

THE COMMON THREAD

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BS"D

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Today's Learning:

Nach: Tehilim 119 (gimmel/dalet)

Mishnah: Kilayim 2:1-2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 32

Our parashah contains four main sections: First, the story of the Spies who were sent to Eretz Yisrael and returned with a bad report, Bnei Yisrael's reaction to that report, and Hashem's anger at Bnei Yisrael; second, the laws of the korban chatat / sin offering, which is brought, in particular, for the sin of avodah zarah / idolatry; third, the story of the man who gathered wood on Shabbat; and fourth, the mitzvah of tzitzit. R' Aryeh Finkel shlita (rosh yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Modi'in Illit, Israel) explains the connection between these sections as follows:

The essence of Bnei Yisrael's sin in accepting the Spies' report was not merely that they listened to lashon hara about Eretz Yisrael and about G-d. Rather, it demonstrated a lack of emunah / faith that Hashem keeps his promises. Specifically, since Hashem had promised to take Bnei Yisrael to a good land, there should have been no question in Bnei Yisrael's minds that the land is, in fact, good.

In this light, the connection to avodah zarah is apparent. Avodah zarah is the denial of G-d. Bnei Yisrael, too, suffered a breakdown in their emunah and effectively denied G-d.

The connection to transgressing Shabbat is apparent as well, for Shabbat is the ultimate expression of emunah. In Lechah Dodi we recite, "Enter in peace, crown of her husband, in happiness and exultation . . ." Why is Shabbat a time of happiness? Because our Sages say that Shabbat is a microcosm of Olam Ha'ba. In other words, it is an expression of our faith that Hashem keeps His promise to reward man for his good deeds.

Our parashah ends with the mitzvah of tzitzit and the declaration, "I am Hashem, your Elokim." Our Sages teach that this expression always means, "I am Hashem who has the power, and can be trusted, to reward man for his good deeds." Thus, the parashah comes full circle to the idea that Hashem keeps His promises. (Yavo Shiloh p.481)

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

The Midrash Tanchuma quotes this verse and then asks: 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: This applies only 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 being a shliach mitzvah takes precedence over [certain aspects of] Shabbat. . .

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 [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]

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 3 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.

However, the midrash concludes, "The messengers that Moshe sent were wicked." They did not go to the Land with the intention that Moshe had in mind, i.e., to sanctify it. (Divrei Yoel p.351)

"Vayishlach otam / Moshe sent them forth from the Wilderness of Paran at Hashem's command . . ." (13:3)

R' Yeshayah Reiniger z"l (19th century; rabbi of Hranice, Moravia) notes that the verse could have used a contraction, "Vayishlachaim." [The meaning would have been the same, but our Sages teach that the Torah generally prefers the most concise phrasing, so we must search for a reason when a longer form is used.] He explains:

There seem to be conflicting indications in the Torah whether Hashem approved of sending the Spies. Our verse, for example, seems to say that they were dispatched "at Hashem's command." The answer, writes R' Reiniger, is that perhaps once Moshe decided to send spies, Hashem chose the specific individuals. This would explain the extra word in our verse: "Moshe sent otam / them . . . at Hashem's command."

This would answer another question as well. We read (verse 8), "For the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea son of Nun." Then we read (verse 16), "Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun—'Yehoshua'." Why aren't these pieces of information combined into one verse? Based on the above, the answer may be that verses 4-15, which list the names of the spies, are Hashem's words; thus, the fact that Moshe changed Hoshea's name could not be included there. (Chiddushei Rabbi Yeshayah)

"These are the names of the men whom Moshe sent to spy out the Land, and Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun—'Yehoshua'." (13:16)

R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l (1512-1585; rabbi in Egypt, Cyprus and Poland) notes that the name "Yehoshua" is used several times in the book of Shmot. Thus, our verse cannot be taken to mean that Moshe changed Hoshea's name to Yehoshua.

Rather, R' Ashkenazi writes, his name was always Yehoshua, but, being a relatively young man, he was often called by the diminutive, "Hoshea." Yehoshua was a youngster among the Spies. Here we read, "These are the names of the men whom Moshe sent," whereas, regarding Yehoshua we read (Shmot 33:11), "His servant, Yehoshua bin Nun, a lad, would not depart from within the tent." Thus, in our verse, Moshe said that, from now on, he should be called Yehoshua, as a man among men.

R' Ashkenazi writes further: We read (Bereishit 17:5), "Your name shall no longer be called Avram; but your name shall be Avraham." In contrast, we read (Bereishit 17:15), "Hashem said to Avraham, 'As for Sarai your wife—do not call her name Sarai, for Sarah is her name.'" This implies that our Matriarch's name was always Sarah, but everyone called her by the diminutive "Sarai." Now, to inspire Avraham

to pray harder for her to bear children, Hashem wanted to increase Sarah's stature in her husband's eyes, so He commanded that she no longer be called "Sarai." (Ma'asei Hashem)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written in 5739 [1979] by R' Pinchas Menachem Alter z"l (1926-1996), rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Sfas Emes in Yerushalayim, to his mechutan, R' Menashe Klein z"l (1924-2011). R' Klein lived in Brooklyn, N.Y. and was a prominent posek and author of numerous sefarim. He also established the Yerushalayim neighborhood Ramot Ungvar. For the last four years of his life, R' Alter served as the Gerrer Rebbe.

To the honorable one, my beloved friend and mechutan, the famous gaon and tzaddik, etc., wise and knowledgeable, R' Menashe Klein shlita, rabbi of Ungvar and head of Yeshivat Bet She'arim.

After inquiring of the well-being of his honor with true friendship and proper respect . . .

In order not to have, G-d forbid, two [consecutive] letters that do not contain divrei Torah, I will write something. Although I have many observations regarding your precious sefarim, Mishneh Halachot, I will write a small comment regarding a question asked by my brother, the [Gerrer] Rebbe, shlita. In the blessing known as Me'ain Shalosh [also known as Berachah Acharonah or Al Ha'michyah] we say, "B'kedushah u'v'taharah" / "with holiness and purity." [This blessing is supposed to be an abridgement of Birkat Hamazon.] Where is there any reference in Birkat Hamazon to kedushah and taharah? Now, you have written that the fruits of Eretz Yisrael are holy and must be guarded in purity. [Thus, since this blessing is recited over the Seven Species with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed, it makes sense to say, "B'kedushah u'v'taharah."]

I would like to add support for your answer. The mishnah at the end of Sotah (48a) states: "When the Temple was destroyed, fruits lost their taste. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, '[The absence of] purity removed the taste'." Thus, when we pray [in this blessing] for the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash, we pray as well for the restoration of the good taste of the fruit, which requires the restoration of ritual purity. Thus we say, "B'kedushah u'v'taharah." May we merit this soon in our day.