and so decided that all that generation would die in the desert because it had let itself be carried away by the counsel of the spies.

In everyday life, it is easy to check if one behaves with true humility or partakes of the harmful trait of pride, a trait that should always be fought. For example, suppose that the president of a synagogue notices that someone is sitting in his seat. If he is really humble, he will understand that this is nothing to get upset about. Consequently he will say nothing, for it is obvious that the newcomer did not know that it was the president's seat (otherwise he would not have sat in it). The president will thereby demonstrate his wisdom and his moderation, and this will be accounted to him as if he had overcome a test. However, if the president insults the newcomer, he demonstrates just how weak his own character is, and how filled it is with pride and love of honor.

It was this that was the sin of the spies. On one hand, they were leaders and upright men, yet on the other hand they were weak in character, for they desired only honors, and they opened their mouths wide to speak ill of Eretz Israel, having learned nothing from Miriam. In addition, they showed themselves to be ungrateful towards the earth that nourishes men and they were severely punished for it.

When I was in Austria, I heard the following explanation from the Chief Rabbi of Austria, Rav Eisenberg: Moses' great strength lay in the fact that, on the one hand, he knew how to fight the battles of G-d, as it is written, "The L-RD is a man of war" (Exodus 15:3), and on the other hand, he knew how to be the most humble of men when it came to matters of self.

It seems to me that one finds an allusion to this in the words, "The L-RD is a man of war. The L-RD is his name" (ibid.). At one point war is mentioned, and at another point G-d's Name (which represents mercy towards created beings) is mentioned. Consequently, the spies should have learned from Moses how to conduct themselves with humility and mercy, yet in the end they learned neither from Moses nor from Miriam. This is what caused them to disappear from off the face of the earth, for it is only through devotion and victory in times of trial that Eretz Israel is acquired.

# IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

## RABBI YAAKOV SASPORTAS

**T**he Gaon Rabbi Yaakov Sasportas was one of the great masters of Torah. He was a G-d fearing man that knew how to awaken and enliven the faith of Jews.

Rabbi Yaakov was born in 5370 (1610) in Oran, Algeria. Born into an illustrious family that had been expelled from Spain, he was one of the descendants of Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman, the Ramban.

From his earliest years, Rabbi Yaakov surprised those around him by his thorough knowledge in all domains of Torah. At the age of 12, he completed the study of all the tractates of the Talmud, and already by that time had a perfect understanding of the Tur. In 5388 (1628), he became famous and recognized as one of the great rabbis of his generation, yet he was only 18 years old. He was made Dayan of the rabbinical court of the city of Tlemcen in Algeria.

Rabbi Yaakov sat on the court of Tlemcen for about eight years. At that very time, the Shabbetai Tzvi movement had spread all the way to Morocco, and many were those that believed that the false Messiah Shabbetai Tzvi had really been sent by G-d to deliver Israel from exile.

Shabbetai Tzvi had been born in 5386 (1626) in the city of Izmir, and from his earliest youth he amazed everyone by his rapid comprehension and his ingenious mind. At the age of 20, he had been initiated in all aspects of the Torah, the revealed Torah and the study of Kabbalah. He assembled around himself numerous disciples to whom he taught Kabbalah. One day, convinced that he was the Messiah sent by Heaven, he revealed his secret to those close to him, and these began to spread the news that the Messiah would not delay in revealing himself and that soon the people of Israel would be delivered. A belief in the imminent revelation of the Messiah began to profoundly take hold of the people, and everyone impatiently awaited the day of deliverance.

Finally, Shabbetai Tzvi appeared publicly in the presence of a mass of believers to ask them to prepare themselves for the great day that would no longer be delayed. He told the people that it was no longer necessary to fast on the ninth of Av, for the hour of deliverance had arrived.

One of Shabbetai Tzvi's faithful, Nathan Ashkenazi, who had proclaimed his messianism, was better known as Nathan of Gaza. His father, Rabbi Elisha Ashkenazi, was himself also an enthusiastic believer in Shabbetai Tzvi. From Germany, he ascended to the Holy Land, then traveled to Morocco accompanied by another Torah scholar from the Holy Land, Rabbi Chiya Dayan. These two rabbis spread the Shabbetai Tzvi movement in Morocco.

Rabbi Yaakov Sasportas vehemently opposed them and denounced the blind faith that claimed to make Shabbetai Tzvi the Messiah. Rabbi Aaron Hasabeoni of Fez and Rabbi Daniel Toledano of Meknes fought alongside Rabbi Yaakov against this messianic movement, and in fact the fears of these Gaonim proved true. The numer-

ous Jews that had been swept up by the Shabbetai Tzvi movement abstained from fasting on the ninth of Av, which caused in its wake a decline in the performance of mitzvot in general.

Rabbi Yaakov was imprisoned in 5406 (1646) by the governor of Tlemcen on a false accusation that his adversaries had brought against him. He was only released after his family paid a large ransom. He thereafter left Tlemcen and settled in Sale, Morocco.

For two years, Rabbi Yaakov sat on the rabbinate in the city of Sale. However, a famine struck the entire country, forcing Rabbi Yaakov to leave. Accompanied by his family, he traveled to Amsterdam, where he was welcomed with great honor by the Jews of the community. There he was named director of the great Etz Chaim Yeshiva. Rabbi Yaakov continued to lead an intensive fight against the Shabbetai Tzvi movement that had by this time spread throughout Europe. During this fight, he stayed in contact through correspondence with the great Rabbis of Morocco, whom he conferred with in order to find a way of stopping the spiritual epidemic that was ravaging the Jewish people.

The fight against the false messianic movement was not that easy, for the chief rabbis of the day had let themselves be entrapped and fascinated by Shabbetai Tzvi. They considered him to be the Messiah. At the cost of great effort, Rabbi Yaakov Sasportas, the head of those fighting against Shabbetai Tzvi, managed to remove the mask of the false messiah and prove to everyone that he was nothing but a charlatan and a crook.

Finally, Shabbetai Tzvi was imprisoned by the government and forced to choose between death and renouncing his religion. Shabbetai Tzvi, it comes as no great surprise, chose the second option: He converted to Islam.

Rabbi Yaakov was in contact with one of the great scholars of that era, Rabbi Menashe Ben Israel. In 5425 (1665), they embarked together for England with the goal of requesting the English King for permission to allow Jews to live in his country.

The trip was crowned with success, and numerous Jews left Holland to live in England. Rabbi Yaakov was named Rabbi of the Jewish community of London.

Rabbi Yaakov thought at that time that he could finally live in peace, but again he was forced to take up the baton of the wandering Jew. A terrible epidemic erupted in England and claimed many victims. As a result, Rabbi Yaakov left England for Hamburg, Germany, where he served as Rabbi.

In 5453 (1693), Rabbi Yaakov returned to Amsterdam, where he was named Rabbi of the city's Ashkenazi Jewish community.

In 5458 (1698), Rabbi Yaakov died at the age of 88, after having enjoyed his final years.

# THE MORAL OF THE STORY

## MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD AND SILVER

*A teaching of the Maguid of Dubno*

**T**he Midrash says: Rabbi Acha the great began his discourse with the verse, “Grass withers and blossom fades, but the word of our G-d shall stand forever” [Isaiah 40:8]. To what can this be compared? To a king who had a friend, and to whom he said, “Come with me and I shall give you a gift.” He went with him, but later died. The king then told his friend’s son, “Although your father died, I still want to give him the gift that I spoke of. Come and take it.” In the same way, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, “Leave your country” [Genesis 12:1] and promised Abraham to give him a gift. Then He said to Moses, “Although I promised Eretz Israel to the Patriarchs and they are dead, I have not changed My mind.” This is why “the word of our G-d shall stand forever” [Isaiah 40:8].

This text appears quite difficult to understand literally. How exactly did Abraham receive the gift of Eretz Israel? The answer is that the Midrash teaches us that everything we desire in this world is but vanity, as it is written, “A voice say, ‘Proclaim!’ and one asks, ‘What shall I proclaim?’ – ‘All flesh is grass, and all its kindness like a blossom in the field. Grass withers and blossom fades when the breath of the L-RD blows upon it” (Isaiah 40:6-7). Only the Torah remains, of which it is written, “the word of our G-d shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8). It is therefore in this area that one notes the realization of Hashem’s promise. The passage that we cited in Isaiah begins as follows: “A voice calls out in the wilderness: ‘Clear the way of the L-RD; make a straight path in the desert, a road for our G-d.’ ... The glory of the L-RD will be revealed, and all flesh together will see that the mouth of the L-RD has spoken” (Isaiah 40:3,5). The prophet compares this world to a desert devoid of Torah and mitzvot, of which it is said, “Sow for yourselves righteousness” (Hosea 10:12). In the same way that the desert does not accept seed, those who are absorbed by the desires of their body do not accept Torah. In addition to this voice, there is another that proclaims, “All flesh is grass, and all its kindness like a blossom in the field” (Isaiah 40:6). These two voices express the praise and glory of the Torah, of which it is said, “Clear the way of the L-RD... The glory of the L-RD will be revealed” (Isaiah 40:3,5). These two themes are subjects of shame for the world here below, and the prophet devotes the development of this idea to the verses that end with that passage that states, “Grass withers and blossom fades, but the word of our G-d shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

The Maggid of Dubno explains this to us by means of a parable.

Someone had lost a great amount of money, following which he left his city and went to settle far away. On the other side of the seas, he found a country where the inhabitants lived as if in a desert. They had so little wisdom that they didn’t even think of building ploughs or other tools that would allow them to sow and gather in a harvest. Now he noticed that the soil was strewn with pieces of gold and precious stones, items that no one appreciated the value of. These people lived solely from the grains and fruits that travelers brought to them, and for which they traded their precious stones, silver, and gold. Our man chose a very large field, planted and harvested heaps of grains and fruits, products for which people traded their pure gold in large quantities. When he felt that the end of his life was near, he said to the children that he had fathered in this country, “Know that I have a son from my first wife, a man who lives where I used to live. Go, send for your brother and share with him the inheritance that I leave you – grains, fruits, gold, and precious stones – by giving him the choice of taking what he wants.” They carried out the last

wishes of their father, and their brother chose the precious stones and pearls, and they took hold of the harvest while mocking their brother’s choice, for they believed that they got the best of the inheritance. In their eyes, the stones that their brother chose were as insignificant as the dust. They were truly amazed at their brother’s choice, a person that their father had told them was wise and prudent. Where was his wisdom in this case, since he had neglected the good to take up these trifling stones? During this time, their brother returned home with a chest completely filled with gold and valuable stones.

Some time later, a wise king came to visit these people and educated them. He showed the inhabitants how to construct ploughs and how to plough and to sow. They all took to the business of agriculture, and the country soon became very rich in agricultural products. When that happened, they began to export their precious stones to other countries and to sell them at their proper market value, so much so, in fact, that grain and fruit became very cheap in their country, while precious stones become very costly. The brothers therefore told themselves, “Today we see that our father was right to say that our other brother was wise and learned, whereas we took him for a fool. Now we see with our own eyes what a fortune he made, and knew how to make, whereas he left us the worthless portion of the inheritance.”

We already know that Eretz Israel holds considerable importance both to the body and the soul. For the body, because it is a land flowing with milk and honey, where nothing is lacking. The physical goods of the land are abundant, yet they are the lesser of the its worth. The real worth of the land pertains to the aspect of the soul, for due to the holiness of the land, it encourages the development of wisdom, holiness, purity, and prophecy. It also attracts the Divine Presence, as it is written, “For from Zion will the Torah come forth, and the word of the L-RD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:3). This exists in small amounts among the general populous, but it is found in immeasurably large amounts among the Sages, who thanks to it can arrive at unfathomable levels of understanding. As long as men aspire to fleeting desires and believe that there is nothing better than this material world, it is obvious that spirituality will be to them of little interest by comparison, particularly when they rejoice in the peace and prosperity that the people enjoyed during the reign of King Solomon. They can therefore tell themselves that Abraham did not at all taste of the good land that Hashem had given him as a heritage, for what profit did he derive from it while living there, since the Canaanites were still in the land? During this era, there is reason to ask oneself how the Holy One, blessed be He, did not carry out the promise that He had made to the Patriarchs. However later, when the light of the truth will shine with all its brightness, when one will consider all the desires of this world as negligible and of no interest, and when one will only see the Torah with its branches and its fruits, one will understand that Abraham chose the best part by far, and that no one inherited as much holiness and wisdom as did he.

Now the Midrash is clear. In their eyes, “All flesh is grass, and all its kindness like a blossom in the field”, as well as all that is desirable in this world. Consequently, nothing exists that is more precious than the Torah in the splendor of its holiness and the glory of its exaltedness. Never again will the Torah leave our mouths, for “the word of our G-d shall stand forever.”