

WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH

by Shlomo Katz

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Edited by Shlomo Katz

Contributing Editor: Daniel Dadusc

Shelach

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Today's Learning:

Yoma 6:5-6

Orach Chaim 305:15-17

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 93

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 42

In this week's parashah, we read that Bnei Yisrael sent spies to Eretz Yisrael and believed the bad report that those spies brought back. As a result, Hashem decreed that that entire generation would die in the desert, and only the next generation would enter the Land.

Following the announcement of this decree we read (14:39-40), "The people mourned exceedingly. They awoke early and ascended toward the mountaintop saying, 'We are ready, and we shall ascend to the place of which Hashem has spoken, for we have sinned'." It appears from these verses that Bnei Yisrael repented. Why was their repentance not accepted?

R' Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak Danziger z"l (the "Alexanderer Rebbe"; known as the "Yismach Yisrael") explains that repentance is not effected by words alone. Repentance must come from the heart, and

this "repentance" did not. How can we know? Because had Bnei Yisrael been truly repentant they would have begun listening to Moshe. On this occasion, however, they did not listen to Moshe. He told them (14:41), "Why do you transgress the word of Hashem? It [i.e., your plan to invade the Land] will not succeed," but they continued with their ill-fated invasion. (Quoted in Devar Ha'teshuvah Al Pi Mishnato Shel Ha"Yismach Yisrael" Me'Alexander p. 194, by R' Avraham Zvi Margaliot, Rabbi of Karmiel)

"See ('u're'eetem') the Land - how is it?" (13:18)

"And you will see ('u're'eetem') it [the tzitit] and remember all the commandments . . ." (15:39)

The word "u're'eetem" appears only three times in the Torah - in these two verses from our parashah and in the verse (Shmot 1:16), "And you will see on the birthing stool [literally, 'on the stones']." R' Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich z"l (Hungary; 20th century) suggests the following connection between these three verses:

The yetzer hara and the yetzer hatov each is referred to in certain verses as a "stone." The "stones" in the verse from Shmot therefore allude to the good and bad inclinations. If one will see and ponder these two stones and recognize the difference between them, he will see "the land" (referring to "This World") and "how it is." He will see that "the land" ("This World") is worthless and he will instead look at the benefits of keeping Hashem's commandments. (Tiyul Ba'pardes p. 34)

"They arrived at the Valley of Eshkol . . . They named that place, 'The Valley of Eshkol,' because of the cluster ('eshkol') that Bnei Yisrael cut from there." (13:23-24)

The midrash says that Eshkol, the friend of our patriarch Avraham (see Bereishit 14:24), was named for the eshkol that Avraham's descendants were destined to cut from his property. R' Yaakov Yokel Ettlinger z"l (Germany; early 19th century; author of Aruch La'ner") explains:

This midrash is teaching that Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael a warning intended to protect them from believing the spies, but they ignored it. How so?

Another midrash relates that Avraham asked his three friends -- Aner, Eshkol and Mamre - whether he should circumcise himself. Aner said, "You are [nearly] 100 years old, and you are going to torture yourself?"

Eshkol said, "Why should you weaken yourself when you are surrounded by enemies?"

Only Mamre said, "Your G-d stood by you in the furnace, against the Four Kings, and in a time of famine, and you would not listen to Him?!"

R' Ettlinger writes: The argument that Eshkol used in trying to dissuade Avraham from circumcising

himself was the same argument that the spies would later use to discourage Bnei Yisrael from entering Eretz Yisrael. "Our enemies are too strong!" they said. And, like the advice that Avraham received from his friend Eshkol, the spies' advice appeared on its face to be in the best interests of the Jewish people.

In particular, the spies acted as if they had brought the gigantic cluster of grapes back in order to impress Bnei Yisrael - they said in verse 13:27, "We arrived at the Land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" - but their true intention was to intimidate their brethren. In reality, Eshkol's advice was not good for Avraham and the spies' advice was not good for Bnei Yisrael.

Hashem caused this friend of Avraham to be named "Eshkol" precisely so that Bnei Yisrael might make an association between the bad advice that he gave Avraham and the spies' bad advice that was represented by the eshkol of grapes. This is the meaning of the midrash that Eshkol was named for the cluster that Avraham's descendants were destined to cut from his property. (Minchat Ani)

"Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yephuneh, of those who spied the Land, tore their garments." (14:6)

Why did only Yehoshua and Calev tear their garments? Were there not other righteous Jews who were upset by the spies' report? R' Noach Rabinowitz z"l (Russia; 19th century) explains with a parable:

A magnate once sent two employees to investigate a marriage prospect. He instructed his employees to pay attention to every detail about the members of the other family - their genealogy, their scholarship, their wealth, their status, their generosity, etc.

One of these employees secretly preferred a different match for this magnate. But he had to speak the truth to his employer, so how could he prevent this match?

During their visit to the prospective in-laws, the two employees saw many positive things and a few negatives as well. When the employees returned, the one who was in favor of the match reported the negatives first, in a few brief words, and then spoke at length of the good things he saw in the family. The one who was against the match did the opposite. First he summarized very briefly the reasons favoring the match and then he spoke at length about the negatives he had observed.

This is the same strategy that the spies adopted. First they reported (13:27), "We arrived at the Land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey." Immediately following this, they said, "But . . .," and continued for several verse to criticize the Land.

When Bnei Yisrael first heard this, they did not tear their clothes, explains R' Rabinowitz, because they assumed that the spies were lying. They thought that Yehoshua and Calev would soon rebut everything that the spies had said.

But Yehoshua and Calev tore their clothes. They recognized the truth of their fellow spies's report, and they knew that they could not rebut it. They had seen that Eretz Yisrael does have some bad characteristics alongside the many good ones, and they knew that one's impression simply depends on which characteristics he chooses to emphasize. (Toldot Noach: Derush Ha'sheni Le'Shabbat Hagadol)

R' Chaim Falagi z"l

R' Chaim Falagi was an early nineteenth century rabbi in Izmir, Turkey, and was a prolific author. Seventy-two of his works are known, but it also is known that some of his manuscripts were destroyed in the great fire which struck Izmir in 1841. Every time R' Falagi published a new sefer, he made a festive meal and ate a new fruit, on which he would recite the blessing of "She'he'cheyanu." (There is a dispute amongst poskim/halachic authorities whether one may recite this blessing in honor of printing a sefer.)

In one of his works, R' Falagi describes his own life as follows:

I call heaven and earth to testify that from the age when I could control my faculties until I was twenty, I used to devote myself single-mindedly to Torah study, day and night, with no wasted time. I had no involvement with worldly matters.

From age 20 to age 40, when my children were dependent on me, I dealt with worldly matters as a broker. Nevertheless, whenever I had no work, I did not turn to frivolity and wasteful things, but rather I returned to my studies.

From age 40, when I was appointed to be a rabbinical judge and teacher and to handle matters of concern to the public, until this day, there is not a minute when I am not surrounded by litigants or by public affairs. These matters come both from this city and its environs, and also various decrees of the government keep me busy with matters affecting the public. Therefore my heart worries within me that I do not spend sufficient time studying.

I therefore force myself to use the limited time that I have for studying, and may others see me and do the same; may they learn from me that when distractions come along, whether they come from public or private matters -- for one's eyes and heart search for a spare moment -- that spare time, when it comes, should not be wasted. If one lives thus, his Torah studies will be blessed.

R' Falagi's son wrote of him:

His behavior with his family and the excellence of his character traits in dealing with them was unique in the world. He never became upset about any household issue; to the contrary, he always made peace overtures . . . He never became upset at the children's noise. He used to call them to him each morning to recite the morning blessings, and they prayed out loud. Very patiently, every

day, he performed the mitzvah of "You shall teach them to your children."

He would instruct his children in fearing Hashem . . . and never to make fun of any person. Once, a member of his household offended another person, and he [i.e., R' Falagi] did not rest until that person had been appeased. A number of times, he even gave money to a person who had been offended.

R' Falagi died on the afternoon of 17 Shevat 5618 (1858). (Source: Gedolei Ha'dorot p. 624).

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The Sabrin family, in memory of father Shlomo ben Chaim a"h

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