

ROAM AND BOARD

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying, Send men and spy out the land of Canaan ... (Bamidbar 13:1)

A rabbi, once speaking on this week's parshah said that these verses act as a kind of litmus test for the Jew in every generation living outside of Eretz Yisroel (he, of course, lived in Eretz Yisroel). He said that, if one is moved to tears each time he reads the story of the spies and their rejection of Eretz Yisroel, and of the exile that resulted, then he is part of the rectification of the sin. If, however, one living outside of Eretz Yisroel can read this episode like any other in the Torah, then he himself is still part of the problem.

To what can this be compared? To someone whose money was stolen from him at a certain street corner by a thief, after which his fortunes turned for the worse. Will his heart not sink and will tears not flow every time he passes that corner, until his fortune returns?

The truth is, clearly even a Jew living in Eretz Yisroel not is not home yet. The Jewish people remain scattered around the world, the Temple is not yet rebuilt, and the land is filled with disbelievers in Torah, and is led according to secular values. The B'nei Eretz Yisroel should cry this week as well, over the exile that still affects every Jew.

However, it is one thing to grow complacent in Chutz L'Aretz, and something altogether different to grow complacent in Eretz Yisroel. Those living in Eretz Yisroel are at least closer to the Final Redemption than those living outside the land. This is why, as we quoted a few weeks ago, those buried outside Israel are resurrected forty years (corresponding to the years in the desert after the spies' sin) later than those who were buried in Eretz Yisroel.

This, perhaps, was part of the message of the Har Sinai Experience. One might have thought that the final destination of the Torah-Nation should have been Mt. Sinai. After all, as the Midrash tells us, Mt. Sinai became a virtual paradise when the Divine Presence came down and hovered above the mountain, and gave the Jewish people the Torah. Could there have been no better place to remain than at such a holy place?

Yet, in spite of the fact that the desert bloomed and Torah flourished there, the Jewish people were still told to move on--on to Eretz Yisroel. On to a place filled with hardship and in need of hard work,

as if that too was part of the development of a Torah nation.

However, the generation of the spies wanted to remain in the desert, not the one that was barren and dangerous, obviously, but the one that flourished with the blessing of G-d. They seemed to fail to understand that the Divine Providence that had allowed them to grow and develop in the desert was merely a temporary one, one designed to bring them eventually to Eretz Yisroel. The time would eventually come when it would end, and the Jewish people would be left to fend for themselves in the desert, and longing to enter the land.

As the Ba'al HaTurim points out, it is mistake that even great people can make. The last letters of the words send men (shlach lechah anashim)--ches, chof, mem--spell the word chacham, indicating that all of the spies were wise and righteous people. Apparently, even wise and righteous people can err in this judgment, and suffer from what has come to be called, a golus mentality--a perspective corrupted by exile.

But isn't it irresponsible to move to Israel if you don't have a job lined up first?

The truth is, the great rabbis of the past didn't think so, and there is nothing in the Torah to support this idea. In fact, trusting in G-d, something Eretz Yisroel is supposed to be a test of, means living there for the right reasons, and knowing that G-d will take care of you. Having a job lined up first, as a condition of making aliyah, is a recent thing, because the rabbis have seen too many people move back to Chutz L'Aretz when plans didn't pan out fast enough. Moving to Eretz Yisroel only to leave it again for negative reasons constitutes a chillul Hashem (profanation of G-d's Name), because it suggests that G-d can't take care of His people on His own land.

If so, then maybe the starting point should be to build up enough emunah and bitachon--faith and trust in G-d--as a preparation for living in Eretz Yisroel. Maybe a major part of one's avodas Hashem (service of G-d) should be developing the spiritual muscles that can give one the spiritual and physical stamina to survive the yesurim (difficulties) with which, according to the Talmud, Eretz Yisroel is acquired. Marriage and life in general is stressful enough as it is; without the proper emunah, neither can fare well--anywhere in the world--when the going gets tough, how much more so in a foreign land that lives by miracles.

To begin such a program of spiritual development means to become a little less complacent in the desert. It means delving deep into one's heart of hearts during parshios like this week's, and seeing just how much one is pained by our extended exile, outside and inside the land.

Shabbos Day:

Moshe sent them from the Paran Desert according to the word of G-d, and all of them leaders on the

Children of Israel ... (Bamidbar 13:3)

Of the twelve men that Moshe sent out to spy the land, only two of them came back with a positive report: Yehoshua from the tribe of Ephraim, and Caleiv from Yehudah. The other ten came back with a negative report, and invoked Divine wrath and caused the extra 39 years of desert wandering.

It is interesting to note that, it was also ten of the twelve tribes that had stood before Yosef 210 years earlier, as he played the role of viceroy of Egypt, when he accused them of being *meraglim* (spies). And even though they had not been spies at the time, and even though the land Yosef referred to was Egypt, perhaps Yosef was also sending a warning to the tribes of the future as well: The same philosophical flaw that has put you into hot water this time will put you into hot water later as well, if you don't do complete *teshuvah*!

(Maybe this is why Yehoshua sent only two spies 39 years later to spy the land--corresponding to the two tribes that were not involved in the sale of Yosef. We read about this in this week's Haftarah.)

After all, if you think about, both Yosef and Eretz Yisroel were misperceived, and for the same reasons. As the Ba'al HaTurim points out in Parashas Mikeitz, the reason why the brothers could not recognize Yosef was because they assumed that he could never have achieved such a high position in life. The preconceptions about Yosef and the way G-d runs His world precluded such a possibility, and they responded to the viceroy accordingly.

Thus, in spite of his previous dreams to the contrary, and, all the hints he gave them, the brothers just couldn't see past Yosef's veil and recognize their brother. Had they been able to, then all the events would have proceeded differently, and the Final Redemption, not exile into Egypt, would have come then and there.

The same thing was true about the spies and Eretz Yisroel. Having lived in hardship in Egypt, and then with the miracles of the desert, the spies couldn't imagine how Eretz Yisroel could be such a desirous, breath-taking land. They couldn't imagine a place on earth that could be part of the physical world, yet, of a much higher spiritual reality and so fulfilling. It had been beyond their experience, and outside of their imagination. Therefore, they chose to roam and board in the desert.

Therefore, when they entered the land, the spies viewed the land with a colored-vision. As Rashi points out, blessing was viewed as just the opposite, and rather than see the beauty of Eretz Yisroel, all they saw was a black veil pulled over her beautiful face. (They said, It is a land that swallows up its inhabitants ... (Bamidbar 14:32)--a familiar complaint that will echo throughout the generations, even until today.) It is very much the same way that many Jews today only see problems and ignore the beauty of the land, and the spiritual opportunity it presents.

If we continue the analogy, we can assume the endings will also be similar. With respect to Yosef, when he finally revealed himself and the brothers were forced to see their loving and harmless brother in place of the cruel and frightening viceroy of Egypt, they were dumb struck. So, too, we

can assume, there will come a time when the black veil of Eretz Yisroel will also be lifted, and all Jews will be forced to see what had been inside all along: a land flowing with milk and honey, and blessing for all her cherished its existence.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

However, the men that went up with him said, We are not able to fight the people; they are stronger than us! (Bamidbar 13:31)

They were speaking regarding Heaven.(Rashi)

One of this things for which the spies were heavily criticized was their apparent lack of belief in G-d's ability to overcome the nations of Canaan. The Midrash says that when they said, they are stronger than us, they were in fact referring not just to themselves, but to G-d Himself.

But those type of interpretations always prompt the question, how could that be? These were not children who never saw the hand of G-d at work before. These were great people of Biblical proportions who witnessed the destruction of Egypt--the mightiest nation on earth at the time--the splitting of the sea, bread from Heaven, and miraculous water. Not to mention the Divine Presence that encompassed them and protected them against the dangerous elements of the desert. So, how could they doubt G-d's ability to rout the seven nations of Canaan?

What we have to answer is that they didn't doubt this. Each and every Jew in the camp knew that G-d is the Creator and Maintainer of creation, and that the moment that He decides that He has had enough of someone, or even entire nations, they are history--ancient history! Ultimately, no one can stand up to G-d, and they were clear about this.

However, as we have all noticed, and the Generation of the Desert witnessed in the battle against Amalek, G-d plays different roles in our lives. As the Nefesh HaChaim makes clear, the general role G-d plays is to take a back seat to our free-will decisions. He allows us to strengthen Him by making moral free-will decisions, or to weaken Him back turning our back on Torah and mitzvos. Ultimately, we don't affect G-d at all, but, for the sake of free-will and reward in the World-to-Come, He puts up a convincing front that this is indeed the case.

The Generation of the Desert knew that life in Eretz Yisroel would not be like life in the desert. In the desert, it was a very idyllic environment in preparation for life on the land. You didn't have to physically earn a living in the desert--you just had to learn Torah and do the mitzvos. However, life in Eretz Yisroel, they surmised correctly, would be more natural, filled with miracles, yes, but mixed together with nature as well. Overall Jewish success would depend heavily on merit, and G-d's strength, so-to-speak, would be intimately tied to the spiritual status of the nation, beginning with the battles against the existing nations of Canaan.

The nations of Canaan were mighty people. The Jewish people, however, had yet to acquire national spiritual perfection. For this reason, they worried about to what extent G-d would fight on their behalf--how strong He would be for them. If G-d's involvement in their battles was going to be based upon spiritual merit, then how much could they actually expect from G-d in the end? This is what was really behind their statement and concern.

However, as we have discussed before, trust in G-d brings results from Heaven even if one doesn't merit them. Trust in G-d is a whole separate mitzvah, one which can bring Divine assistance even before a person attains righteousness, as it says:

One who trusts in G-d will be surrounded by kindness (Tehillim 32:10). Rebi Elazar said in the name of Rebi Abba: Even an evil person who trusts in G-d will be surrounded by kindness. (Midrash Tehillim, Mizmor 32:3)

The Generation of the Desert were not evil people, as Rashi and the Ba'al HaTurim point out. Perhaps they had much work to do, but had they only understood the mechanics of trust in G-d, and thrown their lot in with G-d, not matter where they were holding spiritually, they would have moved forward into the Final Redemption without any hesitation. That itself is part of the test of moving up and into Eretz Yisroel. Apparently, it is a timeless message too.

Melave Malkah:

... Let the patience of G-d be as great as You have declared, saying, 'G-d is very patient and extremely merciful, forgiving iniquity and transgression, yet by no means clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the chil-dren until the third and fourth generation.' (Bamidbar 14:17-18)

This, of course, is the Shalosh-Esrai Middos Rachamim--the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, first taught to Moshe by G-d back in Parashas Ki Sisa, after the sin of the golden calf. He was told that invoking them would never be for naught, and that it was the ultimate way to entreat Divine mercy. Now, after the spies angered G-d one more time, Moshe felt no choice but to use this special prayer to avoid Divine retribution en masse.

What is so special about these words that they can affect so much, which is why it is around them that the special Selichos prayers were formed, which we say on fast days and during the Ten Days of Repentance?

The answer is that these words are really spiritual conduits that lead high up into the Spiritual Realm. They lead up to the same source from which Bris Avos, the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people, emanates. It is Bris Avos that guarantees the survival of the Jewish people, even when they don't merit it. Were it not for Bris Avos, G-d would have turned His back on us long ago there simply

would not have been the miracles. Instead, He is forever committed to us, forever involved in our affairs.

This is why:

[The covenant of Bris Milah] was a made with thirteen covenants. (Shabbos 132a)

It is Bris Milah that symbolizes our part of the commitment that resulted in Bris Avos. And, it is Bris Avos that emanates from the same source as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, and when we say the latter, we are really invoking the former, and bringing down light and mercy regardless of any merit or demerit we may possess.

Have a great Shabbos,
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