

THE SPIES AND THE MITZVAH OF CHALLAH

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shlach

The Spies and the Mitzvah of Challah

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Today's Learning:
Ta'anit 4:3-4
O.C. 574:5-575:2
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yoma 17
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Terumot 50

Most of this week's parashah relates the story of the Spies that Bnei Yisrael sent to examine Eretz Yisrael and the tragic aftermath of that excursion. Afterwards, the Torah teaches the mitzvah of Challah / giving a kohen a portion of each dough that one kneads. The Torah says (15:19, 21): "It shall be that when you will eat of the bread of the Land, you shall set aside a portion for Hashem. . . From the first of your kneading you shall give a portion to Hashem, for your generations."

Why, asked R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (died 1993) is this mitzvah taught in this parashah? Why is it not mentioned in next week's parashah together with the other produce-related, Eretz Yisrael-dependent laws, such as Terumah?

R' Soloveitchik's answer is quoted as follows: The commandment to separate Challah is different from Mitzvot such as Terumah and Ma'aser in that the latter apply to the produce of Eretz Yisrael wherever the produce may be, while the former applies to a dough kneaded in Eretz Yisrael

regardless of where the wheat grew. [Ed. note: By rabbinic decree, Challah is separated even in the Diaspora.] Terumah and Ma'aser are indicative of the intrinsic holiness of Eretz Yisrael and of the blessing attributable to the Land itself. Not so Challah. That mitzvah is a reminder of G-d's blessing that rests on the handiwork of the residents of Eretz Yisrael.

The mitzvah of Challah belongs specifically after the episode of the Spies, for their very doubt was whether Bnei Yisrael were strong enough to conquer and inhabit the Land. In the context of those doubts, the Torah teaches that the efforts of those who inhabit the Land are blessed. (Quoted in Shiurei Ha'rav Al Masechet Challah)

"One man each from his father's tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them." (13:2)

Throughout the ages, commentaries have struggled to understand the sin of the Spies. As our verse testifies, they were leaders of their tribes! Where did they go wrong?

R' Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg z"l (rosh yeshiva in Berlin and Switzerland; died 1966) offers the following explanation: The Spies were indeed leaders of the nation, but there are two kinds of leaders. Some leaders have farsighted vision and can anticipate and prepare for the future needs of their charges. Other leaders do not have this ability; their strength is in rallying the people to achieve a predetermined goal.

The Spies were the latter type of leaders - they had the skills to lead Bnei Yisrael through the desert, but not to prepare them for new surroundings in Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, the Zohar indicates that the Spies' negative report was influenced by their fear that they would lose their leadership positions once the nation settled in the Land.

Can the Spies be faulted for not being fit for the task that was assigned to them? R' Weinberg explains that they were faulted only because they let their personal biases influence their report. That bias weakened their resolve to do the best job possible. Had they not thought about retaining their jobs, they would at least have retained their faith in Hashem.

(L'frakim p.506)

"These are their names - For the tribe of Reuven -- Shammua son of Zaccur." (13:4)

R' Avraham Saba z"l (1440:1508) notes that there appears at first glance to be no rhyme or reason to the order in which the Spies are listed. By tribe, that order is: Reuven, Shimon, Yehuda, Yissachar, Ephraim, Binyamin, Zevulun, Yosef (Menashe), Dan, Asher, Naftali, Gad. This is neither the order of the tribes' birth, nor is it the order of their encampment!

In fact, the list is a modified version of the order in which the tribes traveled. R' Saba explains that the factor that influenced the order of the tribes here is the relationship of the tribes to Eretz Yisrael.

Two- and-one-half tribes chose to settle outside the Land - Gad, Reuven and half of Menashe. Gad, the instigator, is therefore listed last. Reuven should have been listed second to last, but because he was the bechor / firstborn, his descendants' failing is overlooked and he is listed first.

[Shimon follows Reuven because they camped and traveled together. Yehuda comes next because of his importance and the fact that one of the two good spies, Kalev ben Yefuneh, came from Yehuda. Yehuda and Yissachar are paired because they camped and traveled together.] Ephraim and Binyamin are pushed ahead of Zevulun because the other good spy, Yehoshua bin Nun, came from Ephraim, while the Bet Hamikdash was destined to be built in Binyamin's portion.

Yosef is mentioned together with Menashe (rather than with his other son, Ephraim) because Yosef and Menashe both chose to remain outside of Eretz Yisrael; Yosef, when he did not ask his brothers to bury him in Eretz Yisrael immediately after his death, and Menashe, when half of his descendants chose to receive their land east of the Jordan River. Indeed, it was Yosef's apparent lack of attachment to the Land that caused some of his descendants to accept land outside of Eretz Yisrael.

(Tzror Ha'mor)

"Hashem, Slow to Anger, Abundant in Kindness, Forgiver of Iniquity and Willful Sin, and Who cleanses - but does not cleanse completely, recalling the iniquity of parents upon children to the third and fourth generations." (14:18)

This verse is part of Moshe's prayer on behalf of the Jewish People after the sin of the Spies. Moshe's prayer included most, but not all, of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy mentioned in Shmot 34:6- 7. (The full list is: "Hashem, Hashem, All Powerful, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth; Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of Iniquity, Willful Sin, and Error, and Who Cleanses -- but does not cleanse completely, recalling the iniquity of parents upon children and grandchildren, to the third and fourth generations:")

The following Attributes are missing from Moshe's prayer in our parashah: Hashem, All Powerful, Compassionate and Gracious, Truth; Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of Error. Why?

R' Avigdor Katz z'l (Vienna; 13th century) explains: Commentaries explain that the repetition, "Hashem, Hashem," teaches that G-d is merciful both before a person sins (although G-d knows he will sin) and after he sins. Here, there was no purpose in mentioning the first "Hashem" as the Jewish people had already sinned.

Regarding the omission of "All Powerful," Moshe could not pray that G-d have mercy because of that attribute, since the Spies' sin had been in doubting whether Hashem was in fact powerful enough to defeat the Canaanites. (See Bemidbar 13:31 - "We cannot ascend to that people for it is stronger than Him!")

Moshe could not mention "Compassionate and Gracious" because the Spies had spoken lashon hara. A person who speaks lashon hara is called a "fool" (Mishlei 10:18), and the prophet Yishayah teaches (Yishayah 27:11), "For it is not a nation of understanding [i.e., it is a foolish nation]; therefore, its Maker will not show it compassion, and its Creator will not be gracious to it."

Next, Moshe could not appeal to G-d's attribute of "Truth," since the Spies had not spoken the truth.

Moshe could not pray to G-d as the One who practices Chessed / Kindness for that would have "reminded" G-d of Avraham, the greatest human practitioner of Chessed. Avraham, too, had expressed doubt when Hashem had promised him the Land. (See Bereishit 15:8)

Finally, Moshe could not appeal to G-d as the "Forgiver of Error," for an error is an unintentional sin. Here, the Spies had sinned intentionally.

(Quoted in Nimukei Chumash L'Rabbeinu Yishayah)

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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