

# A SIMILAR THOUGHT FOUND IN MUSSAR AND CHASSIDUS

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Rabbi Frand on Parshas Sh'lach

---

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 465, Donning a Tallis for the Amud. Good Shabbos!

---

### A Similar Thought Found in Mussar and Chassidus

I would like to combine two disparate sources that teach similar insights. One of these sources is from the school of Mussar and the other is from the world of Chassidus, but, as the astute student is aware, many times -- if not most of the time -- these two worlds make similar points. I will first quote an observation from Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mir Mashgiach, and then from the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement.

At the beginning of the parsha, Rashi explains the juxtaposition of the incident of the Spies and the prior story of Miriam's leprosy at the end of last week's parsha. Miriam was afflicted with Tzara'as for having spoken Lashon HaRah against her brother Moshe Rabbeinu. "These wicked people," Rashi says, "saw what happened to Miriam for speaking misplaced slander and did not take the lesson to heart (lo lakchu mussar)." [Rashi Bamidbar 13:2]

Rav Yeruchem points out that the Spies were guilty of many far more serious crimes than failing to be more contemplative regarding taking the lesson of Miriam's leprosy to heart. That would seem to be the least of their sins.

They spurned the Land of Israel. They lacked Emunah (Faith in G-d). They suggested -- according to Rabbinic exegesis on the pasuk "for they are stronger than us (mi'menu)" [Bamidbar 13:31] -- that the inhabitants of Canaan were stronger even than the Almighty. This amounts to blasphemous heresy. With this litany of crimes among their sins, it seems incongruous to make a big deal out of the fact that they "refused to take mussar" (from Miriam's misfortune).

But, says Rav Yeruchem, life is all about taking mussar from different events that take place around

us. The key to success in life is a person's ability to look at life and learn from what he sees. People would be much better off if they would be more observant and more receptive to events that surround them.

The Baal Shem Tov makes a similar point on another pasuk in the parsha. The spies were instructed: "You shall strengthen yourself (v'his-chazaktem) and take from the fruits of the Land" [Bamidbar 13:20]. On a simple level, the reason the pasuk calls for "strengthening" regarding taking from the fruits of the Land is because the fruits were very heavy. They weighed so much because of their lushness that it took several people to carry a single cluster of grapes.

However, the Baal Shem Tov provides a Chassidic insight to the same pasuk. The Baal Shem Tov states: It was necessary to strengthen themselves to take the appropriate lesson from the fruits of the Land. It was necessary to look at the fruit and ask how fruit come about in the world. Seeing a fruit and being able to recite a bracha and eat that fruit should be viewed as the end of a very long and arduous path.

The path started with a farmer who many months ago tilled his land and waited until the soil was dry enough. Then it rained and the soil became muddy and he couldn't till it again for a while. Finally he was able to take seeds and throw them into the ground. The seeds had to first germinate and then decompose. The farmer waited, not knowing what was going to be with these seeds. Are they good seeds? Will they take to the land or won't they take to the land? Finally the seeds began to sprout. The farmer had to fight the different conditions of nature. He had to water and fertilize the trees. He had to prune them. He had to worry about the different weather conditions. After months and months of worry and toil and sweat and tears, a fruit finally emerged.

The Baal Shem Tov explains that the meaning of "And you shall strengthen yourselves and take (u'lekachtem) from the fruit of the Land..." is that we must take a lesson (from the expression lekach tov -- a good lesson) from this fruit. Study the fruit and learn a lesson for life. Life is like a fruit. There are so many endeavors in life where we invest worry and toil and sweat and tears. We sometimes question "Is it really worth all the effort we put into it?" But we know that the only way we will ever be able to reap the fruits is if we go through the entire process. Take a lesson of life from how a fruit grows. This requires strength (v'his-chazaktem). Consequently the Torah tells us to gird ourselves - and only then take the lesson (l'kachtem = lekach tov) from the fruit of the Land.

---

## Sign of Strength and Sign of Weakness

Editor's preface: The following is presented with the caveat that the exact context of Rav Elya Meir Bloch's statement is not known, nor can one necessarily infer that what was said then is necessarily applicable in our times.

I saw an interesting observation from Rav Elya Meir Bloch on the pasuk "And you will see - how is it? And the people that dwell therein - are they strong or weak?" [Bamidbar 13:18]

Rashi says that the way the spies were supposed to determine whether the inhabitants of the land were strong or weak was by the type of cities they inhabited. Dwelling in un-walled cities indicated that they were strong, since they relied on their strength, while living in fortified cities was a sign of weakness.

Our gut reaction would be just the opposite. Our first thought would be that if they live in fortified cities, they would be hard to conquer. Fortresses, we think, are signs of a mighty nation. On the other hand, one would think that a nation that lives in a bunch of tents would be defenseless, and easy to conquer. It should be a pushover!

No. Appearances are deceiving. If they need to fortify themselves from the outside, it is a sign that internally they are weak. On the other hand, if they have the confidence to live openly, this is a sign that internally they are strong.

Rav Elya Meir (I am not sure in what context he made this remark, and it may seem to be a rather surprising observation to be coming from the Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva!) said that there exists an old conflict as to whether it is better "to insulate" or "to isolate." In other words, should a person surround himself with walls to spiritually protect himself from the corrupting influences of the outside world, or should he live openly and have contact with one and all as a means of retaining spiritual vitality?

Rav Elya Meir writes that people who insulate themselves by building strong fortresses are not necessarily demonstrating signs of strength. As Rashi points out, these fortresses may in fact be signs of weakness. People who are internally strong have no need for such walls. On the other hand, people who live openly and intermingle with the rest of society must have an internal strength that allows them to preserve their integrity without resorting to artificial barriers that separate themselves from the allure of surrounding influences.

---

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. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

1. Tape # 016 - Mixed Seating at Weddings
2. Tape # 061 - The Minyan: Who Counts?
3. Tape # 105 - Tallis: Does it Cover Only Married Men?
4. Tape # 150 - Tzitzis: Must They Be Worn?
5. Tape # 197 - Carrying Medicine on Shabbos

6. Tape # 243 - The Concept of Prison in Jewish Law
7. Tape # 287 - Women and Tzitzis
8. Tape # 333 - Techeiles Today
9. Tape # 377 - Tzitzis: Must they Be Seen?
10. Tape # 421 - The Issur of Histaklus
11. Tape # 465 - Donning a Tallis for the Amud
12. Tape # 509 - Ain Ma'averin Al Hamitzvos
13. Tape # 553 - Women and Tzitzis Revisited
14. Tape # 597 - Davening at the Graves of Tzadikim
15. Tape # 641 - K'rias Shema and K'eil Melech Ne'eman
16. Tape # 685 - Art Museums
17. Tape # 729 - Making Tzitzis
18. Tape # 773 - Kavanah When Wearing Tzitzis

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail [tapes@yadyechiel.org](mailto:tapes@yadyechiel.org) or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

---

Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and **Torah.org**.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Yerushalayim.