

SUCCESSFUL MITZVAH AGENTS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 377, Tzitzis: Must They Be Seen? Good Shabbos!

Two Attributes of Successful Mitzvah Agents

Moshe sent 12 tribal representatives to spy out the land. Their mission was a disaster that we still pay for to this very day. The night following their return from the mission was the night of the Ninth of Av. The nation cried on that night [Bamidbar 14:1]. The Talmud comments "You cried for nothing that night, I will give you something to cry about on that night for all generations" [Taanis 29a; Sanhedrin 104b].

The parsha of Sh'lach and its associated Haftarah present a stark contrast between the spies that Yehoshua sent, who did their job in the correct fashion, and the spies who Moshe sent, who did not do their job in the correct fashion. The Medrash extensively praises the spies who were sent out by Yehoshua. "Nothing is more dear to the Master of the World than a person who goes on a mission of G-d and gives his heart and soul to fulfill that mission. The paradigm of people sent on a mission who perform with dedication and devotion are the two representatives sent out by Yehoshua bin Nun".

What can we learn from the spies of Yehoshua. What is the key to being a successful 'shliach mitzvah' [agent for performing a holy task]? How does one become praiseworthy when carrying out a mission of G-d?

In order to answer this question, it is instructive to turn to a second Medrash. The Medrash comments on the word 'cheresh' in the pasuk "And Yehoshua bin Nun sent out from Shittim two men who were spies 'cheresh' saying..." [Yehoshua 2:1]. According to one opinion, the Medrash interprets that the word 'cheresh' comes from the term for earthenware vessels (kli cheres). The two spies disguised themselves as pottery salesman. According to a second opinion in the Medrash 'cheresh' comes from the word for a deaf person. Yehoshua told them to pretend that they were deaf, and thereby they would be able to eavesdrop on the secrets of others.

In a homiletic fashion, these two interpretations of the Medrash can be teaching us the two key ways to be successful agents of G-d in carrying out holy missions.

The first approach is to be like a pottery salesman. Pottery is fundamentally different halachically than metal utensils. Tumah [ritual impurity] is transmitted to a metal utensil by touching it from the outside. However, an earthenware vessel contracts tumah even when a source of tumah is suspended inside its walls -- without actually touching the wall of the vessel.

The Kotzker Rebbe (1797-1859) explained that the functionality of a metal utensil is its outside. Its external component (chitzoniyus) has value. Therefore it can be defiled by touching its externality. But the externals of an earthenware vessel are insignificant. (Pottery in those days was cheap and did not have a good appearance.) The outside does not make any difference. Therefore, the way to defile it is via its functionality (the inside).

In order to be a successful shliach mitzvah, a person must be willing to give up on his externals. He must be willing to say that externals do not make any difference. The only thing that matters is the internal (penimiyus), the functionality of the mission.

The other key to being a successful agent for a mission of G-d is to pretend that you are deaf. Any person who has ever undertaken the task of doing something worthwhile in this world has been told by at least some - if not most - people, "You're crazy! It will never work! It can't be done."

"You want to start a Day School? It can't be done. You want to build a Yeshiva? It won't work. You want to put up a new mikveh (ritual bath)? It's not going to happen. You want to start a new shul? Forget it." The whole world tells you that it is a crazy idea!

If a person listens to all the advice, he will never succeed in accomplishing G-d's mission. The people who started our Torah institutions, 40, 50, 60, and 70 years ago, were all told that it could not be done in America. This happens in every generation. Whenever we try to start something new there are always the nay-sayers who say it can't be done.

The only way to be a successful 'shliach mitzvah' is to be 'cheresh' -- to pretend that you are deaf to such negative 'encouragement.'

Only In Israel

Parshas Shlach reminds us that whenever we speak about the Land of Israel, we must always say "The land is very very good". [Bamidbar 14:7]. It is very easy to find fault. Unfortunately there are always things about which it is easy to be critical. But we need to 'see the good in Jerusalem' [Tehillim 128:5]. We must always try to see the good and not speak ill of Eretz Yisrael.

The following true story - which could only happen in Eretz Yisrael - speaks to the very special status of Eretz Yisrael and the very special mentality that could only exist in the holy land. I heard this story from Rav Aharon Feldman.

A grandfather came to visit Eretz Yisrael and took his little grandson out to eat in a Jerusalem restaurant. As their luck would have it, this was the same day that Bill Clinton (who was President of the United States at that time) was in Jerusalem. On an unplanned stop, the Clinton entourage went into this very restaurant for a bite to eat. What better photo-op is there than to have President Clinton eating a bagel and lox sandwich in the holy city of Jerusalem?

The grandfather and grandson were sitting in the restaurant when suddenly, the Secret Service, the President of the United States, CNN, and the entire entourage walked into the restaurant. Bill Clinton ordered his bagel and lox, and took a couple of bites which were duly recorded by the cameras. It was a real Kodak moment!

Clinton then noticed the grandfather and grandson in the restaurant. He approached the little Yerushalmi boy and said, "Hello. My name is Bill Clinton. What is your name?" The boy told the President his name, they had a brief conversation, and then Clinton and his entourage departed.

A few moments later, the grandfather asked his grandson, "Do you know that you just met the President of the United States?" To which the little boy responded, "Yes, but I still have never met Rav Elyashiv".

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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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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