

REJECTION OR REJECTED?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Who doesn't know that Parashas Shlach Lecha is about how the Jewish people rejected Eretz Yisroel? Everyone knows about the 12 spies sent by Moshe Rabbeinu to check out the land in advance of the arrival of the rest of the nation, and how 10 of them came back with a negative report.

Even the Israeli Ministry of Tourism chose to use the two "good" spies as their logo. It's as if, one person joked, that they want to remind tourists not to bad-mouth Israel after their visit. "Remember what happened to the last group that spoke negatively after Israeli life!" they might be saying.

Interestingly enough is how no one ever seems to speak about how the Land rejected the Jewish people. Yes, it was the Spies who came back and delivered a scathing report, that dissuaded the rest of the nation from making aliyah. Perhaps though, it was what the Land WANTED them to do, so that they would NOT come into the Land.

We know that the Land does this from here:

You shall not defile yourselves by any of these things, for the nations, whom I am sending away from before you, have defiled themselves with all these things. The land became defiled, and I visited its sin upon it, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. (Vayikra 18:24-25)

"No, I CHOSE to leave," a person making "yeridah" from Eretz Yisroel once told me. "I could have stayed if I chose to."

"So, why didn't you?" I asked him.

"It wasn't working out for me there. I wasn't enjoying myself like I thought I would," he explained.

"Why not?" I asked.

"I'm just not used to a Middle-Eastern country. I thought I could adjust my way of thinking, but apparently I could not."

"But others have?" I pursued.

"I guess they could," he shrugged.

"I'm not sure," I said. "A lot of people said similar things but somehow they made it work and stayed. What do you think was the difference?"

He thought about it for a moment. I could see that he had never taken the discussion that far, and did not have an answer.

"I guess they're just luckier than I am," he finally said.

Aside from the fact that we do not believe in luck, his answer overlooks one very important factor in life: Hashgachah Pratis—Divine Providence. A person can be "vomited" out by the Land, but it is Hashgachah Pratis that arranges it.

Sometimes in life God forcibly moves us around. Enemies can walk in and make us leave at gunpoint, God forbid. Other times, He arranges life in such a way that our own preferences and biases, in response to Divine Providence, make us go "up" or "down." We make the choice, but it is a choice that was set up by God Himself based upon a person's merit or demerit.

As Rashi points out in this week's parsha, 10 of the 12 spies came to Eretz Yisroel having already decided that they did not want to make aliyah. Even before they arrived at the border of the Land, they had already completed their mission as they saw it, not as they had been instructed by Moshe Rabbeinu. They arrived lacking sufficient merit to inherit the Land.

They probably thought when they saw what they did, that it was their lucky day. They had, or so they imagined, what they needed to validate their rejection of the Promised Land, and to convince the people to support their decision. Clearly from the arrogance with which they returned, they had felt vindicated and justified.

It didn't occur to them that it was a trap that they themselves had set. Their preconceived notions about aliyah and desire for materialistic comfort and political power jaded their vision. As God points out, the spies turned blessing into curse. The vision they saw was a product of their perceptions of reality, presented in such a way as to take advantage of them to their detriment. They tied the "noose" from which they eventually hung.

This is clear from their reaction to God's decision, to execute the perpetrators and to deny those who followed them, the opportunity to inherit the Land. They did a complete 180, as if waking up from a bad dream that just happened to be reality.

"It is what it is," has become a very common expression these days. It says that reality is reality because it is reality, and we can't change that. We have to accept it for what it is, and learn to work with it instead of fighting against it. This makes for a much smoother life, theoretically.

It is, however, only a half-truth. The other half says that it is what it is because of how we approach reality. God paves the road ahead of a person in the direction he chooses to go:

A man's folly perverts his way, but his heart is angry with God. (Mishlei 19:3)

Harm comes upon him because of his sin, because his folly perverts his way and he commits sins for which he is punished. When the trouble occurs to him, his heart is angry with The Holy One, Blessed

is He, and he questions the Divine standard of justice. (Rashi)

It's a very important lesson about life in general, not just about aliyah. It tells a person how to analyze his decisions to make sure that he is not a victim of his own spiritual shortcomings. Getting what we want may be a short-lived celebration if it is a function of Divine Providence that, measure-for-measure, denies us the good we ourselves first incorrectly rejected.

Turn the situation around and doors to success may open that were never imagined. Teaching ourselves to like what we should results in Divine assistance to eventually love it, and to benefit from it. Dreams only come true when they are God's as well.