

# IN SEARCH OF LAND

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

With ten tests did our ancestors test The Holy One, Blessed is He, in the desert, as it says, "They have tested Me these ten times and did not listen to My voice ..." (BaMidbar 14:22). (Pirke Avos 5:6)

There is an inherent problem in the above statement. The verse being quoted is from this week's parsha and can refer to the problems the Jewish people caused up until the sin of the spies; by the end of the Torah, the number of "tests" will have gone up significantly. However, the mishnah itself is from the time of the second Temple era, long after the close of the Torah, and therefore its list of tests should be longer! Why did the rabbis, seemingly, stop counting the trials with this week's parsha?

The truth is, even for the ten tests referred to above, the majority of the Jewish people did not get involved. When the Jewish people came to Moshe at the sea and asked sarcastically, "Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you took us out to die here?" (Shemos 14:11); in fact, it had only been Dason and Aviram who spoke to Moshe like that (Nedarim 64b).

And who was it that left over their munn until the morning, after Moshe warned them not to (Shemos 16:19)? Dason and Aviram, and only Dason and Aviram. Furthermore, who was it that called out at a moment of rebellion, "Let us appoint a new leader and return to Egypt?" Again, Dason and Aviram; the vast majority of the Jewish people did not follow their lead, not at the sea, and not with the munn.

In the incident of the golden calf, Dason and Aviram had not been the chief instigators; however, neither had the Jewish people involved themselves with it, except for a few from the weaker element of the nation (and even they didn't actually worship the calf). According to the Yalkut (Aikev, 852), the Erev Rav (Mixed Multitude) had been totally responsible for that horrific transgression at the base of Mt. Sinai, while the rest of the Jewish people stayed at home in their tents, crouched in terror waiting for Divine retribution.

Which brings us back to this week's parsha. Of the ten tests, at least this one carries the name of its perpetrators (the twelve spies), whom we know are Jewish, and are also not only Dason and Aviram (they didn't go at all!). Furthermore, the Midrash makes it clear that the majority of the nation did not accept the evil report of the ten spies, which raises a very difficult question, one that can be applied

to all of the ten tests: Why punish the entire nation?

The answer to this question comes from knowing what the true nature of the test was: Were the incidents themselves the trials, or were the trials just a test for something else altogether?

Back in Parashas BeShallach, right after the munn fell and just before the attack of Amalek, the Jewish people asked: Is G-d among us or not (aiyin)? (Shemos 17:4)

With a little perspective, it is easy to see how senseless the question was. After all, the sea had already split for them, saving them and drowning the Egyptians. Before that, they had witnessed the spectacular and miraculous destruction of Egypt before being redeemed from there. Munn had already begun to fall daily from the sky; a Cloud led their way by day, and a Pillar of Fire led them through the darkness of night!

What kind of sign of G-d's presence had they been looking for?!

Thus the Kabbalists explain that what the Jewish people were looking for was not so much a sign that G-d was among them, but more of a sign as to what extent He was there with them (in fact, the word "aiyin" is also a name of one of the highest sefiros). In other words, from the time the Jewish people left Egypt, they had lived by miracles and had seen revelations of G-d that even the later prophets would never see. G-d's involvement in their lives had been very, very direct and obvious; they wanted to know if that's the way it was going to be for them henceforth.

This is what they had tested. Each incident had not involved the Jewish people, but they used each test of G-d to see just how patient He was prepared to be with them, to see how long He would overlook their shortcomings until He simply turned His back on them and treated them like anyone else. Would He deal miraculously with them no matter what they did?

This way of thinking had been a very big mistake, and even created a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because of their lack of trust in G-d by not assuming that He would always be with them, weakened even more so by their fear of sinning, they created a situation by which He could no longer stay with them on such a high level of relationship. Trust is a two-way street, and though for ten tests G-d had shown His faithfulness each time, each time the nation had not shown theirs.

Thus this tenth test had sealed the fate of the nation, to die in the desert and to lose the closeness to G-d they had known until then. This is why mishnah only refers to the ten tests up until and including this parsha. After this test, after which G-d decided they would not enter the land of Canaan, there was no longer any need to test G-d further in this respect.

## Shabbos Day:

G-d spoke to Moshe, telling him to speak to the Jewish people and say to them, "When you come into the land to which I am bringing you and you eat of the land's produce, you must separate an elevated gift for G-d. You must separate the first portion of your kneading as a Dough-Offering ..." (BaMidbar 15:17)

Commonly referred to as Challah, the Dough-Offering is the portion separated from a dough the volume of about 8 cups (or, 43.2 eggs), which in the time of the Temple was given to the kohen to eat; today it is burned until it is inedible and is then disposed of. When more than 1200 grams of flour are used Challah must be separated; if at least 2250 grams of flour were used, then a special blessing is recited upon separation of Challah (Chazon Ish). In Eretz Yisroel, this is Torah Law (when the majority of the Jews are living on the land); outside of Eretz Yisroel, the mitzvah to separate Challah is rabbinical.

The mitzvah of Challah is one that is usually performed by a woman (Mishnah, Shabbos 2:6), because, according to the Talmud, it is one of the ways womankind rectifies the giving of the forbidden fruit to Adam, back in the Garden of Eden. Since Adam was "kneaded" from the ground (see Sanhedrin 38b), he is called the "Challah" of creation, and eating from the forbidden fruit therefore damaged the "challah" of creation (Talmud Yerushalmi). By taking Challah, a woman helps to rectify what was "damaged" then.

Since the actual eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil took place erev Shabbos, it is considered even more praiseworthy if a woman bakes erev Shabbos in order to fulfill the mitzvah of separating Challah (Mishnah Berurah 242:6). Hence the time-honored tradition of many Jewish women to bake Challahs erev Shabbos, rather than to buy them, especially when the woman is expecting a child; doing so, according to tradition, is supposed to be an important merit for a healthy and easy delivery (of the baby, not the Challahs), as well as for material blessing on a household.

There are many laws relating to the mitzvah of separating Challah, and one easy source from which to review them is the book, "Halichos Bas Yisroel," by Rabbi Yitzchak Ya'akov Fuchs (there is an English edition as well).

However, what concerns us here is the relevance of this mitzvah to the story of the spies. We have already seen how this is one of the few mitzvos from the 613 mitzvos that is "dependent on the land"; that is, that is only applicable when being performed in Eretz Yisroel. That is certainly one very important connection to the story of the spies, who rejected Eretz Yisroel.

On another level, it is interesting to note that the Talmud, when comparing other lands to Eretz Yisroel, does so as follows:

All of the lands are a "dough" (issa) compared to Eretz Yisroel ... (Kesuvos 111a)

True, in the context of the Talmud, the term "issa" is used to denote "mixture," in this case, the mixture of various lineages and families. However, there are other ways to make a similar comparison, but the rabbis chose the word "dough," which is consistent with the Talmud elsewhere that looks at the earth as being the "dough" from Adam was taken.

That would also have a bearing on the reason why women are more connected to this mitzvah than the men, and why it appears in this week's parsha:

G-d said to Moshe, "Send men and they will spy the land of Canaan ..." (BaMidbar 13:1)

"Men" excludes [women], as the rabbis have said: The men hated the land, as they said, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt!" The women loved the land, and said, "Give us our possession!" (Klei Yekar)

The women, who appreciated the gift of Eretz Yisroel and its uniqueness as a land, wanted to "take it," and leave behind the rest of the lands. Hence, they are rewarded with the mitzvah of taking Challah from the dough, which will become the gift of the kohanim.

On a much deeper level, the mitzvah of Challah helps to rectify that which is only alluded to in the Torah in the second verse of Bereishis ("And the earth was null and void ..."), but which is the subject of many Kabbalistic works. It is this that is the underlying cause of all that goes wrong in creation, such as the spies coming back with an evil report. To make a long story short, and a very abstract idea less so, there are eight of these "things" that are in need of "repair," each of which has six parts. Hence, in total there are forty-eight "parts" in need of this spiritual rectification, which is what taking Challah (which is approximately one-forty-eighth of the dough), comes to help rectify.

These words may do little to provide a clear picture of just what taking Challah has to do with bringing creation closer to fruition, but they do give a sense of just how important and holy the mitzvah of taking Challah actually is.

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## Seudos Shlishi:

At the end of the parsha, there is another interesting connection to Eretz Yisroel, and loshon hara (which the spies spoke about Eretz Yisroel).

While the Jews were in the desert, they discovered a man gathering sticks on Shabbos. The ones who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire community. Since it was not specified what must be done with him, they placed him under guard. (BaMidbar 15:32)

The Torah does not tell us who the Shabbos-violator was, but the Talmud does:

The rabbis taught: The Wood-Gatherer was Tzelophchad, as it says, "While the Jews were in the desert, they discovered a man gathering sticks on Shabbos..." (BaMidbar 15:32), and as it later states, "Our father died in the desert ..." (BaMidbar 27:3). Just as here it refers to Tzelophchad, so too in the case of the Wood-Gatherer does it refer to him. This is Rebi Akiva's opinion. Rebi Yehudah ben Besira said, "Akiva! Whether you are right or wrong, you will have to account for what you have said. For if you are right, then you have revealed the name of a man which the Torah hid; if you are wrong, you will have slandered a righteous man." (Shabbos 96b)

Curiously enough, the second verse quoted was spoken by the five daughters of Tzelophchad, who were trying to justify their claim to their father's inheritance in the land. Apparently, Tzelophchad had died without leaving any sons, and his daughters, realizing the crisis, went right to the top (Moshe) to make their claim. In the end, it was the Top (G-d) who not only supported their request, but established an important law of inheritance because of them.

But how could such righteous daughters, who had such an intense love for the land of Israel, come from a father who was willing to break Shabbos in public? And why would Rebi Akiva, the one who emphasized the importance of the mitzvah of loving one's neighbor as oneself, speak loshon hara about him?

According to the Pri Tzaddik (based upon the Zohar, Parashas Sh'lach, 157a), the "Wood-Gatherer" had not been out collecting wood on Shabbos because of boredom, or even to gather wood to make a fire. On the contrary, he was trying to teach a very deep lesson to the entire Jewish people. He understood that a person who transgresses and then does tshuva can cause a tremendous rectification in the world, the effect of which is to transform the Aitz HaDa'as (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) into the Aitz HaChaim (Tree of Life), sins into merits. This is why the Talmud states:

Even righteous people cannot stand in the place of Ba'alei Tshuva (those who repent; Brochos 34b)

Therefore, according to the Pri Tzaddik, Tzelophchad's only desire in breaking Shabbos was to make this point. He set himself up to do tshuva, and in effect, help begin an important process of spiritual rectification.

However, in the end, his error was that one of the conditions for successfully doing tshuva is not sinning on the condition to repent after, as the Rambam writes. But in any case, according to the Pri Tzaddik, Tzelophchad had not been a man out for his own good, but one who wished to bring merit to the whole nation. Perhaps this is why Rebi Akiva felt compelled to mention him, to reveal his good intention, not to focus on his deed.

Through Tzelophchad's daughters, we can learn that this trait, of trying to merit the nation, is also an important trait for loving Eretz Yisroel. Tzelophchad descended from Yosef HaTzaddik, who is attributed with both traits, looking out for the interests of his people even before his own needs, and of having a great love of the land of Israel. This definitely provides an interesting connection between the Wood-Gatherer at the end of the parsha, and the spies who rejected Eretz Yisroel at

the beginning of the parsha, and the loshon hara they spoke for all the wrong reasons.

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## **Melave Malkah:**

In spite of all that went wrong with the spies, and throughout the entire forty years in the desert, the rabbis emphasize that the Generation of the Desert was righteous. They had failed ten tests, but in the course of forty years, that does not amount to very much; there had been many tests they had passed.

Even the tests they had failed, the Zohar points out, it was the environment that was a large part responsible for their performances. This is because the desert is not a user-friendly place, not only because it is uninhabitable, but because it is the "home" of the negative forces in creation, those that exist to steer man astray. The desert is a place of spiritual darkness and death, filled with all kinds of spiritual impurities, and the newly-freed Jewish people had been taken there to take on these evil forces, to subdue them. If they had succeeded, then they would have ushered in the Messianic era, in their time.

Even the forty years of wandering, which came as a punishment for the forty days of "negative" spying in this week's parsha, were designed to facilitate this purification process. The forty years corresponded to the forty lashes that one receives for breaking a negative mitzvah from the Torah (Zohar, Tetzaveh 184a), which also come to spiritually-cleanse a person after they have transgressed.

Furthermore, elsewhere it is mentioned that the very souls of those who stumbled in the desert had come from a different spiritual source from which Eretz Yisroel comes. If so, then the spies rejection of the land was not merely due to a lack of physical attraction; there was a lack of spiritual attraction as well, something they could not have chosen but, which, they could have overcome. And had they overcome this deeply-rooted spiritual tendency, then they would have effected a far greater rectification of creation than those with a natural spiritual inclination toward the land, which, apparently, their descendants possessed.

It is something to think about, especially in our generation when the chance to live in Eretz Yisroel is a reality after two thousand years. The Jewish people seem to be divided between two types these days: those with a passion for Eretz Yisroel (whether they live here or not), and those who possess little, if any passion for Eretz Yisroel at all (though they may feel a moral responsibility to support her).

Aside from the fact that all Jews are supposed to yearn to settle in Eretz Yisroel, whether it is halachically feasible or not, one has to wonder if the lack of attraction to the land is not rooted very

deeply within the person, on a soul-level. If so, then one's lack of passion for Eretz Yisroel, which has to rise above present-day politics and security concerns, might not merely be an indication of a lack of desire to move to Israel; it might be an indication of the test G-d has set up for the person, challenging the individual Jew to build that love, and to turn it into a passion.

Living in Eretz Yisroel may be optional in our day-and-age, a mitzvah reshut, but loving Eretz Yisroel and the concept of living in "G-d's Palace" is not. The Talmud states:

Three wonderful gifts were given by The Holy One, Blessed is He, to the Jewish people, and all of them were given through hardship. They are Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and, The World-to-Come. (Brochos 5a)

It is hard to imagine a "wonderful gift" being something that causes suffering. "With gifts like these, who needs deprivation?" However, what makes the above three gifts unique and like each other is the way each, on the surface, seem unreal and intangible, barely worth pursuing. Thus, in the case of all three, one has to use faith to guide them to each, all the while believing that in the end, each will blossom into the gift they are meant to be.

No matter what kind of soul a Jew has, it is the same test for all of us; in the end, we all have to end up loving and living Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and G-d willing, The World-to-Come as well. Is it not safe to assume that the latter is based upon the previous two?

Have a great Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston

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