

## THE LAND IS EXCEEDINGLY GOOD!

**O**ne of the gravest sins committed by the Children of Israel appears in our parsha, a sin that occurred in the desert and which is known as “the sin of the spies.” Although they were in the desert at the time, the Children of Israel desired to enter Eretz Israel, the land where the Canaanites (who were known for their depravity) were then dwelling. Nevertheless, the Children of Israel were afraid of not being able to chase the inhabitants out of the land in order to take possession of it. What were they to do?

They asked Moses to send spies into Eretz Israel to see what the situation was like in the land, in order to prepare for its conquest. However Hashem was not satisfied with this measure, and He told Moses: “Send men for yourself and let them spy out the land of Canaan” (Numbers 13:2). Rashi paraphrases this as: “According to your opinion. I do not command you. If you wish, send.” In other words Hashem was saying: “I know that the land is good and that you can enter it and live there without problem. However if you, the Children of Israel, want to send spies to examine the land, then send them for yourselves, not for Me.”

Twelve spies were sent from Kadesh Barnea to explore and spy out the land. Moses told them, “See the land – how is it? And the people that dwells in it – is it strong or weak? Is it few or numerous? And how is the land in which it dwells – is it good or bad?” (Numbers 13:18-19). That is, he asked them to verify whether Eretz Israel was a good or bad land. However the spies made a serious mistake in their mission, one that cost the Children of Israel a fixed date on which to weep in generations to come for the destruction of the Temple.

The spies arrived in Eretz Israel and there they saw that the land was good. They saw that its fruits were large, and that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. They also saw that it was easy to conquer from all sides, and they could certainly invade and take control of it. However to our great regret, upon witnessing all these things,

the spies did not see what was good in the land. They saw neither its beauty nor its appeal. What did they see? They saw that the land devoured its inhabitants. They clearly saw that its fruits were so large that they were impossible to transport. Everywhere they looked, they perceived that its inhabitants would be very difficult to defeat, just as they told Moses: “Nevertheless the people that dwells in the land is powerful, the cities are very greatly fortified” (Numbers 13:28). For us, what emerges from all this is that the spies were not content on remaining silent, and instead they actually spoke ill of the land. They spoke Lashon Harah about Eretz Israel, about the Holy Land. Was it a minor thing in their eyes to find a Jew and tell him that the home he is about to purchase is infested with cockroaches and sludge, oozing out mud and mire, and that it is about to topple over? What could a person think after being told such a thing? How could a person value his new home in that case?

True, our Sages have said (as Rashi and others note in commenting on Numbers 13:3) that the spies were all tribal chiefs and righteous men when Moses sent them off. Yet suddenly, having barely entered Eretz Israel, their hearts completely changed and they became capable of slandering the land, of seeing only the negative side of Eretz Israel. How could that have happened?

A story is told of two Jews, chassidim of the holy Rabbi Israel of Rozhin, who traveled to Eretz Israel separately. When they returned to Rozhin, each of them went to see the Rebbe. The Rebbe asked the first Jew, “What did you see in Eretz Israel,” to which he replied: “What can I tell the Rebbe? I saw many farmers, many peasants, coach drivers, merchants, and all kinds of people.” The Rebbe gave him his blessing, and he left. The Rebbe then asked the second Jew what he had seen in Eretz Israel. He replied, “What can I tell the Rebbe? I saw synagogues, Batei Midrash, talmidei chachamim, Torah giants, yeshivot, and kollelim. I also saw people who, even though they were engaged in business, were in the Beit Midrash

at the end of the day to study a page of Gemara, regardless of everything else.”

After his departure, the Rebbe of Rozhin said: “You know what the difference between these two men is? They both saw the same people in Eretz Israel, but the difference depends on how we look at things. If we look at things with a generous eye, we see good things. And if we look at things with a bad eye, we see bad things.”

Dear friends, that is precisely what the spies did. They immediately looked at the land from a negative point of view. They arrived in Eretz Israel expressly for that purpose, to perceive only its problems. This is why they saw it in a negative light.

If we want, we can unfortunately notice this attitude today. Many people leave Eretz Israel – they “descend” abroad – because they did not find their place in the country. This happens because the land in which milk and honey flows, which Hashem promised to the Jewish people, did not affect their hearts. Such people do not realize that Eretz Israel is holier than all other countries. The reason for their departure is simply that the Holy Land does not concern them. Furthermore, they speak of the land in a derogatory way to others, which is why people do not want to live in Israel. They have heard over and over again how the country is far from good, how difficult it is to live there, and how people have it good elsewhere.

It is as we have said: Things depend on how we look at the land. If we look at it with a negative perspective, we will only see its drawbacks. However if we speak positively of the Holy Land, we will perceive its virtues. We must only look at the positive aspects of Eretz Israel, as it is written: “May you gaze upon the goodness of Jerusalem” (Psalms 128:5). Let us settle down in Eretz Israel to demonstrate our love for the land, for it is said: “Whoever lives in Eretz Israel may be considered to have a G-d” (Ketubot 110b) and furthermore, “The land is exceedingly good” (Numbers 14:7).

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## *The Danger of Seeking Honor*

The story of the spies is one of the most painful subjects in the history of the Jewish people, one that inflicted incredible harm, caused us the loss of both Temples, and brought about a bitter exile that has lasted until this day. As the Gemara states, the night in which the spies slandered the land was the night of Tisha B'Av. When the Children of Israel heard the report of the spies, they all burst into tears. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "They are now weeping for nothing, but I will fix [this day] for them as an occasion of weeping for generations" (Sotah 35a).

Whoever takes the time to study this parsha will immediately rub his eyes in disbelief and ask, "How could this be? Weren't they the generation of knowledge, who at the splitting of the sea merited to perceive G-d in a way that the greatest of prophets did not?" Not only that, but the spies themselves were at a very high spiritual level, as the Torah itself states: "All of them anashim [men] who were the heads of the Children of Israel" (Numbers 13:3). On this Rashi comments: "Anashim in Scripture always refers to distinction." Consequently, how could such great men fall so low, to the point of even denying G-d Himself (Sotah 35a)?

We find the answer to these questions in what the Ramchal wrote in Messilat Yesharim (ch. 11). He cites the words of the Zohar, according to which the tremendous spiritual fall of the spies was due to the fact that they sought honor. In fact they were afraid that when the Children of Israel would enter Eretz Israel, they (the spies) would no longer be tribal heads, for others would be appointed in their place. This is why the spies spoke ill of Eretz Israel. They wanted to continue leading the people, thus satiating the desire for honor that burned in them. This same tendency – honor seeking – is what brought about a terrible catastrophe and the death of thousands. As Hashem swore, "In this wilderness shall your carcasses drop, all of you who were counted in any of your numberings, from 20 years of age and above that have murmured against Me" (Numbers 14:29). Messilat Yesharim adds that the desire for honor is extremely powerful, to the point that a person can control himself when it comes to money or other desires, but honor seeking is much more difficult. The desire for honor acts in man's heart more than any other desire of this world. Without such a drive, a person would agree to eat anything, he would not have difficulty earning a living, and he would not exhaust himself to get rich. It is solely because he cannot see himself as less than his peers that he does everything demanded of him on condition that his honor is safeguarded. Messilat Yesharim ends by stating, "Many people failed in this regard and were lost." We find an example of this with Jeroboam the son of Nabat, a man who was so intelligent that the Sages of Israel seemed like the growth of the field in comparison to him. Nevertheless, he lost his entire share in the World to Come because he sought honor. As the Sages said: "The Holy One, blessed be He, seized Jeroboam by his garment and urged him, 'Repent, then I, you, and the son of Jesse [King David] will walk in the Garden of Eden.' 'And who shall be at the head?' he asked. 'The son of Jesse shall be at the head.' 'If so,' [Jeroboam replied] 'I do not desire it'" (Sanhedrin 102a).

From this we learn just how destructive the desire for honor is, and just to what point it can blind a person and make him lose all worlds. The Sages perceived what happened to those who sought honor when they said, "Envy, lust, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world" (Perkei Avoth 4:21). We see that all this literally occurred to the spies, which is why a person has a vested interest in fleeing from honor as from a burning building. As the Sages warned, "Do not seek greatness for yourself, and do not covet honor" (ibid. 6:5).

The words of the Chafetz Chaim are are-inspiring in this regard, for he said that whoever rejoices in the honors he receives for the mitzvot he performs in this world, such a person will lose his portion in the World to Come! Once when the Chafetz Chaim traveled to Moscow for his yeshiva, he wanted his

arrival to remain secret so that his close friends would not have to come and welcome him. When one of these friends asked him why he prevented them from coming to welcome and pay him all the honor due a Torah scholar such as himself, he replied, "I have no doubt that you eat kugel on Shabbos. If you feel like eating kugel on Friday, the Rebbetzin would certainly suggest that you eat something else. Kugel is delicious – but it's only for Shabbos." The Chafetz Chaim continued by saying, "The honor that I would receive from all these people is like kugel, it's only for the next world – 'The day that is totally Shabbos [the World to Come]' – and if a person cannot stop himself from eating kugel before Shabbos [this world], he will remain hungry on Shabbos."

Let's give this some serious thought.

## *Some Win and Others Lose*

***It is written, "Send men for yourself" (Numbers 13:2).***

In Parsha Lech Lecha, Rashi states that the word lecha means, "For your own benefit, for your own good." According to this interpretation, we need to understand what possible benefit Moses could have had by the sin of the spies!

If Moses had not sent the spies to explore Eretz Israel, the Children of Israel would have immediately entered the land, and Moses would have therefore died as had been decreed for him.

Since the spies were sent and the Children of Israel sinned by accepting their report, they remained in the wilderness for 40 years.

Consequently, the mission of the spies was, in the final analysis, for the benefit and good of Moses.

Moshav Zekenim

## *Hashem Considers a Good Intention Along With the Deed*

***It is written, "They went and came to Moses and to Aaron" (Numbers 13:26).***

Rashi explains: "What is meant by, 'They went'? It is meant to compare their going with their coming. Just as their coming was with an evil design, so was their going with an evil design."

This seems difficult to understand, for Rashi himself (on v.3) said that the spies were honest men when they left! Rabbi Avraham Meir, the Rebbe of Ger, gives a marvelous explanation for this. The Sages said that the Holy One, blessed be He, counts a good intention along with a deed, but not a bad one with a deed (Kiddushin 40a). According to this, when Moses sent the spies, even if their departure was in principle with bad intentions, such intentions were not as yet added to their deed; hence at that point they were regarded as honest men. However once their bad intentions were put into action and they slandered the land of Israel, they were counted along with their deeds. This is why Rashi said, "It is meant to compare their going with their coming."

## *How did Round Houses Affect the Spies?*

***It is written, "The cities are very greatly fortified" (Numbers 13:28).***

In this expression as well, the spies had the intention of slandering the land, for the Children of Israel were promised that once they would arrive in the land, Hashem would "place a leprous affliction upon a house in the land of your possessions" (Leviticus 14:34). On this Rashi explains: "This is an announcement to them that afflictions will come upon them because the Amorites hid treasures of gold in the walls of their houses throughout the 40 years that the Israelites were in the desert, and by means of the affliction [the Israelite] will tear down the house and find them."

The spies, however, said that the "cities are very greatly fortified," meaning that their houses were round. Now round houses are not rendered impure

by leprous afflictions, as the Mishnah states (Negaim 12:1). This means that the spies were saying that Hashem's promise would not be fulfilled, for the places in which the Amorites hid their treasures would remain a mystery, and the Children of Israel would never find them.

Toldot Adam

### ***Just How Powerful is the Evil Inclination?***

***It is written, "They have heard that You, O L-RD, are in the midst of this people – that You, O L-RD appeared eye to eye and Your cloud stands over them" (Numbers 14:14).***

When we examine the parshiot dealing with the sins of the generation of the desert, we are surprised at how such sins could have been committed by a generation that experienced such obvious miracles day and night. The Torah testifies in these parshiot that they were a generation of knowledge, one that merited seeing Hashem with their own eyes. Therefore how did they end up sinning?

In his book Da'at Chochma U'Mussar, Rabbeinu Yerucham of Mir cites his student Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein, the Mashgiach of the Lomza yeshiva, who said: "I remember that I once asked how those who had left Egypt could end up sinning, even though they had seen all these things. I thought that he was going to give me a profound answer that contained a secret teaching. Instead he said: 'Such was the evil inclination's power of seduction!' He began to cry copiously before me. 'For 40 years I was angry with the generation, and I said, "An errant-hearted people are they, and they do not know My ways" [Psalms 95:10]. Thus I had an answer that was more satisfying than a thousand words could give. I learned much, since that time and until today, from that reply."

## **A TRUE STORY**

### ***The Extent of Prudence in Looking***

When Rabbi Matia ben Charash sat in the Beit Midrash to study Torah, the brilliance of his face was like the sun and his appearance was like that of the ministering angels. This was due to the fact that he never stared at a woman in his entire life.

One day the Satan passed by and was overcome by jealousy. He thought to himself, "How is it possible that such a man never sinned?" He said to the Holy One, blessed be He, "Master of the universe, Rabbi Matia ben Charash, what is he before You?" Hashem replied, "He is a perfect tzaddik." The Satan said, "Give me permission to tempt him." The Satan thus appeared before Rabbi Matia ben Charash as a woman who was so beautiful that there was none like her since the days of Naamah, the sister of Tuval-Cain, with whom the angels sinned.

When the Satan appeared before Rabbi Matia ben Charash, he turned his face the other way, and when he stood to his left Rabbi Matia turned to the right. As he was turning to every side, he thought to himself, "I'm afraid that my evil inclination will eventually overpower me and I'll sin." He called to his servant and said to him, "Bring me a flame and a nail." He took the nail and placed it into the flame until it was white hot, and then he blinded himself by plunging the nail into his eyes. When the Satan saw this, he trembled and fell backwards. At the same time, the Holy One, blessed be He, called the angel Raphael and said to him, "Go heal Matia ben Charash." The angel went to him and said, "Matia! The Holy One, blessed be He, has sent me to heal your eyes," to which Rabbi Matia replied: "Leave me. What I've done is done." The angel returned to Hashem with this reply, and Hashem said to him, "Go and tell him that I guarantee that the evil inclination will never overpower him," and he was instantly healed.

Ben Ish Hai, Va'etchanan

## **A MATTER OF EDUCATION**

### ***Counteracting Rebelliousness***

In Parsha Shelach Lecha, after the sins of the spies and those who went up to fight – which are both described by the statement, "You rebelled against the order of the L-RD" (Deuteronomy 1:26,43) – the Children of Israel received various mitzvot. Included among these were the meal and drink offerings, the separation of challah, the offering of one who transgresses mitzvot by mistake, the offering for the sin of idolatry, the stoning of the person who collected wood on Shabbat, and the recollection of the mitzvot in the making of the tzitzit.

On the surface it would seem that these mitzvot should be located elsewhere in the Torah, in places that pertain to their subjects. However when we look for a common denominator among them, we see that they are all supplements to already existent mitzvot. The meal and drink offerings, as well as the challah, are supplements to the mitzvot of the offerings and tithes. The stoning of the person who collected wood is a supplement to the mitzvot of Shabbat. The offering for one who transgresses mitzvot by mistake, the offering for the sin of idolatry, and the tzitzit are general mitzvot that relate to the totality of the mitzvot. The offerings are meant to rectify rebellion against the entirety of the mitzvot and the sin of idolatry, whereas tzitzit and the recollection of the exodus from Egypt are meant to remind us of all the mitzvot.

Given that the entire people transgressed G-d's word by the sins of the spies and those who went up to fight, Israel's faithfulness to G-d was weakened. Hence additions to the mitzvot, given in our parsha, reinforced their faithfulness.

Today with regards to education, when a student rebels we are obligated to bring him around by using gentle methods and explanations. We must lead the student to realize that in order to rectify his sin, his rebelliousness must be counterbalanced by his acceptance of the yoke of the mitzvot. For example, we must explain to an insolent student that he must change his attitude, and that from now on he must act with even more respect and politeness than before. As the Sages have said, "Whoever witnesses a suspected woman in her disgrace should withhold himself from wine" (Sotah 2a).

## **GUARD YOUR TONGUE**

### ***An Excruciating Punishment***

It is written in our parsha, "Those men, who brought up an evil report of the land, died in the plague before the L-D" (Numbers 14:37).

Our Sages explain in the Gemara that it was because the spies spoke Lashon Harah regarding Eretz Israel that they were punished measure for measure. Thus they died an unusual death: "Their tongue was elongated and reached down to their navel, and worms issued from their tongue and penetrated their navel, and from their navel they penetrated their tongue" (Sotah 35a). The Sages also said, "Rabbi Eleazar ben Perata said: Come and see how great the power of an evil tongue is! How do we know [its power]? From the spies, for if such things happen to those who bring up an evil report against wood and stones, how much more will it happen to him who brings up an evil report against his neighbor" (Arachin 15a). From this we see just how serious the sin of Lashon Harah is, to the point that the spies suffered an excruciating death and were excised from the World to Come. Furthermore, it was because of this sin that the entire Jewish people were forced to wander in the desert for 40 years.

## REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

### *Tzitzit*

We must always diligently observe the mitzvah of tzitzit, for it is as valuable as all other mitzvot (Shavuot 29a). Young children die because of the neglect of tzitzit (Shabbat 32b). Whoever is attentive to the mitzvah of tzitzit will merit seeing the Shechinah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 24:6). Furthermore, in the future 2,800 slaves will serve him (Shabbat 32b).

The Sefer HaChinuch gives the following reason for this mitzvah: "This is explained in Scripture. It deals with always remembering Hashem's mitzvot, and there is nothing better for a person's memory than to carry his master's stamp on his clothing, which we constantly wear and see during the day. The verse states, 'They shall put a thread of blue upon the fringe of each corner...and you shall look upon it and remember all the commandments of the L-RD' (Numbers 15:38-39). On this the Sages commented: 'Rabbi Meir used to say: "Why is blue specified from all the other colors? Because blue resembles the color of the sea, and the sea resembles the color of the sky, and the sky resembles the Throne of Glory"' (Menachot 43b)."

This means that the role of the techelet ("blue") in the tzitzit is to remind man of the Throne of Glory, in order that he merits to cling to the Holy One, blessed be He. The gaon Rabbi Moshe Feinstein Zatzal raised a question on this, for it is surprising that Hashem would choose the color techelet because it resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the color of the Throne of Glory. Why did He not choose a color that directly resembles the Throne of Glory? From here we learn that it is impossible for a man to arrive directly and without effort at spiritual concepts. He must start by advancing progressively, and it is only in this way that we can reach the Throne of Glory.

The following is also related in the Shulchan Aruch: "Nevertheless, it is proper for every man to take care to wear a Tallit Katan all day long so that he will remember G-d's commands at every moment. Each set of tzitzit has five knots, corresponding to the five books of the Torah. The tzitzit are on the garment's four corners so that a person will remember the Torah no matter to which of the four directions he turns" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 24:1). On the verse, "You shall look upon it and remember all the commandments of the L-RD," Rashi states: "Since the numerical value of tzitzit is 600, the eight threads and five knots equal 613" (Rashi on Numbers 15:39). The Ramban objects to this, saying that this explanation is impossible because in the Torah the word tzitzit is spelled with only one yud, giving it a numerical value of 590! However in Pesikta Zutrata it is stated that in the expression, "They shall be to you le'tzitzit," the letter lamed compensates for the lower numerical value resulting from the three instances of the word tzitzit written without a yud.

The saintly Ohr HaChaim wrote that the tzitzit are a symbol of servitude, and when we look at such a symbol we know that we are not free to do what seems right in our eyes. Insofar as food, clothing and speech are concerned, we must act in every way like a servant on whom the fear of his master resides. There are four corners to the tzitzit, alluding to the fact that the Holy One, blessed be He, reigns over the four corners of the globe and that we are His servants. A person will thus be saved from sin, as the Gemara recounts concerning a person who went to commit a sin: Just as he was about to commit it, his four tzitzit slapped him across the face and thus saved him (Menachot 44a).

Some people have the habit of looking at the tzitzit when reciting the phrase "and you shall look at them," and they also place them against their eyes, which is a beautiful custom. People also kiss the tzitzit when looking at them, all this being done for the love of the mitzvah (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 24:4). The Mishnah Berurah (par. 24, al. 47) cites ancient sources in stating that a person who brings the tzitzit to his eyes when

## EISHET CHAYIL

### *The Influence of a Mother's Modesty*

The Midrash states that when a woman conducts herself according to Jewish laws and is modest and discreet, she merits having sons that know Scripture and Mishnah, and who perform good deeds (Bamidbar Rabba 8:9).

The Torah recounts that when the angels came to Abraham, they asked him: "Where is Sarah your wife?" (Genesis 18:9). The Keli Yakar explains the angels' question as follows: By what merit will a sterile 90-year-old woman give birth to a son like Isaac? Abraham answered them, "Behold, in the tent," meaning that it was by the merit of her modesty that she was worthy of having Hashem's promise to Abraham fulfilled through her, the promise of "kings will emerge from you" (v.6).

Just how amazing are the words of Rabbeinu Bechaye in stating, "When a man is just, humble, and filled with good character traits, it is a sign that his mother was modest and filled with good thoughts. This is why she merits having such a son, for a healthy branch demonstrates the quality of the roots."

This means that the spiritual condition of children is fixed by their mother's efforts in the area of modesty.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

### *The Saintly Tanna Yonatan ben Uzziel*

Hillel the Elder had 80 disciples, the greatest of whom was the Tanna Yonatan ben Uzziel (Sukkah 28a). His study of Torah was truly filled with enthusiasm, to the point that fire emerged from him. Of him the Gemara states, "When he used to sit and occupy himself with the study of the Torah, every bird that flew above him was immediately burnt" (ibid.).

Yonatan ben Uzziel translated the Prophets. He also translated the Torah into Aramaic, although the main such translation was produced by Onkelos. It is said that when Yonatan ben Uzziel translated the Prophets, Eretz Israel shook along its entire length, and a Celestial voice was heard saying, "Who is this that has revealed My secrets to man?" Yonatan arose and said, "It is I who revealed Your secrets to man. It is fully known to You that I have not done this for my own honor or for the honor of my father's house, but for Your honor I have done it, that dissension may not increase in Israel" (Megillah 3a). However when Yonatan wanted to translate the Writings, Hashem prevented him, for they contain secrets regarding the coming of Mashiach, secrets that are forbidden to reveal.

The Hilloula of the saintly Tanna Yonatan ben Uzziel occurs on Sivan 26. He is buried in Amuka, near Sefat, and his gravesite is a place of pilgrimage throughout the year for the thousands who come to pray by his grave. Tremendous miracles occur there, such as finding a suitable spouse and receiving heavenly assistance, both material and spiritual. May his merit protect us and all Israel. Amen.

reading the section on tzitzit in the Shema is assured of never going blind. It is also good to cover the head with one's tallit during prayer, for this leads to a fear of Heaven. The Pele Yoetz states, "We should be careful to make a tallit, be it small or large, from the wool of sheep, not from other animals. Otherwise we will only be fulfilling a rabbinical commandment, which would be like a person who could earn a thousand gold coins, yet contents himself with just five hundred."