

THE MERIT OF MOSES: PROVIDING JEWS WITH STRENGTH TO ENDURE THE EXILE (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

On the verse, "Send for yourself men and let them spy out the land of Canaan" (Numbers 13:2), Rashi cites the Sages in saying: "Send for yourself. According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send [Tanhuma Shelach 5]." This resulted from the fact that the Children of Israel had approached Moses and said, "Let us send men ahead of us" (Deuteronomy 1:22), prompting Moses to ask Hashem for advice. Hashem replied: "I told them that the land was good, as it is written: 'I shall bring you up from the affliction of Egypt...to a land flowing with milk and honey' [Exodus 3:17], and by your life, I have given them the opportunity to err by the words of the spies, that they may not inherit it."

What we learn from all this is that the Holy One, blessed be He, did not want to send spies to explore the land. Only because the Children of Israel had requested spies did He permit Moses to send them, and He gave them a chance to err so they would not inherit the land. That being the case, it is certain that Moses did not want to send spies, since it was not Hashem's will. They were sent only because the Children of Israel wanted it.

That being the case, our surprise may be understandable here, for how can we interpret the expression, "Send for yourself" according to the view of the Midrash, which states that the decision to send the spies lay with Moses? Furthermore, "Send for yourself" means "for your own benefit, for your own good," yet Moses wanted none of that! Even if we say that sending the spies would have been advantageous, or in some way beneficial to Moses, should the Children of Israel have been punished simply because Hashem wanted to help Moses? After all, Hashem gave them the freedom to err! Are we to say that the Almighty somehow lacked the ability to aid Moses without harming the Jewish people?

There is yet another problem. How could Moses receive any aid whatsoever if it was at the expense of the Children of Israel? Moses was a faithful shepherd who only wanted to help, not harm, the Children of Israel. Therefore how could he accept aid that would be detrimental to them? To answer this question, we may say that He Who created the world knew that Moses would not enter the land of Israel. Therefore had the Children of Israel entered the land right away, Moses would have immediately died. Thus Hashem said to Moses: " 'Send for yourself,' for your benefit, because the Children of Israel will have an opportunity to err when the spies are sent, and if they disparage the land they will have to remain in the desert for 40 years, meaning that you will live 40 years more."

However even this explanation is difficult to understand, for why would Moses accept such aid if it was at the expense of the people? Moses had nothing to gain from the fact that the Children of Israel would have to remain, because of him, in the desert for 40 years and endure exile and sorrow throughout their generations!

We know that Jews survive in exile only by the merit of Torah (Torat Kohanim, Vayikra 26:3), meaning by toiling in its study and uncovering new Torah insights. All the Torah that Jews have studied over the generations, all of it has been due to the merit of the Torah that Moses learned from the mouth of Hashem, as it is written: "Remember the Torah of My servant Moses" (Malachi

3:22). In fact Moses ascended Mount Sinai and completely devoted himself to the study of Torah for 40 days and 40 nights (Shemot Rabba 47:5), neither eating nor drinking during that time. Instead he remained and learned everything from Hashem, "even what a faithful disciple would say in the future" (Vayikra Rabba 22:1). Moses also acted for the sake of the Jewish people, ascending to Heaven with immense devotion and overcoming the ministering angels in order to bring the Torah down for them (Shabbat 88b). Hence it is by the merit of his Torah that Jews have the strength to toil in its study during their exile. By the merit of Moses, the Torah protects Jews and prevents them from faltering. Thus the influence of Moses spreads to every generation (Zohar III: 216b), for he studied the entire Torah and all that will ever be discovered in it. By his merit, Moses protects the entire Jewish people.

When the Children of Israel raised the issue of sending the spies, Hashem told Moses: "I am fully aware that they want to send spies to explore the land of Israel. Even after seeing with their own eyes all the miracles and wonders that I performed for them, they still do not believe Me when I say that the land is exceedingly good and flows with milk and honey. Nor do they believe their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who loved the land and cherished it. Since they hesitate to enter it, it is decreed that they shall remain in the desert for 40 years and endure exile and sorrow for all the generations." Hashem therefore prepared the remedy for the exile before it occurred, meaning that He instructed the entire Torah to Moses, including everything that a faithful disciple would ever discover in the future. This is because, as the Sages have said, "Reward [zechut] is brought about through a person of merit [zakai]" (Shabbat 32a). Jews are able to endure in exile through the diligent study of Torah and the insights they discover in it, insights that were initially revealed to Moses on Sinai. By the merit of his strength, Jews are saved from all their enemies.

Thus Hashem told Moses: " 'Send for yourself,' for your benefit, since in this way you will derive the greatest benefit. Which benefit is this? Because of the spies, the Jewish people will have to endure exile, and in it they will study the Torah that you learned from My mouth. They will devote themselves to it and discover new insights that you already know, and your lips will move in the grave when they cite your teachings [Yevamot 97a]. Hence your merit will protect them and give them the strength to survive in exile. It will save them from all their oppressors."

The Holy One, blessed be He, greatly helped us and showed us tremendous kindness by teaching the entire Torah to Moses, along with the new insights that tzaddikim have uncovered over the course of time. If Hashem had only taught Moses the Torah that pertained to his generation, where would we find the strength to study and discover new insights in it? Where would we find the strength to endure our long exile and be delivered from all our enemies? Only by the merit of Moses has this been possible.

The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

"But He Has Complete Job Security!"

The prohibition against disparaging others applies even if it does not harm or bother them in any way. An example of this would be when people refuse to believe or even accept the words of one who speaks ill of another. Another example would be when the speaker feels he can disparage a person's job skills because he thinks, "This worker has complete job security, so nothing I say can hurt him!" Furthermore, disparaging others is forbidden even if the speaker believes that, in principle, his words will not harm anyone. For example, if Reuven is in Israel and Shimon is in Australia, Reuven cannot disparage Shimon and justify himself by thinking, "Since he's in Australia and I'm here in Israel, what I say can never hurt him, nor will he ever know about it." Even in that case it is forbidden to disparage others, for the prohibition against Lashon Harah is absolute, regardless of whether someone is harmed by it or not.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

They Struck Me, They Wounded Me

It is written, “They brought forth an evil report on the land that they spied out... ‘The land...devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it were huge’” (Numbers 13:32).

Rashi explains: “Wherever we passed, we found them burying dead. The Holy One, blessed be He, intended this for good, to keep them occupied with their mourning so they would not notice [the spies].”

In his book *Darchei Mussar*, Rabbi Yaakov Neiman asks why the spies were so severely punished, since their sin resulted from a misinterpretation. That is, they innocently believed that the land “devours its inhabitants.” They did not imagine other possibilities, such as Hashem having caused these deaths in order to keep the inhabitants in mourning and not go looking for the spies.

Rabbi Yaakov Neiman answers by noting that there are different levels of faith, the first of which is to believe in Hashem, Who created the world. Not much wisdom is required for this level of faith, for anyone who isn’t foolish understands that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world. Even if someone were to say that a tiny needle, pointed on one end and hollow on the other, was created by itself, he would be laughed to scorn. How much more would this apply to one who claims that the entire universe appeared on its own? The foolishness of such a person is beyond belief.

The second level of faith is when a person acknowledges that his accomplishments are not the result of his own abilities. Rather, he believes with complete faith that everything stems from Hashem, for there is nothing else but Him. The third level of faith is when a person’s beliefs are contradicted by his logic, yet he still maintains his simple faith in Hashem and does not raise questions. Therein lay the sin of the spies, given their spiritual level and importance. Since Hashem had said that the land of Israel was a good land, it was not possible for anything to contradict these words. Even if the spies saw that the inhabitants of the land were burying their dead, the land was still good. In this way we may explain the teaching of the Sages: “All the Ketuvim are holy, and this [Shir Hashirim] is holy of holies” (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:11). How is King Solomon’s song greater than that of Moses, David, or Deborah?

Just as the Children of Israel sang the Song of the Sea when they saw their enemies lying dead along the seashore, how could they have not sung? David sang when Hashem saved him from Saul and his other enemies, as did Deborah. Who would not sing under such circumstances? However in Shir Hashirim, King Solomon is describing the bitter exile: “The watchmen who circle the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me” (Song of Songs 5:7). Even under such trying circumstances, the Jewish people say: “If you find my Beloved, what shall you tell Him? That I am sick with love” (v.8). In such circumstances, when Jews sing to Hashem, they attain the highest level of faith. When they enter the gas chamber and sing Ani ma’amim (“I believe”) or Ashreinu ma tov chelkeinu (“Fortunate are we, how good is our portion”), this is the greatest level of all. It is a simple faith, even if it runs counter to logic.

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, “Send for yourself men and let them spy out the land of Canaan” (Numbers 13:2).

Rashi explains: “Send for yourself. According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send.” In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks why Moses sent the spies, since it was clear that the Holy One, blessed be He, promised the people “a land flowing with milk and honey,” leaving no room for doubt. The answer is that Moses wanted to infuse faith into the hearts of the spies. He wanted to establish a link between Hashem’s promises and their experiences in the land. Thus when they would see giants there, they would be amazed at the great miracles

that Hashem would perform for them. With this faith in their hearts, the spies would be able to uplift all the Children of Israel. However since the spies did not fulfill the teaching to “know Him in all your ways” (Proverbs 3:6), and since they did not focus on discovering the holiness of the land – going instead as tourists, to “explore” it with selfish intent – their eyes were closed. They even failed to acknowledge the miracles that Hashem performed for them there. For example, they perceived the extreme mourning that they witnessed in the land as a defect, claiming that the land devoured its inhabitants. Hence they involved all the Children of Israel in their sin.

A Good Hour

It is written, “Send for yourself men and let them spy out the land of Canaan that I give to the Children of Israel. ... All of them anashim [men]” (Numbers 13:2-3).

Rashi explains that the word *anashim* always denotes importance. He also states that the spies were righteous at that point in time.

In his youth, Rabbi Yitzchak Charif is said to have given the following explanation for Rashi’s statement: The Torah states that the Children of Israel received a punishment of 40 years instead of 40 days. Let us do a calculation to see the ratio between 40 years and 40 days. There are 960 hours in 40 days, and there are 480 months in 40 years. This means that the Children of Israel were punished by 15 days in the desert for every hour that the spies explored the land. How long should the Children of Israel have remained in the desert? Since they left Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, they should have entered Israel on the 14th of Nissan, exactly 40 years later. However they actually entered it on the 10th of Nissan, a full 4 days earlier. To this we add the time that it took them to walk from Mount Sinai to Israel, an 11-day journey that they would have had to make in any case. This comes to a total of 15 days, meaning that their 40-year punishment was cut short by 15 days. Hence Rashi said that the spies were righteous at that time. That is, for the first hour (one hour being equal to 15 days) everything went well.

Why Only Joshua?

It is written, “These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun ‘Joshua’” (Numbers 13:16).

Rashi states, “Moses called Hoshea. He prayed on his behalf: ‘May G-d save you from the counsel of the spies.’”

If Moses knew that a disaster was about to happen, why didn’t he stop it? Furthermore, why did Moses not pray for all the spies, not just Joshua, and add the letter yud to all their names? The author of *Torah Temimah* states that Moses, in fact, did not know that a disaster was about to happen. However he feared for Joshua’s safety because he was from the tribe of Ephraim (Joseph’s son), and Joseph once gave an evil report about his brothers. Therefore in an attempt to avoid further complications, Moses added the letter yud to his name as an extra precaution.

What Would People Have Said?

The question arises as to why Moses did not worry as much for Gaddi ben Susi, who was also from the tribe of Manasseh (Joseph’s other son). That is, why was Moses more worried about Joshua than Gaddi? The *Kli Yakar* replies that Joshua was Moses’ disciple, and Moses watched over him to ensure that he did not stray from the path, lest his teacher be held accountable. Thus if Joshua had supported the spies, what would people have said about Moses?

And See!

It is written, “And see the land” (Numbers 13:18).

There are three places in the Torah where the word *ureitem* (“and see”) appears:

1. “And see the birth stool” (Exodus 1:16).

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

A Form of Self-Defense

It is written, “Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of the spies of the land, tore their garments” (Numbers 14:6).

Rabbi Chaim Ephraim Zaitchik Zatzal asks why Joshua and Caleb were the only ones to tear their garments, since Moses and Aaron did not. Instead, they simply fell with their faces to the ground. Are we to say that at that point in time Joshua and Caleb felt Israel's stinging defeat more than Moses and Aaron, the faithful shepherds of the people? Are we to say that Moses and Aaron, Israel's symbols of devotion, simply fell with their faces to the ground while the pain of Joshua and Caleb was so intense that they tore their garments? To answer this, we must say that since Joshua and Caleb were personally involved in exploring the land, it is certain that Hashem's protective hand had saved them from the initiatives of those who disparaged the land. Joshua and Caleb were afraid, however, that some of the spies' poison had attached itself to them, and that perhaps the shadow of an evil thought had slipped into their hearts. Hence they made every effort to rid themselves of this doubt. They used all their strength to protest in every way – shouting, praying, and using various actions such as tearing their garments – to prevent the Children of Israel from thinking that they had somehow participated in the conspiracy of the spies. Such was not the case with Moses and Aaron, who had not been involved in exploring the land. Hence they did not need such demonstrations to distance themselves from the evil of the spies. For them it was simply enough to fall with their faces to the ground in order to join Joshua and Caleb. We see something similar to this in regards to a person who incites idolatry (meisid u'madiach). It is a mitzvah to kill such a person, as it is written: “You shall surely kill him. Your hand shall be the first against him to kill him, and the hand of the entire people afterwards” (Deuteronomy 13:10). Here Rashi explains, “The one who was tempted has the duty to put him to death,” for by demonstrating zeal in stoning him, he will (as mentioned earlier) cleanse his soul of all harmful influences that may have affected it. Because some poisonous beliefs from the seducer may have slipped into him unconsciously, he is the one who must, by stoning him, purify himself and proclaim his conscious and underlying belief that he is free of every stain, even the slightest. It is said that among the sages of Jerusalem, there was a tzaddik who took every opportunity to reprimand the deeds of a certain group of wicked men, constantly warning his entourage not to allow themselves to be swayed by their ideas or deeds. When asked why he constantly stressed this point, since it seemed enough just to keep away from them, he replied: “Among the laws pertaining to the salting of meat, there is a principle which states that as long as meat is rejecting the blood within it, it does not absorb the blood of other meat. Therefore as long as I'm rejecting their ideas and deeds, I won't absorb anything from them.”

EISHET CHAYIL

According to the Law of Moses and Israel

When a man marries, he says to his bride: “You are consecrated to me according to the law of Moses and Israel.” Why is the emphasis placed on “Moses and Israel”? As we know, Moses and Israel wandered through the desert for 40 years, and during that time there was complaining and rebellion on the part of the Children of Israel against Moses, and on the part of Moses against Israel. Yet despite going through some extremely difficult times, they still remained together. This is what a man who consecrates his bride means by saying, “According to the law of Moses and of Israel.” In other words: Although we can expect difficult moments in life, we will still conduct ourselves like “Moses and Israel.”

Another explanation is that by saying this to his bride, a man is taking responsibility for ensuring her sustenance, but only “as men who ensure the sustenance of their wives in truth.” That is, he assumes responsibility for caring for her, but only in truth, meaning that he will not lie or cheat to meet her demands. Thus, “You are consecrated to me,” but only “according to the law of Moses and Israel,” for this requires me never to sin, and together we will live a life of holiness.

2. “And see the land” (Numbers 13:18).

3. “And see it and remember” (Numbers 15:39).

The Mishnah states, “Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin: Know from where you came, to where you are going, and before Whom you are destined to give an accounting” (Perkei Avot 3:1). The aforementioned verses allude to these same three things:

1. “And see the birth stool” – an allusion to birth, “from where you came.”

2. “And see the land” – an allusion to death, “to where you are going.”

3. “And see it and remember” – an allusion to the day of judgment, “before Whom you are destined to give an accounting.”

The Chatam Sofer states that the verse, “Now remember borecha [your Creator] in the days of your youth” (Ecclesiastes 12:1) alludes to this Mishnah by means of the word borecha. In it we find be'ercha (“your well”) – an allusion to birth; borcha (“your pit”) – an allusion to death; and borecha (“your Creator”) – an allusion to the day of judgment.

Deviating From the Mission

It is written, “We arrived at the land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and these are its fruit. Nevertheless the people who inhabit the land are powerful, and the cities are very greatly fortified. There we even saw the offspring of the giant” (Numbers 13:27-28).

Why is it said that the spies disparaged the land? After all, they just reported what they saw. They were told to look for trees and to bring back the fruit of the land, which they did. They were told to verify if the cities were fortified or not, which they did, and they were told to ascertain the strength of the fortifications, which they also did. Therefore in what way did the spies sin? The Ramban explains, “The wickedness of the spies consisted in saying the word ephes [nevertheless].” When a soldier is sent on a reconnaissance mission, he must return with facts and figures, not with beliefs. The spies were sent to explore the land and return with an account of what they saw. They were not to return with their beliefs – with a “nevertheless” – which made conquering the land seem impossible.

– Aish Dat

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Shelach continues with the account of the people's journey as they prepared to enter the land. This began in Parsha Beha'alotcha at the mountain of G-d, and after making stops in Kivrot HaTa'ava and Hazereth the people arrived in the desert of Paran. To reach their goal, spies were sent into the land of Israel, yet they returned to the desert with a total lack of faith in Hashem. Following this incident, the people were told that they had to remain in the desert for 40 more years, during which time the adult generation would die. They tried to stop this disaster by rebelling against Hashem and ascending into Israel, but without success. After this estrangement from Hashem and the decree of a lengthy desert sojourn, the people received other mitzvot. Added to their burnt-offerings and feast-offerings were to be meal-offerings and libations. Thus flour and wine, which help sustain life, were to be offered at the same time as their animal offerings. Also given to the people were the mitzvot of removing challah and tithing the harvest. A special offering was ordered for anyone who inadvertently transgressed a mitzvah, and the people were commanded to stone the willful transgressor of Shabbat (who gathered sticks on that day). The corners of garments were to have tzitzit on them, for in this way a person would look at them and recall all the mitzvot, and the evil inclination would not lead him astray.

A TRUE STORY

Putting Mordechai to the Test

It is written, “They shall be to you as tzitzit” (Numbers 15: 39).

The greatness of the mitzvah of tzitzit is described by our Sages: “This mitzvah is equal to all the mitzvot together” (Menachot 43b). Rashi explains the reasoning behind this: “Because the numerical value of the tzitzit is 600. [Add to this] 8 threads and 5 knots, and we have 613.” Rabbi Mordechai, the Rebbe of Neshchiz, had a great desire to obtain a tallit katan from Israel, and with great difficulty his chassidim were able to do just that. Since a chassid of the Rebbe wanted to sew the tallit for him, the Rebbe acquiesced and gave it to him. The chassid folded it in order to make an opening for the head, but he made a mistake and cut two openings for the head. When he discovered his mistake, he was afraid that the Rebbe would become extremely upset with him. After all, the Rebbe had gone to great lengths in order to procure a tallit from Israel, yet he had completely ruined it! Trembling at the prospect of what would happen to him, the chassid went to the Rebbe and admitted his mistake. The Rebbe said to him, “What are you afraid of? In fact the tallit needs two head openings...a regular one, and the other to put Mordechai to the test: Will he or will he not get angry?”

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Clay Vessels

It is written, “Joshua the son of Nun sent from Shittim two men to spy cherish [secretly]” (Joshua 2:1).

While the Children of Israel were encamped in Shittim, Joshua secretly dispatched two spies and ordered them to explore the land and the city of Jericho. The book Me’am Loez provides us with another explanation for the word cherish, comparing it to cheres (clay). These spies claimed to be pottery merchants, going around asking: “Who wants to purchase clay vessels?” In this way the inhabitants of the land never suspected them of being spies.

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that the Halachah for clay vessels is that only inside surfaces are susceptible to impurity, not outside ones. This is because all other materials have enough intrinsic value to become impure on both sides. However clay in itself is nothing but earth, having no value other than the fact that it can serve as a recipient for something else. Hence its only value pertains to its inside. The spies that Joshua sent to Jericho were perfectly aware of what had happened to the spies that Moses had sent to explore the land. They knew that they had not yielded to Moses, and that they had acted in accordance with what they thought was right. Therefore the spies sent by Joshua made themselves into clay vessels, which have no intrinsic value whatsoever. All their importance comes from the fact that they can serve as a receptacle for holding other things. These spies annulled their own wills and views before the will and view of the one who sent them. They simply carried out Joshua’s orders, and therefore they succeeded in their mission.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

The Rebbe Berish Landau of Biala

Rabbi Berish Landau Zatzal was born in 5580 to Rabbi Avraham Zatzal, the Rebbe of Ciechanow. He was eventually drawn to the Chassidut of Rabbi Yitzchak of Vorki, even becoming one of his disciples. By going to Vorki, Rabbi Berish also became acquainted with the Chiddushei HaRim of Ger, who would always ask him to relate one of his father’s teachings.

Already during his father’s lifetime, Rabbi Berish hosted meals for the chassidim, even during the weekdays. When his father was told of this, he ordered several bottles of wine to be placed on the table on his behalf. After his father’s passing, Rabbi Berish began to lead the community with great vigor, hosting a meal where he related words of Torah to the chassidim. Although he lived a very austere life, Rabbi Berish still managed to spend his evenings, like his days, immersed in the study of the holy Torah. He brought such an abundance of blessings and wealth to his chassidim that people said that none of the Rebbe’s chassidim required gifts for the poor during Purim or money for Passover. Rabbi Berish had five sons who became famous in their own right, some even rebbes. Among them was Rabbi Elimelech Menachem Mendel Landau, the Rebbe of Strikov, from whom the Strikov Chassidic dynasty emerged and exists to the present day. Rabbi Berish passed away on Sivan 25, 5636. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

One Greater Still

It once happened that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua, and Rabbi Tzadok were reclining at a banquet of Rabban Gamliel’s son, while Rabban Gamliel was standing over them and serving drinks. When he offered a cup to Rabbi Eliezer, he did not accept it. However when he offered it to Rabbi Joshua, he did. Rabbi Eliezer said to him, “What is this, Joshua? We are sitting, while Rabban Gamliel is standing over us and serving drinks!” “We find that even one greater than he acted as a servant,” he replied. “Abraham was the greatest man of his age, yet it is written of him, ‘And he stood over them.’ And should you say that they appeared to him as ministering angels – they appeared to him only as Arabs! Shall Rabban Gamliel the Eminent not stand over us and offer drinks?” Rabbi Tzadok said to them, “How long will you disregard the honor of the Omnipresent and occupy yourselves with the honor of men! The Holy One, blessed be He, causes the winds to blow, the vapors to ascend, the rain to fall, the earth to yield, and sets a table before everyone. As for us, shall Rabban Gamliel the Eminent not stand over us and offer drinks?”