

SEND SPIES, IF YOU PLEASE...

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Today's Learning:
Shevi'it 6:2-3
Orach Chaim 121:3-122:2
Daf Yomi: Beitzah 17
Yerushalmi Megillah 25

The central event in this week's parashah is the sending of the spies and the failure of their mission. How could the generation of the Exodus fail in such a manner? R' Shlomo Harkabi z"l hy"d (1890-1943; mashgiach of the Grodno Yeshiva) explains as follows:

In comparing Eretz Yisrael to Egypt, the Torah states (Devarim 11:10-11): "For the land to which you are coming, to possess it - it is not like the land of Egypt that you left, where you plant your seed and water it on foot like a vegetable garden. Rather, the Land to which you cross over to possess it is a Land of hills and valleys; from the rain of Heaven you shall drink water." Rashi (there) comments that the verse is telling us that Eretz Yisrael is better than Egypt. Lest we have any doubts, our parashah tells us (13:22) that Noach's son built the city of Chevron before he built Egypt. Clearly Cham thought that Eretz Yisrael is a better land!

But which is better - a land that is watered by an ever-flowing river like the Nile or a land that is completely dependent on rain? It depends. One who lives by the laws of nature would choose the land that has a Nile, for one can only count on the rain so long as one does G-d's will, no easy task. The Jews who had witnessed the Exodus were up to that task, but they did not feel it. They did not realize that in freeing them from slavery and from Egypt, Hashem had freed them entirely from a This- Worldly existence. Instead, they still felt an attachment to Egypt and to the natural way of life that it represented. In this way they were deemed to have rejected Hashem and His Land. (Me'imrei Shlomo, p.200)

"Send forth men, if you please . . ."

(13:2)

Rashi explains: "Send according to your judgment. I do not command you to do so; if you wish, send."

R' Zvi Hirsch Kalisher z"l (1795-1875) asks: How could Moshe send spies after hearing these words from G-d, in effect placing a stumbling block before the Jewish people? Surely Moshe knew that the Land was good and that spies were unnecessary!

He explains: There were several disadvantages to not sending spies. Moshe expected that Bnei Yisrael would march into Eretz Yisrael and encounter little or no resistance. Would that generation and future generations recognize the miracle in such an occurrence if they had not first seen the Canaanites' strength? Probably not. They would say, "The Canaanites were weak and Bnei Yisrael had 600,000 soldiers - what do you expect?"

Also, the people had asked Moshe to send spies. If he refused, they would conclude that Moshe had something to hide.

Finally, mitzvot are supposed to be performed joyously. Surely once Bnei Yisrael knew how wonderful the Land is and once they had seen samples of its fruits (brought back by the spies), they would enter the Land with greater excitement.

These were Moshe's thoughts, and he assumed that most of Bnei Yisrael, especially their righteous leaders who he chose as spies, shared these thoughts. But they didn't. Hashem knew this, of course, so he told Moshe (so-to-speak), "May your sending of the spies be as you please." (Sefer Ha'berit)

"They . . . cut from there a vine with one cluster of grapes, and bore it on a double pole, and of the pomegranates and of the figs."

(13:23)

Rashi writes: Eight of the spies carried the huge cluster of grapes, one carried the pomegranates,

and one carried the figs. Yehoshua and Calev did not participate because the spies' only intention was to bring back bad tidings: "Just as its fruit is a freak, so the Land is not normal."

R' Elya Meir Bloch z"l (died 1894-1955; Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe) taught: This demonstrates that when one's intentions are bad, nothing can persuade him of the truth. In fact, it is one of the Land's praises that the fruits are so big; however, in their desire to bring back bad tidings, they interpreted what they saw incorrectly. They even contradicted themselves, for in the same sentence in which they said (verse 32), "The Land through which we passed, to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants," they said, "All the people that we saw in it were huge." However, when one's motives are bad, logic and reason do not matter.

From Yehoshua and Calev's refusal to participate we learn that one should not assist those whose intentions are bad, even if one's own intentions are pure and something good can come out of it. (Peninei Da'at)

R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (1891-1982) taught: Which was worse - the sin of the Golden Calf or the sin of the spies? We would think that the former was worse, for it bordered on idolatry, but the Torah teaches otherwise. Hashem forgave the sin of the Golden Calf, but the Jews were punished for 40 years for the sin of the spies.

Why? Because Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish People are inextricably linked. One who speaks lashon hara about the Land strikes at the heart of the people.

(Mi'toch Ha'Torah Ha'go'ellet, II p.178)

"I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you . . ." (15:41)

The last five verses of our parashah (including this verse) make up the third section of Shema which we recite twice daily. However, there is a dispute in the mishnah (Berachot 1:5, also in the Pesach Haggadah) whether this section need be recited at night.

In the course of that dispute, the sage Ben Zoma suggests that the Exodus will no longer be remembered after mashiach arrives. Can this be? many commentators ask. Look how many mitzvot relate in some way to the Exodus. Is it not a fundamental belief of Judaism that the Torah is eternal?

R' Meir Asch z"l (died 1852; grandson of his more famous namesake) explained as follows in his Shabbat Hagadol derashah in 5584/1824: Our remembrances of the Exodus are of two types. When we remember the Exodus every day, it is to acknowledge the source of our faith in Hashem. In contrast, when we remember the Exodus on the Seder night, it is to thank Hashem for removing us from Egypt.

This must be the case, for if our daily remembrances of the Exodus were also in thanksgiving to G-d, we would, in effect, transgress the prohibition against reciting Hallel every day. The purpose of the prohibition, R' Asch explains, is to cause us to focus on G-d's constant miracles, not only on wondrous miracles such as the Exodus.

After mashiach comes, we no longer will remember the Exodus as a source of faith, for the wonders of the ultimate redemption will exceed those of the Exodus. However, we will still observe the Pesach Seder to thank Hashem for the Exodus because if not for that event, we never would have become a nation. (Imrei Yosher p.56b)

Rambam writes in his halachic code (Hil. Kriat Shema 1:3) that one must mention the Exodus during the day and at night. However, in his Sefer Hamitzvot, a list of the 613 commandments, he makes no mention of this mitzvah. Why?

R' Yechezkel Abramsky z"l (1886-1976) explains: In the introduction to Sefer Hamitzvot, Rambam sets out the rules by which he determined which of the Torah's thousands of laws should be counted as the 613 mitzvot. One of these rules is that the law will be in effect forever.

According to the sage Ben Zoma, however, the mitzvah to mention the Exodus on a daily basis will no longer apply after mashiach's arrival. Accordingly, it cannot be counted as one of the 613 commandments. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Arzei Ha'levanon II p.99)

Letters from Our Sages

This week, we continue with excerpts from the will of R' Yaakov Lorberbaum z"l (died 1832; the "Nesivos").

9. When praying, have in mind the meaning of the words. When saying the Honored and Awesome Name, have in mind what is written in the Shulchan Aruch [i.e., that the Four Letter Name means, "Master of the World, Who Was, Who Is, and Who Will Be," and "Elokim" means, "Powerful and Capable of Anything, and Master of All Forces."] Regarding esoteric intentions based on the wisdom of the kabbalah, one must be on guard and extra cautious not to come to heresy. Nowadays, one should not rely on any person to teach him this wisdom, especially on one who has not filled his belly with Talmud and Halachah. As for those who glorify themselves as knowing this wisdom, do not believe them or desire them or listen to them, even on the smallest matter . . .

21. Over and over I warn you: Distance yourselves very, very much from having others rely on your trustworthiness, lest your honesty be questioned in the end. Also, it is so easy to think of justifications [to take advantage of others], especially when one loves money; therefore, be very careful not to be in such a position unless it is impossible to avoid it.

22. I further warn you not to cause any person to take an oath, G-d forbid . . . It is preferable to lose all

of one's money than to be a rasha/sinner for one moment before G-d. If someone is obligated by halachah to make an oath to you, let him get away with a cherem/ban instead. You will not lose out because of this; to the contrary, what good is his oath if he cannot be trusted with money?

23. Avoid the need to litigate. If there is any dispute between you and your colleagues, compromise, and do not litigate. Look, my sons, at what Chazal said: "Yerushalayim was destroyed only because people stuck to the letter of the law." If this was sufficient to destroy Yerushalayim, how much more so should one avoid it with all his powers?

24. I also warn you that if you have business dealings with someone who does not understand [the terms of the deal], speak to him clearly and make him understand everything. Do not say: what difference does it make - he is willing? . . . This is the meaning of "Love your fellow as yourself." Do everything with the same straightforwardness that you would wish for yourselves, and that which is hateful to you, do not do to others . . .

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