

THE BEST MERCHANDISE

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Shelach

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Today's Learning:

Sotah 8:5-6

Orach Chaim 455:4-6

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 40

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Niddah 7

This week's parashah recounts the mission of the spies and the negative report that they brought to Bnei Yisrael. In analyzing their journey and the fact that Moshe sent them to the Negev first, Rashi comments: "It is the way of tagarim / peddlers to show the less desirable merchandise first and only then to show the good merchandise."

R' Yisrael Taub z"l (1849-1920; the "Modzhitzer Rebbe") derives a lesson from Rashi's comment: Why did Rashi use the example of tagarim / peddlers rather than, more generally, socharim / merchants? The answer is that tagar has a negative connotation - one who complains is called "kora' tagar" / "he calls tagar" - while socher has a positive connotation. Even the Torah is called "sechorah" / "merchandise" (Mishlei 3:14).

We are taught (Avot ch. 3): "Torah study is good together with work." However, we must know which is the essential pursuit and which is the secondary pursuit. A socher, an honorable merchant, puts

the sechorah / the Torah first, and only later engages in work. When he awakes in the morning, he prays with devotion and studies some words of Torah before going off to work. In contrast, a tagar makes the secondary thing - work - his priority. "It is the way of tagarim / peddlers to show the less desirable merchandise first and only then to show the good merchandise." (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

"For the tribe of Yosef, for the tribe of Menashe, Gaddi son of Sussi." (13:11)

When the Torah mentions the tribes of Menashe and Ephraim, the children of Yosef, it sometimes mentions Yosef in connection with one (for example above) and sometimes in connection with the other (e.g., Bemidbar 1:32). R' Shimon Schwab z"l (1908-1995) explains:

When Yaakov blessed Yosef, he said (Bereishit 48:5-6), "Your two sons who were born to you in Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine; Ephraim and Menashe, like Reuven and Shimon they will be to me. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they will be included under the names of their brothers . . ." It is these other children to whom the Torah refers when it mentions the "the tribe of Yosef" or "the sons of Yosef." For whatever reasons, they are sometimes counted among the sons of Menashe and sometimes among the sons of Ephraim. (Ma'ayan Bet Ha'sho'eivah)

"Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun 'Yehoshua'." (13:16)

The ancient Aramaic translation, Targum Yonatan, states: "When Moshe saw the humility of Yehoshua, he called Hoshea the son of Nun 'Yehoshua'." What does Yehoshua's humility have to do with his name change?

R' Aryeh Leib Zunz-Charif z"l (Poland; 1765-1833) answers as follows: We read in last week's parashah that Eldad and Medad began prophesying and Yehoshua demanded that they be punished. What did they prophesy? The Sages say that they prophesied, "Moshe will die, and Yehoshua will take Bnei Yisrael into the Land."

Rashi (on our verse) writes that Yehoshua's new name contains Moshe's prayer, "May G-d ('Y-h') save you ('hoshea') from the spies' conspiracy." However, writes R' Zunz, in light of Eldad's and Medad's prophecy, it is unclear why Moshe was concerned about Yehoshua's safety. We are taught that when Hashem gives a prophet good tidings about a person, He will never change His mind and the good tidings will certainly come true. If so, Eldad's and Medad's prophecy meant that Yehoshua would certainly be saved from the spies' conspiracy.

The answer is that Yehoshua, in his humility did not consider Eldad's and Medad's prophecy to contain good tidings. Yehoshua was not interested in a leadership position. If so, Hashem could

"change" His mind about Yehoshua's future, and Yehoshua's salvation from his fellow spies was not assured. Thus, "When Moshe saw the humility of Yehoshua, he called Hoshea the son of Nun 'Yehoshua'," as if to say, "May G-d save you from the spies' conspiracy." (Kometz Ha'minchah)

R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l (1513-1585; rabbi in Egypt, Italy and Poland) offers the following explanation for Yehoshua's name change: Yehoshua apparently was younger than the other spies. We read about the spies (13:3), "They were all distinguished men." Regarding Yehoshua, however, we read (Sh'mot 33:11), "Yehoshua bin Nun, a lad . . ." [He was 44.]

Being a relatively young man, Yehoshua was known by a diminutive form of his name - "Hoshea." Also, he was known more as a son of his father than as "his own man" - he was "the son of Nun." In order to stand this young man on his own two feet and make him an equal of the other spies, "Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun 'Yehoshua'."

Similarly, R' Ashkenazi suggests, our Matriarch Sarah's name was always Sarah; the name by which she is known in part of the Torah - Sarai - is only a diminutive form. [Thus it says (Bereishit 17:15), "Do not call her name Sarai, for Sarah is her name," in contrast to (Bereishit 17:5), "Your name shall be Avraham."] (Ma'asei Hashem)

"The people who spread the evil report about the Land died in a plague before Hashem." (14:37)

Rashi writes: "They died a death that befit them. Because they sinned with their tongues (i.e., speech), their tongues lengthened until they reached their navels and worms crawled from their tongues to their navels."

R' Shimon Moshe Diskin z"l (Russia; 1875-1931) elaborates on the appropriateness of this punishment: The various mutinies against Moshe in the desert fall into two categories. In some cases, Moshe's opponents were not jealous of his position, but were simply distressed by the inconveniences of life in the desert compared to the pleasant memories they had of Egypt. These people were not interested in making any sacrifices for the sake of attaining some greater good. (Such a mutiny was seen in last week's parashah.)

In other cases, Moshe's opponents understood the purpose of being in the desert. However, their own jealousy of Moshe's position ate away at them. (Such a mutiny will be seen in next week's parashah.)

The members of the first group mentioned above sinned with their stomachs. They remembered the delicious foods that they had had in Egypt and they complained about the food they received in the desert. In contrast, the members of the second group sinned with their tongues.

The spies who spread the evil report about Eretz Yisrael belonged to both groups. They were jealous of Moshe, but they also incited the people to return to Egypt. Therefore they were punished

in this bizarre, but appropriate, manner, whereby their tongues touched their stomachs and worms crawled back and forth between them. (Midrash Shimoni)

Selected Laws of Shemittah (From Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shemittah Ve'yovel, ch. 6)

[Ed. note: This year is a shemittah year, and, from time-to-time, we are presenting excerpts from the laws of shemittah. As with any halachic issue addressed in Hamaayan, our goal is to increase awareness of the subject, not to provide practical halachic guidance. For such advice, consult a competent rabbi.]

1. One may not conduct business using the produce of shevi'it / the seventh year. If one wishes to sell a small quantity of the produce of shevi'it, he may, and the money he receives takes on the sanctity of shevi'it, i.e., it should be used to buy food which will be eaten in the sanctified manner in which the fruits of shevi'it must be eaten. The fruit which was sold also retains its original sanctity.
2. One should not buy vegetables in order to sell them . . . However, if he purchased vegetables to eat and he had leftover, he may sell the leftovers and the money he receives takes on the sanctity of shevi'it. Similarly, if he gathered vegetables for his own use and his son or grandson took some and sold them - this is permitted and the money takes on the sanctity of shevi'it.
3. When one sells the produce of shevi'it [i.e., in those circumstances where it is permitted to sell it], one may not sell it using a measure, weight or number, so that it will not be as if he is doing business with the produce of shevi'it. Rather, one sells a little bit and estimates [its value], which is low, in order to let the buyer know that the seller acquired it from hefker / that which is ownerless. [In other words, when one acquires something for nothing, he sells it cheaply. (Radvaz)]
4. One may make bunches of things which ordinarily are brought home in bunches, in order to sell them in estimated quantities in the market. However, one may not make bunches as one ordinarily makes them for the market [i.e., in precise quantities].

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