

THE GRAVITY OF THE SIN OF NOT LEARNING FROM MUSSAR

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shlach

The Gravity Of The Sin Of Not Learning From Mussar

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #421, The Issur of Histaklus. Good Shabbos!

Our parsha begins with the discussion of the Spies -- while last week's parsha concluded with the punishment Miriam received for speaking lashon horah [gossip] about her brother, Moshe. Rashi comments on the juxtaposition of these two sections. Rashi explains that the juxtaposition is a further critique against the wicked spies. They had just witnessed Miriam being punished for inappropriate speech, and they did not learn the appropriate ethical lesson for themselves (hem ra-u, v'lo lakchu mussar).

The Mir Mashgiach, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, notes that as we read through the narrative of the spies -- as explained by our Sages -- we see they committed many acts of betrayal and rebellion against G-d. Our rabbis interpret their statement "the people of Canaan are stronger 'mimenu'" (normally translated 'than us') as actually saying that the people of Canaan are stronger than Him -- namely, than G-d. In effect they were out and out heretics.

Rav Yeruchem says that in the litany of sins which they committed -- speaking lashon harah about the land of Israel, questioning G-d's omnipotence, and many other acts of theological rebellion climaxing in total heresy -- it is strange that the sages criticize them for "not taking the appropriate ethical lesson".

This is equivalent to a person who steals a car, robs a bank, shoots the guard and takes the customers hostage. He is indicted for robbery, kidnapping, and murder. Would we expect to find

appended to such an indictment that he parked in a fire lane?

Rav Yeruchem explains that the crime of failing to learn the appropriate ethical lesson is not such a minor crime. In fact, all the other crimes stem from this one source.

There are events that continuously occur in our lives that are subtle messages being sent to us by the Master of the World. Some of the messages are subtle; some are not so subtle. G-d wants us to hear the message. If we hear that message, we will not go astray.

The incident with Miriam was a watershed event in Jewish history. It should have had a profound impact. It should have made a powerful impression on everyone's life concerning the terrible sin of critical speech. Had the spies looked at this incident carefully and become different people because of it, they would not have committed the sin of delivering a negative report about the land of Israel!

This concept is not limited to the spies. We frequently witness significant events but fail to learn the appropriate message.

Parking in a fire lane does not inevitably lead to the other crimes in the arraignment. It does not follow that the person will then rob and kill and kidnap. However, "hem ra-u v'lo lakchu mussar" -- the fact that people are obtuse to the messages that bombard us throughout our lifetimes does eventually lead to the worst of sins, up to and including out and out heresy.

We Must Be Worthy of Reaping the Bounty of the Land of Israel

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (the Netzi"v) comments in his He'emek Davar commentary on the sentence structure of the response of Calev and Yehoshua to the report of the other ten spies: "the land that we passed through, to spy it out -- the land is very, very good! If Hashem desires us, he will bring us to this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey." [Bamidbar 14: 7-8]. The modifier "a land that flows with milk and honey" should immediately follow the phrase "he will bring us to this land". The grammatically correct way to express the thought is to put the words "and give it to us" at the end of the sentence, rather than between the noun land and its modifier.

Why does the Torah phrase the verse in this way? The Netzi"v writes that the land of Israel is not like any other land in the world. In any other geographical location, if the land is good, fertile, and blessed with natural resources, then any people who live there will be able to reap its bounty. The only trick would be to get onto the land and perhaps capture it.

The land of Israel is different. It may be good, it may be flowing with milk and honey -- but merely

being there does guarantee that a nation will be able to reap its bounty.

The United States is a bountiful country. It is blessed with amber waves of grain. It is rich in natural resources and it is a beautiful land. The original colonists and the pioneers who developed this country spread out and conquered the land, and the land and its bounty became theirs. The Napa Valley in California is among the most fertile areas in the world. All one needs to do is plant the grapes in the ground, and they will grow bountifully.

However, it is possible to arrive in the land of Israel and not automatically merit the blessings of the land. The only way to merit its blessings is through G-d deciding to bestow them upon the inhabitants. To merit that, the inhabitants need to be worthy of receiving those blessings.

This is implied in the strange sentence structure of the pasuk. "And G-d will bring us to this land". But once we get there we still need his help. Therefore the pasuk continues "and he will give it to us" (assuming we will be worthy of it). Only then will it prove itself to be "a land that flows with milk and honey".

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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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