

THE SPIES AND YERUSHALAYIM

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shlach

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In this week's parashah, we read of the incident of the Spies. Our Sages teach that the date on which the Spies delivered their report to Bnei Yisrael was the eighth day of the month of Av. The following night, the ninth of Av / Tishah B'Av, Bnei Yisrael wept, as we read (14:1), "The people wept that night." Hashem then declared, "You cried on this night for no reason; I will make this night a night of tears for your descendants." Therefore, the ninth of Av was designated by G-d as the date for the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash.

R' Yechiel Michel Tikochinsky z"l (1871-1955; editor for 51 years of an annual calendar documenting the customs of Eretz Yisrael and Yerushalayim; also author of the widely-used work on mourning, Gesher Ha'chaim) notes that the connection between the Jewish People and Eretz Yisrael, especially Yerushalayim, was never severed. He writes: The nation lifted its right hand and swore (Tehilim 137:5-6), "If I forget you, Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget [its skill]. Let my tongue adhere to my palate, if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Yerushalayim above my greatest joy." The prophet Yeshayah declared (62:6), "Upon your walls, Yerushalayim, I have assigned guardians; all the day and all the night, continuously, they shall never be silent." And the prophet Yirmiyah instructed (51:50), "Remember Hashem from the distance, and let Yerushalayim come up in your hearts." Its memory never leaves us. In all our prayers and in Birkat Ha'mazon we recite a special blessing about Yerushalayim. (Ir Ha'kodesh Ve'hamikdash p.7)

R' Yisroel Elya Weintraub, (1932-2010; American-born, leading kabbalist and teacher of hashkafah / Jewish thought in Bnei Brak, Israel) wrote to someone who had moved from Eretz Yisrael to the Diaspora:

"I ask of you-Eretz Yisrael is the place of Yisrael, and the expression that a place finds favor in the

eyes of its inhabitants was said primarily about it. (Therefore, every Jew is entitled to four amot of land in Eretz Yisrael; that is a halachah.) Therefore, le'ma'an Hashem [literally, 'for G-d's sake'], do not speak ill about it after leaving it, while you are there [in the Diaspora] (see Tehilim 106, verse 24, and the frightful aftermath thereof)." (Igrot Da'at p.287)

"They ascended in the south and he arrived at Chevron." (13:22)

Why does the verse say "he arrived" rather than "they [the spies] arrived"? Rashi z"l explains: "Kalev alone [among the spies] went there and prostrated himself on the graves of the Patriarchs, praying that he be helped not to give in to the enticement of his colleagues and join them in their counsel. We see that it was Kalev who went there, for the Torah states (Devarim 1:36) 'Except for Kalev ben Yefuneh, he shall see it, and to him will I give the land upon which he stepped!' and it is written (Shoftim 1:20) 'They gave Chevron to Kalev'."

Why did Kalev choose to pray in Chevron, and not at the future site of the Bet Hamikdash? R' Moshe Wolfson shlita (mashgiach ruchani of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn, N.Y.) explains:

In a sense, the incident of the Spies was the beginning of the destruction of Yerushalayim [see front page]. In its destruction, Yerushalayim is not the ideal place for prayer. In contrast, Chevron represents the eternal, unbreakable connection between Hashem and the Jewish People, i.e., the connection that exists regardless of our merits simply because we are descendants of the Patriarchs. Not coincidentally, the name "Chevron" shares a root with the word "chibur" / "connection." "Chevron" is also comprised of the same letters that spell "churban" / "destruction," signifying that Chevron's significance is most pronounced when Yerushalayim is in a state of destruction.

Why then do we not pray toward Chevron rather than Yerushalayim, since the Bet Hamikdash is currently in a state of destruction? R' Wolfson explains: The eternal, unbreakable connection between Hashem and the Jewish People which Chevron represents is hidden deep within our souls - barely, if at all, within our consciousness. It is too subtle to be represented by a physical place to which we can direct our prayers; indeed, were it in the open, it would be susceptible to destruction. The revealed aspect of our relationship with Hashem is represented only by Yerushalayim, where Hashem's revelation was, and will in the future be, open and public. Therefore, we direct our prayers there. (Tziyon Ve'arehah p.86)

"They have tested Me now ten times." (14:22)

R' Shlomo Eliasoff z"l (1841-1926; leading early 20th century kabbalist; grandfather of R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv shlita) asks: How could Bnei Yisrael "test" G-d after all the miracles they had

witnessed? Indeed, do we not read (Shmot 14:31), "[Bnei] Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant"? Furthermore we read (Shmot 15:20), "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took her drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums . . ." Why did they have drums? Because they took musical instruments with them out of Egypt in anticipation of witnessing miracles! Finally, did they in fact test Hashem? Is it not more accurate to say that they sinned?

R' Eliasoff explains: In fact, only a small part of Bnei Yisrael sinned on each of the ten occasions. We read, for example (Shmot 16:27), "It happened on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather [mahn]." However, the majority of Bnei Yisrael tested Hashem on those occasions. How so?

R' Eliasoff continues: Bnei Yisrael lacked confidence in their ability to receive and hold on to the "light" of Hashem's revelation. Whenever some of their brethren sinned, Bnei Yisrael should have reprimanded the sinners. But they did not, because they were testing the depth of Hashem's commitment to them: Would He abandon them when some of them sinned? That is what Hashem referred to when he said, "They have tested Me now ten times." (Likkutei Niglot Leshem Shevo V'achlamah)

"[When] you perform a fire-offering to Hashem--an olah / elevation-offering or a zevach [shelamim] / feast-offering . . . The one who offers his offering to Hashem shall offer a minchah / meal-offering of a tenth [of an ephah] fine flour, mixed with a quarter-hin of oil." (15:3-4)

The midrash relates this verse to the verse (Malachi 3:4), "Then the minchah of Yehuda and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to Hashem as in the days of old and in previous years." What is the connection between these two verses? Also, why is our verse so redundant ("The one who offers his offering to Hashem shall offer . . ."), when it could have said simply, "[When] you perform a fire-offering to Hashem . . . bring a minchah"?

R' Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer z"l (1878-1933; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) explains: The primary value of a sacrificial offering is when the one bringing it is prepared to "offer himself"--not literally, of course, but rather by repenting and improving his deeds in order to bring himself close to Hashem. (Indeed, "korban" comes from the root which means "to come close.") The redundancy in our verse comes to teach that "The one who offers his offering to Hashem shall offer [himself with] a minchah . . ." And when will that minchah be pleasing to Hashem? When a person uses his days of old, i.e., his old age, to rectify his previous years. (Chiddushei Rabbeinu Yosef Nechemiah Al Ha'Torah)

Pirkei Avot

[Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: "You are not required to complete the task, yet you are not free to neglect it. If you have studied much Torah, you will be given great reward, and your Employer can be relied upon to pay you the wage for your labor, but be aware that the reward of the righteous will be given in the World to Come." (Ch.2)

R' Shimon ben Tzemach Duran z"l (1361-1444; rabbi of Algiers; known as "Rashbatz") writes: This mishnah is teaching that one should never give up on learning Torah even though it is impossible to learn the entire Torah. In the previous mishnah, Rabbi Tarfon had said, "The day is short, and there is much to do"--a statement that could lead a person to give up hope. One might say, "Why start something that I can never finish?" Therefore, in this mishnah, he teaches that there is reward even for one who does not complete the task. This is because, although the halachah is that a worker who is hired for a specific job need not be paid until he completes that job ("Ain sechirut mishtalemet elah l'va'sof"), he does earn his pay incrementally as he performs each unit of the work ("Yeshnah l'sechirut mi'tchilah v'ad sof").

Rashbatz continues: A person might find an excuse to be lazy, studying Torah only casually and as a form of relaxation, since he will be rewarded for whatever he studies. Therefore the mishnah says, "You are not required to complete the task, yet you are not free to neglect it." You were not hired, so-to-speak, to complete the entire Torah, which G-d knows to be impossible; therefore, do not worry that you will not be paid for however much you do learn. But why start what you can't finish? Because you were created for that purpose, and you have no right to neglect it. G-d does not expect you to finish, but He does object when you neglect the mitzvah.

Furthermore, know that "your Employer can be relied upon to pay you the wage for your labor." He is not like a human employer who stalls by saying, "Come back tomorrow and I will pay you then." You will never have to sue Him. (It was not necessary, Rashbatz observes, for Rabbi Tarfon to note also that G-d will always have assets from which to pay you, for that is obvious.) But, know that "the reward of the righteous will be given in the World to Come." This is because employers pay when the work is done, and the work is never done as long as a person lives. (Magen Avot)

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** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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