JEALOUSY AND HONOR-SEEKING DRIVE A PERSON FROM THE WORLD  
(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “They were all men, heads of the Children of Israel” (Numbers 13:3). Here Rashi explains, “At that time, they were virtuous.” That being said, how could such virtuous men disparage the land of Israel? Is it because the spies wanted to remain as leaders that they tried to prevent the Children of Israel from entering the Holy Land? There is something else that we need to understand. As we know, when the spies were in the camp, they were surrounded by the seven clouds of glory. Therefore how could they not have feared Hashem’s anger and dreaded the prospect of Hashem expelling them from the clouds? How could the spies not have feared the Rauch HaKadosh of Moses, who knew that they were lying to the Children of Israel? Above all, we need to ask ourselves why Moses did not add a letter to the names of all the spies, just as he added the letter yud to the name of Joshua, as he prayed for Hashem to protect him from the counsel of the spies (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:8), thereby preventing all of them from dispersing the land.

Before explaining all this, let us first ask another question. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abraham, “Lech lecha (Go for yourself)...” (Genesis 12:1), which Rashi explains as: “Lech lecha. Go for yourself, for your own benefit and your own good.” We therefore see that the word lecha signifies “for your own benefit and the good that will ensue.” Yet here in Parsha Shelach, on the verse, “Send for yourself (lecha) men” (Numbers 13:2), Rashi cites the Sages as saying: “Send for yourself. According to your own understanding, I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send.” We may therefore ask how sending the spies was beneficial and good for Moses, since the word lecha implies this. In other words, how would Moses benefit from it? The answer is that Eretz Israel can only be acquired when the Children of Israel are united. When there are divisions and conflicts among the people, the land vomits out its inhabitants, as it is written: “That the land should vomit you out when you defile it” (Leviticus 18:28). In fact each person who does not sense His glory.

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A problem faces everyone who waits for deliverance and tries to infuse his soul with hope and faith. He is seized with hesitation, with the question: “Can I really have faith that Hashem will save me? Do my actions justify such faith and allow me to be optimistic? How and by what merit can I have faith that Hashem will answer my requests, since I’m the only one who truly understands my spiritual state?”

Such hesitation can completely confuse a person. During his most difficult moments, it leads him to oscillate between hope and hopelessness. He wholeheartedly wants to have faith in Hashem, since he knows that he must have faith and it is easier to live with faith. However in the depths of his heart, he hesitates. How is this possible?

Our teacher the Chafetz Chaim gave some advice to those who are confused in this way, delivering them from their distress. He said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, does not watch over man so closely as if to say, ‘I will only save you if you are a tzaddik!’ He simply says, ‘I will not save you if you rebel.’ As long as a person does not rebel by deliberately refusing to perform mitzvot, he can expect good things.”

The origins of this idea appear in our parsha. All the derogatory things that the spies said about Eretz Israel are based on it. They claimed that Eretz Israel was a land in which it was impossible to live without Heaven’s help, and that such help required personal merit. They claimed that the generation of the desert, which had committed the sin of the golden calf, could not allow themselves to base all their faith on the assumption that Hashem would help them to survive in the land, since they had sinned in the desert. Even if they already repented, the spies said, perhaps they did not even have the right to rely on Hashem!

In response to this, Caleb and Joshua told the people: “Just don’t rebel against Hashem! The Holy One, blessed be He, is not so strict with a person as if to say to him: ‘I will only save you if you are a tzaddik!’ Instead He only says, ‘I will not save you if you rebel.’” Thus Caleb and Joshua ended by saying, “Just don’t rebel against Hashem!” As long as a person does not rebel against the Holy One, blessed be He, by deliberately refusing to obey His mitzvot, he can expect good things.

— Shmirat HaLashon, ch. 19

A Pearl From the Rav: The Importance of Tzitzit

For the mitzvah of tzitzit, the Torah states: “You shall look upon and remember all the commandments of the L-RD and do them” (Numbers 15:39). We need to understand why these expressions (look, remember, do) are used to describe this mitzvah. Would one of them not have been enough for a person to serve Hashem? Why are they all needed?

Concerning the tzitzit, the Sages have said: “Looking leads to remembering, and remembering leads to doing” (Menachot 43b). Our teacher the Chafetz Chaim, in his commentary on the Torah, states that the mitzvah of tzitzit leads to remembering all the mitzvot, since it has the same numerical value as all the mitzvot. However for a person to reach the level of remembering all the mitzvot when looking at the tzitzit, he must first know all the mitzvot. In that case he will look, remember, and do. However if he does not know them, how can he remember them when looking at the tzitzit?

We must add that if a person has the ability to learn mitzvot, but fails to do so, he is not exempt from the mitzvah of tzitzit on account of not having anything to remember. If he does not know how to study, if he has no one to teach him, or if he puts an effort into learning Hashem’s mitzvot but does not know the entire Torah and the reason behind all of Hashem’s mitzvot, Hashem will certainly judge him favorably. In His great compassion, Hashem will enable such a person to look upon the tzitzit and remember all the mitzvot, for he yearns to study and learn, and everything that he does is done wholeheartedly.

We must realize that a person should not be ashamed of letting his tzitzit be seen on the outside of his clothing, for they carry Hashem’s Name. This can be compared to a person who receives a gift from the king: He will consider it a great honor to display this gift on the outside of his clothing, thereby showing it to everyone who sees him. How much more does this apply when a person receives a gift from the King of kings! It is not without reason that the Sages said that whoever demonstrates zeal for the mitzvah of tzitzit will merit welcoming the Shechinah, for it is a gift from Hashem.

The Study of Mussar is Without Equal

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

Rashi states, “Why is the section dealing with the spies juxtaposed with the section dealing with Miriam? Because she was punished for matters of slander, for speaking against her brother, and these wicked people saw but did not learn their lesson.” People usually think that if they could only see Hashem’s guiding hand, the way in which He rules the world through reward and punishment, it would motivate them to better themselves. For what reason do people praise a preacher? It is because of the metaphors that he provides, for the way that he makes things real for people, to the point of almost letting them see things with their own eyes. Yet in the case of the spies, “these wicked people saw!” They saw with their own eyes, and yet they still did not change. Why not? It is because they did not learn from what they saw, as the prophet exhales: “They do not know, and they do not understand, for their eyes are blocked from seeing and their hearts from comprehending” (Isaiah 44:18). There is hearing, and better yet seeing, but all of it is useless unless a person take things to heart.

— Rabbi Meir Chadash

Adding to the Days of the King

It is written, “Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun ‘Joshua’” (Numbers 13:16).

Rashi states, “May G-d save you from the counsel of the spies.” Targum Yonatan links this verse to Joshua’s humility, which is difficult to understand, for what does it have to do with humility?

Actually, why did Moses have to pray for Joshua to be saved from the counsel of the spies, since he was already 40 years old at the time, and the Sages say: “When the majority of a man’s years have passed without sin, he will sin no more” (Yoma 38b)? That being the case, Joshua would not have succumbed to sin. However when Moses saw Joshua’s humility, he was afraid that he would stumble because, as the Sages point out, years are added to the life of a talmid chacham who does not demonstrate obduracy. Hence it was possible that Joshua would live a long time, meaning that the 40 years he already lived did not represent “the majority” of his life. In that case, he was liable to succumb to sin, which is why Moses prayed for him.

— Ohr Chadash, Pesachim

One Who Flees from Honor

It is written, “Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun ‘Joshua’” (Numbers 13:16).

When Moses saw that Joshua became angry with Eldad and Medad when they prophesied, “Moses will die and Joshua will bring Israel into the land,” he realized just how great Joshua’s humility was, since he
fled from honor and did not want to lead the people. Moses was afraid that, because of this humility, Joshua would agree with the spies so the Children of Israel could remain in the desert under Moses’ leadership. In that case they would not have to go into Eretz Israel, where Joshua was to lead the people. Moses therefore prayed for Joshua to be saved from the counsel of the spies.

– Avodat Israel

The Mitzvah of Bikkurim

It is written, “From there they cut down a vine with a cluster of grapes…pomegranates…figs” (Numbers 13:23).

Concerning the verse, “Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes” (v.20), the Arizal said that the mitzvah of bikkurim rectifies the sin of the spies. The spies scorned the land, whereas the mitzvah of bikkurim was given out of love for the land. Hence it only applies to the seven kinds of fruit that are the glory of Eretz Israel.

We must note the fact that, regarding how the bikkurim were gathered, the Mishnah states: “A man goes into his field and sees a ripe fig, a ripe cluster of grapes, or a ripe pomegranate. He [then] ties a rope around it and says: ‘Let these be bikkurim’ ” (Bikkurim 3:1). Only three of the seven kinds of fruit are mentioned here, these being the three kinds that the spies returned with from Eretz Israel.

– Rabbi Menachem Zemba

Because of the Children

It is written, “Poked the iniquity of fathers upon children” (Numbers 14:18).

We must understand poked to mean a diminishment, as in the verse: “There lacks [nifkad] not one man among us” (Numbers 31:49). The Holy One, blessed be He, diminishes the iniquity of the fathers because of the children, who atone for the sins of their fathers. Thus we read, “The son grants merit to the father.”

– HaKetav VeHaKabbalah

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Shelach Lecha continues with the account of the people’s journey as they prepare to enter the land of Israel. This journey began in Parsha Beha’alotcha at the mountain of G-d, and after making stops in Kivrot HaTa’ava and Chazeroth, they arrive in the desert of Paran. Spies are sent to explore the land, and they return to the desert without any faith in Hashem. Afterwards, the people are told that they must remain in the desert for 40 more years, during which time the first generation would die. Rebels among the people try to check this disaster by venturing into the land of Israel, but without success. After being estranged from Hashem and the decree of a lengthy desert sojourn, the people receive other mitzvot concerning offerings, as well as the taking of challah and tithes on the harvest. A special offering is also ordered for anyone who inadvertently transgresses mitzvot, and a person who gathered wood on Shabbat is stoned. The people are also commanded to wear tzitzit on the corners of their garments in order to remember all the mitzvot.

– From Volozhin to Jerusalem
A Successful Emissary Forgoes Personal Interests

It is written, “Joshua the son of Nun sent from Shittim…” (Joshua 2:1).

This verse tells us that Joshua sent two men “to spy secretly.” In the Midrash, the Sages say that they were disguised as pottery merchants, which served as their camouflage. The Chiddushei HaRim says that this was not only their camouflage, but served as a reminder of how they must act in order to successfully carry out their mission. As we know, pottery differs from other utensils, be they of metal or glass, in that it has no intrinsic value. Pottery is made from very simple material, from earth, sand, and clay. How important is sand, since it can be found everywhere, such as on the seashore? The only importance of pottery is that it can serve as a vessel to contain food or drink. On the other hand, vessels of metal or glass have intrinsic value. Silver, gold, or copper are precious metals that decorate homes and are used in jewelry.

A successful emissary, says the Chiddushei HaRim, is one who maintains a single and unique goal before his eyes, namely the success of his mission. He harbors no personal ambitions, nor does he seek profit or honor in carrying out the task at hand. He wants to do only one thing: The will of the one who sent him. In this way he is like pottery, for he renounces his own importance and completely devotes himself to becoming a vessel to fulfill the goal of the one who sent him. Such an emissary will succeed.

Is it Really Better to be a Sheep?

It is written, “The men who spread the evil report about the land died” (Numbers 14:17).

Living in Jerusalem was a tzaddik by the name of Rabbi Dov Sokolovsky Zatzal. He recounted a terrifying story that he remembered from his childhood in the Polish town of Mir, about a hundred years ago. There was a wealthy man there who studied Torah, observed mitzvot, and conducted himself honorably. At a certain point in his life, he decided to sell all that he had and move to Eretz Israel. He therefore sold his home and his goods, collected the money, and said an emotional farewell to the residents of town. Everyone came to honor him, for he was going to fulfill the mitzvah of dwelling in Eretz Israel, the land that every Jew in the Diaspora dreams of. Everyone left him with tear-filled eyes, saying to him: “Next year in rebuilt Jerusalem!”

However when he arrived in Israel (at a time when there was no organized Jewish community there), he realized that everyone was poor and living under very difficult conditions. He found it hard to go from a life of wealth to one of poverty, which was too difficult for him. He eventually left by the same way he came, returning to his town in Poland.

Upon his return to Mir, all the residents went out to meet him. However he spoke disparagingly of the land and described it in harsh terms: “It’s so difficult to live in Eretz Israel that sheep in Mir live better than people in Eretz Israel. Better to be a sheep living outside of Eretz Israel than a man in Eretz Israel.”

These words had barely left his mouth when a terrible thing happened, for he suffered a stroke that left him paralyzed. He fell to his hands and feet, just like a sheep, and was unable to speak. In fact he could only utter incoherent sounds that resembled the bleating of sheep!