

# THE SHEPHERD STICKS WITH HIS FLOCK

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

## Spies and Stones - The Shepherd Sticks with His Flock

Much of the first section of parshas Devarim is devoted to Moshe Rabbeinu's bitter rebuke of the nation with which he has spent his last 40 years. He criticizes, albeit in a roundabout way, their rebelliousness, their fickleness, and their stiff-necked inability to accept Hashem's authority. Not to be forgotten, of course, is that the very fact they are still in the desert, almost 40 years after having left Egypt, is also of their own doing. G-d had originally wanted to bring them to Israel immediately; it was as a result of the sin of the Meraglim (spies), and their negative description of the Land, that our sojourn in the desert was prolonged. In order that all those who said, "We would rather die in this desert than to enter such a land!" would indeed meet the very fate they so desired.

The Torah originally discusses this episode in parshas Shelach. Here, however, Moshe adds (1:37):

*With me, as well, Hashem became angry because of you, saying, "You too shall not come there!"*

Moshe implies that he too was punished for the episode of the spies; if his nation was not to enter the Land, nor would he. The problem with this is that we all know the Torah itself gives a completely different reason as to why Moshe was not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. It was because of the incident at the rock, 38 years later, when Moshe, instead of "coercing" the stone to bring forth its waters with words, strikes it (see Bamidbar/Numbers 20:1-13). How can Moshe imply here that his demise in the desert was a result of the Sin of the Spies?

Ramban understands that there are in fact two separate incidents here; the spies and the stone. Moshe juxtaposes them only because the end result of both was the inability to enter the Land. With me, as well, Hashem became angry because of you - at another time and another place, when you angrily complained about the lack of water, and caused me to hit the stone. Hashem thus told me then, as He had told you 38 years previously, "You too shall not come there!"

Panim Yafos explains that the root cause of the sin of the Meraglim was the nation's dwindling faith. When they first left Egypt, the Torah praises their simple, unshakable belief: "And they believed in Hashem and in His servant Moshe (Shemos/Exodus 14:31)." By the time the spies go out, more than a year has passed. Hard as it is to understand, the impression of the Ten Plagues, the Exodus, and the splitting of the Sea was by then a distant memory. They lost confidence in Hashem's ability to make their journey a successful one, and bemoaned ever having left Egypt.

At the end of the forty year decree, as they stood poised to finally enter the Land, Hashem staged a drought of sorts, in order that Moshe would bring forth water by simply speaking to a stone - a sort of "booster shot" for their emunah (faith) - thus guaranteeing that they would not err as their parents had before them. When, ultimately, the plan failed as a result of Moshe's angrily striking the stone, he too lost his chance to enter the Land of his desire. The sin of the stone only came about because of the need to rebuild the faith lost during the period of the spies. The two events are thus inextricably entwined. Ultimately, With me too Hashem became angry because of you, saying, "You too shall not come there."

Others explain simply that were it not for the sin of the Meraglim, Miriam would not have died in the desert, and the well, which had accompanied them in her merit, would not have dried up. There would have been no drought, and no need to talk to the stone, and Moshe too would have entered the Land. Thus it is true that indirectly, the sin of the Spies precipitated Moshe's not entering the Land.

According to all three explanations mentioned above, when Moshe said, "With me too Hashem became angry," he referred not, as it would seem, to the sin of the Spies, but rather to the incident with the stone. The Rosh, based on a Midrash (Pestikta Zutrasa) however, tells a mashal (parable), through which the verse can be understood according to its most simple meaning:

A poor peasant girl once went to the well to draw water. To her great distress, her pail, which was her only, slipped from her hands, and fell into the deep recesses of the well. She despaired of retrieving her pail, and did not know how she would ever replace it.

Just then, a maidservant from the royal palace came to fill her bucket. It was an elegant bucket, made of gold and studded with jewels. Alas, her bucket too slipped and fell into the deep well. "How fortunate am I," thought the peasant girl, "for now they will surely come to retrieve the royal pail, and once they are there, they will retrieve my pail too!"

The captain, they say, must go down with his ship. Moshe Rabbeinu, the faithful shepherd of his generation, must lead his flock into Eretz Yisrael. Hashem would not allow him to abandon them in the wasteland of the desert. The time will come when Hashem will call upon Moshe to arise, and once again, for the last time, lead his flock into their Land, to rebuild once-and-for-all the Holy Beis HaMikdash. Hashem, as it were, will return to the desert, to awaken our eternal leader. And along with the shepherd, Hashem will awaken His forsaken flock, and breathe souls of life back into their motionless bodies.

Once it was decreed that Moshe's generation would not enter the Land, it was a forgone conclusion that Hashem would not allow him to leave them. Now it was simply a question of working out the details: How, exactly, would Hashem "pull the strings" so that Moshe would indeed be forced to remain in the desert. Were it not for the well, there would have been some other excuse; the shepherd must remain with his flock.

During this difficult period, as we contemplate the bitter exile, we try to find comfort and consolation. At times we may despair - what merit do we have, we ask, through which we will deserve redemption? But we remind ourselves that Moshe, too, silently waits to enter the Land he so desired. When Hashem comes to get him, He'll take us along too. May it be speedily, in our days.

Have a good Shabbos.

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