

SEEING THE GOOD IN JERUSALEM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shlach

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 333, Techeiles Today. Good Shabbos!

Seeing The 'Good' In Jerusalem

"And the entire congregation raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night" [Bamidbar 14:1]. The Spies returned with their report about the Land of Israel. They testified that the inhabitants were stronger than them and that the Jews were incapable of conquering the land. The people cried that night.

To paraphrase Franklin Roosevelt, that was a night that would live in infamy. As the Talmud [Sanhedrin 104b] teaches, that night was the night of Tisha B'Av. G-d stated that since the Jews cried on that night for no reason, He would establish that night as a night of perpetual mourning throughout the generations.

Both Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av. In commemoration of those events, Jews throughout the generations remove their shoes, sit on the floor, and cry on that night.

When we cry on Tisha B'Av, we do not only think back to the start of World War I, which 'happened' to break out on Tisha B'Av. We do not only think back to 1492 when the Jews were exiled from Spain on that date. We do not only think back to the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdash [Temple] or even the destruction of the First Beis HaMikdash. When we sit on the floor on the night of Tisha B'Av and read from the Megilla of Eicha, we have to think back to the incident of the Spies. It all started with the Meraglim.

There is an interesting Medrash which addresses the anomaly in the alphabetically arranged

pasukim [verses] in chapters 2, 3, and 4 of Eicha: In those chapters, the pasukim beginning with the letter 'Pay' precede the pasukim beginning with the letter 'Ayin'. (Chapter 1 follows the normal Aleph-Bet sequence of first Ayin and then Pay.)

The Medrash says that the letter Pay (which literally means 'mouth') precedes the letter Ayin (which literally means 'eye') to remind us that the Spies spoke with their mouths that which they did not see with their eyes.

We must consider, however, that the spies fabricated nothing when they spoke of seeing "Giants in the land". They were not lying when they reported having noticed that it was "a land that buries its inhabitants". Our Sages say that they in fact saw many funerals while they were spying out the land. So what is the meaning of the Medrash that says, "They reported with their mouths that which their eyes did not see"?

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) offers a beautiful interpretation of this Medrash: Two people can see the exact same occurrence and see two different things. It happens all the time.

For example, the pasuk [verse] concerning the Akeidah [Binding of Isaac] says "And he saw the place from a distance" [Bereishis 22:4]. The Medrash comments that Avrohom saw the Shechina [G-d's Divine Presence] in the form of a cloud on top of the mountain. Avrohom asked his son Yitzchak if he saw the same thing. Yitzchak responded in the affirmative. Avrohom then asked Yishmael and Eliezer if they saw it. They responded that they only saw the mountain - nothing above it. They could not see the spiritual phenomenon of the cloud encircling the top of the mountain. Avrohom then told them that they could proceed no further. "Stay here together with the donkeys" [22:5]. If they could see nothing but the physical, they had no right to accompany Avrohom and Yitzchak and view the Akeidah. (The word "chamor" - donkey, is related to the word "chomer," meaning "the physical.")

This was the problem with the Spies. Eretz Yisroel [the Land of Israel] is a different kind of land. It is the Land about which the Torah says, "the Eyes of the L-rd rest upon it from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" [Devorim 11:12]. However, not everyone sees that. Some people go to Eretz Yisroel and are merely overwhelmed with the fact that "It's so stony! There are rocks everywhere you look!" It is, however, possible to go to Eretz Yisroel and sense its uniqueness and its spirituality.

The Medrash is teaching that the Spies failed to see with their eyes that which is there to be seen in Eretz Yisroel. When they arrived at Mount Moriah, they merely saw 'a mountain'. They did not see the site of the Akeida, the site of the future Beis HaMikdash. When they came to Chevron, they saw just another city -- they did not sense the presence of the Patriarchs who are buried there.

They spoke with their mouths. But they did not utilize their eyes to fully see and appreciate that which is there to be seen in Eretz Yisroel. This is what brought about their sin.

Eretz Yisroel must be viewed differently than other countries. If there is one eternal lesson from

Parshas Shlach, it is that one must be very careful about how he perceives and certainly how he talks about Eretz Yisroel.

A popular teaching emphasizes the word 'good' in the pasuk "And you shall see the good of Jerusalem" [Tehillim 128:5]. Jerusalem is the type of city that one can visit and see things that upset him terribly. He can see dissention and he can see people throwing stones at each other and he can see sights that will scandalize him. One can see all the problems and negatives. But the pasuk admonishes us to see the GOOD of Jerusalem. We must look beyond the physical and beyond the surface and see with 'different eyes'. This was the sin of the Spies. They did not look beyond the physical.

They failed to see the holiness of Eretz Yisroel.

This is a lesson that we must continuously repeat and review. We must not get caught up in only seeing the negative about Eretz Yisroel and Yerushalayim.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (# 333). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Techeiles Today. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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