

SHABBAT, SPIES AND WOOD-GATHERERS

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Parshas Shlach

Shabbat, Spies and Wood-Gatherers

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Today's Learning:
Nach: Tehilim 95-96
Tevul Yom 3:6-4:1
O.C. 490:8-491:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sanhedrin 113
Begin Masechet Makkot on Sunday
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kilayim 5

The Midrash Tanchuma on this week's parashah quotes the opening verse of the parashah, "Send forth men "lecha" / for you, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan," and then asks the following question: May a person set out to sea within three days before Shabbat? The midrash answers, citing the Gemara (Shabbat 19a): One may not set out to sea within three days before Shabbat if he is going to a distant place. However, if one wants to sail from Tyre to Sidon [two cities in Eretz Yisrael, in present-day Lebanon], he may do so even on Friday because it is well-known that this trip can be completed in one day.

The midrash continues: To what does this refer? To voluntary travel. However, if one is a shaliach / agent to perform a mitzvah, he may set sail on any day he wishes. Why? Because he is a shliach mitzvah, and this takes precedence over [certain aspects of] Shabbat. Likewise, a shliach mitzvah is exempt from sukkah, for there is no one as beloved to Hashem as a shliach mitzvah who is sent to perform a mitzvah and is even willing to give his life to succeed in his mission.

The midrash continues: There were no people who were sent to do a mitzvah and put their lives on the line for their mission like the two men that Yehoshua sent to spy on Yericho [as described in this week's haftarah]. In contrast, the messengers [i.e., spies] that Moshe sent were wicked. How do we

know this? Because we read (Bemidbar 14:36), "And the men whom Moshe sent to spy out the Land, and who returned and provoked the entire assembly against him by spreading a report against the Land . . ." This is why the verse says, "Send forth men for you." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Avraham Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) writes: The author of the midrash wants to explain the use of the word "lecha" / "for you." The midrash notes that one who travels to perform a mitzvah with such dedication that he is even willing to endanger his life is beloved by G-d and is exempt from certain mitzvot. This highlights the lowliness of one who abandons a holy mission and travels instead to anger Hashem. About such people, G-d says, "They are not mine." (Be'ur Amarim)

"Send forth men 'lecha' / for you, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan." (13:2)

The midrash on this verse asks: "May a person set out to sea within three days before Shabbat?" [See the front page of this issue for the full midrash.] How is this related to our parashah? Also, why in fact did Moshe dispatch the Spies when Hashem indicated His displeasure by saying "for you"?

R' Yoel Teitelbaum z"l (1887-1979; the Satmar Rav) explains: At the end of last week's parashah, we read that Miriam spoke lashon hara about Moshe regarding the fact that he separated from his wife. Why did Moshe do that? Because Hashem could speak to Moshe at any time, and Moshe understood that one cannot "leap" into a state of kedushah / holiness. Rather, one must prepare himself to achieve higher levels of kedushah. [However, only a person on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu has a reason to separate himself from everyday life to such an extent.]

Here, Moshe did not send the Spies to confirm that the Land could be conquered, for Hashem had promised that. Rather, he sent representatives to Eretz Yisrael to prepare the Land for the arrival of Bnei Yisrael by infusing it with their holiness in much the same way that one sanctifies a piece of parchment before writing the Torah on it. This was "for you," i.e., it was consistent with the lesson that is learned from Moshe's separating from his wife.

The Satmar Rav continues: Why should one not travel within three days before Shabbat? Poskim explain that it is because unforeseen circumstances might force him to transgress the Shabbat. (Nevertheless, travel is permitted in the first half of the week because only the three days before Shabbat are the time to prepare for Shabbat.) This idea, that one must prepare for the kedushah of Shabbat, comes from our parashah, i.e., from Moshe's attempt to prepare Eretz Yisrael for the holiness that Bnei Yisrael would bring to it.

This is why the midrash concludes, "In contrast, the messengers [i.e., spies] that Moshe sent were wicked." The midrash means to say that these wicked people did not go to the Land with the intention that Moshe had in mind, i.e., to sanctify it. (Divrei Yoel p.351)

"Then the nations that heard of Your fame will say, 'Because Hashem lacked the ability to bring this people to the Land that He had sworn to give them, He slaughtered them in the Wilderness.'" (14:16)

After Bnei Yisrael had accepted the Spies' negative report, Moshe prayed that they be spared destruction to avoid a chillul Hashem / desecration of G-d's Name. This implies that they had no merit adequate to protect them. Why was their sin considered so severe?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains: We read in Tehilim (106:24-27), "They despised the desirable Land, they had no faith in His word. . . Then He lifted up His hand [in an oath] against them to cast them down in the wilderness, and to cast down their descendants among the nations, and to scatter them among the lands." These verses teach that the exile of the Jewish People throughout the world is a result of the sin of the spies. How so?

The choseness of Eretz Yisrael is a sign of the choseness of the Jewish Nation, for the two are inextricably intertwined. It follows that the rejection of Eretz Yisrael is a rejection of the uniqueness of the Jewish People. In that case, there was no reason for Hashem to have taken Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Likewise, there was no reason after the sin of the Spies not to destroy Bnei Yisrael (G-d forbid) except for the chillul Hashem that would have resulted.

Our Sages say that the purpose of our dispersion is to spread knowledge of Hashem. Had we believed in our own uniqueness and desired that Hashem's revelation be limited to Eretz Yisrael, that is what would have occurred. But since our ancestors did not have that desire, the result was that we were exiled. (Quoted in Peninei Ha'Rayah)

"Forgive now the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your kindness and as You have forgiven this people from Egypt until now." (14:19)

R' Nosson Sternhartz z"l (1780-1845; foremost student of R' Nachman of Breslov and transcriber of his teachings) writes in the name of his rebbe: Depending on how successful one is in having his prayers answered on Yom Kippur, so he will have a meaningful Chanukah. What is the connection?

The Gemara (Ta'anit 29a) teaches that the night when Bnei Yisrael cried because of the negative report that the Spies brought back was the ninth of the month of Av (Tisha B'Av). Hashem said, "You cried for no reason; I will give you a reason to cry on this night." Therefore, the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed on the Ninth of Av. R' Nachman explains that in the sin of the Spies lies the root of all sins, which is why this sin caused the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash. [Elsewhere, R' Nachman explains that by degrading the honor of Eretz Yisrael, the Spies degraded the honor of G-d, for He reveals Himself in the Bet Hamikdash whose place is in Eretz Yisrael.]

The Bet Hamikdash was the place where the Jewish People found atonement. We read in Yeshayah

(1:21) that Yerushalayim was the place "in which righteousness would lodge." Rashi z"l explains that no one ever went to sleep with a sin "on his books" because the daily sacrifice of the morning atoned for sins committed at night while the daily sacrifice of the evening atoned for sins committed during the day. This was necessary, R' Nachman explains, because the Jewish neshamah is simply too delicate to bear a sin. But now that the Bet Hamikdash does not stand, there is no one to provide such atonement, and the neshamah suffers accordingly.

Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that this sin would lead to the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash, so he prayed, "Forgive now the iniquity of this people . . ." And, to a certain extent, his prayer succeeded, and he brought the eventual rededication of the Bet Hamikdash closer. Similarly, to the extent that we successfully pray for forgiveness on Yom Kippur, we bring the rededication / Chanukah closer. Notably, the initial letters of the Hebrew words of this verse "(Ha'am) ha'zeh k'godel chasadecha ve'cha'asher nasata" / "this people according to the greatness of Your kindness and as You have forgiven" are the letters of the Hebrew word "Chanukah." (Likutei Sichot Vol. II, No. 11)

"A person who shall act high-handedly, whether native or convert, he blasphemed Hashem; that person shall be cut off from among his people. For he scorned the word of Hashem and broke his commandment; that person will surely be cut off (literally, 'cut off, he will be cut off'), his sin is upon him." (15:30-31)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) writes: These verses seem to be redundant, but in reality, they may be understood as follows:

The Gemara (Berachot 4b) says that one who transgresses a decree of the Sages incurs the death penalty. How can transgressing a d'rabbanan / rabbinic law be more stringent than transgressing a Torah law, most of which are not punishable by death? R' Kluger explains that if one transgresses a Torah law, death is not an adequate punishment.

Our verses are stating: "A person who shall act high-handedly"--i.e., he transgresses a rabbinic law, which many people are not ashamed to transgress publicly because they do not take them seriously--"He shall be cut off from among his people." In contrast, if "he scorned the word of Hashem and broke his commandment"--i.e., he transgressed a Torah law, which may be known only to Hashem--that person will be cut off, he will be cut off"--he will be punished in both this world and the next. (Imrei Shefer)

"Bnei Yisrael were in the Wilderness and they found an ish / a man mekoshesh / gathering wood on the Sabbath day." (15:32)

R' Zalman Sorotzkin z"l (1881-1966; the Lutzker Rav, later in Yerushalayim) writes: The midrash states

that the mekoshesh sinned for the sake of Heaven. Bnei Yisrael thought that once G-d had decreed that they would not enter Eretz Yisrael, they were no longer obligated to observe mitzvot. To dispel this notion, the mekoshesh transgressed Shabbat so that he would be put to death and others would see and take heed. Indeed, the overall righteousness of this man is hinted to by the Torah's use of the word "ish" / "a man [of distinction]," R' Sorotzkin writes. (The verse could just as well have omitted that word and said, "They found a mekoshesh / wood-gatherer on the Sabbath day.")

R' Sorotzkin explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 118b) teaches, "If one observes Shabbat according to the law, even if he worships avodah zarah like the generation of Enosh [grandson of Adam Ha'rishon], he will be forgiven." Of course, R' Sorotzkin writes, this does not mean that he literally worships idols, for what good is observing Shabbat if one denies that G-d created the world? Rather, the Gemara singles out the form of worship of the generation of Enosh, when mankind first believed that G-d is too lofty to be worshiped directly and therefore conceived of intermediate forces to be worshiped, as Rambam z"l explains. While that too is sinful, so long as one retains a belief in the all-powerful Creator and he observes Shabbat, which testifies to Creation, he is guaranteed to return to true emunah.

After Hashem decreed that the generation of the Exodus would die in the desert, they felt that being under the direct providence of G-d was too difficult, and they wanted to put distance between themselves and Hashem. The mekoshesh wanted to ensure that at least they observed Shabbat.

R' Sorotzkin adds: Why does the Torah say, "they found," rather than "they saw"? This indicates that there were people on the lookout for Shabbat violators, for a community is obligated to appoint guardians to enforce the laws of Shabbat. This obligation derives from the verse (Shmot 31:16), "Bnei Yisrael shall observe the Shabbat, to make the Shabbat . . ." "To observe the Shabbat" refers to the individual's observance, while "to make the Shabbat" refers to the community's enforcement. Why is there such an obligation? Because any individual's transgression of Shabbat weakens the atmosphere of Shabbat experienced by the entire community. (Oznayim La'Torah)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **[Torah.org](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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