THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE PARSHA

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shlach

The Connection Between The Beginning and the End of the Parsha

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #597, Davening at the Graves of Tzadikim. Good Shabbos!

This parsha begins with the story of the sending out of the Spies, and ends with the mitzvah of Tzitzis [fringes on the corners of a four- cornered garment]. There is a word that is used several times in this parsha, in different grammatical formulations, that is a rather uncommon word in the Torah overall. In the beginning of the parsha, the verse reads, "Send out men that they might spy out (v'yasuru) the Land of Canaan" [Bamidbar 13:12]. That same word is used at the end of the parsha in the mitzvah of Tzisis. "And you shall not stray (v'lo sasuru) after your hearts and eyes that lead you astray" [Bamidbar 15:39].

This irony is not lost on Rashi or on any other classic Torah commentary. It is too striking to be overlooked. Rashi comments: The heart and the eyes are "spies" for the body, procuring sins for it. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body sins. In other words there is a deep connection between the tragic mission of the spies and the warning aga inst straying after one's heart and eyes.

The Shemen HaTov suggests that there is a more profound connection. Rashi uses the expression "the eye sees and the heart desires (ha'ayin ro-eh v'halev chomed)." If indeed the sequence is that the eye sees, the heart desires, and then the body sins, why doesn't the pasuk [verse] read: "you shall not stray after your eyes and your heart"? The sequence of the pasuk is the reverse -- "you shall not stray after your heart and after your eyes!"

Apparently it does begin in the heart! How so? The answer is that all of us were born with a

conscience. For most of us that conscience is still active. Before we do something we are not supposed to do, our conscience gives us problems. A little voice in our head announces: "Don't go there. Don't do this. This is not for you. Stay away."

How do we get beyond that nagging voice? We get beyond that nagging voice using our uncanny ability to rationalize. We rationalize the voice away. We can make up the greatest excuses and we can turn virtually every sin into a mitzvah. "I need it. I have to have it. I'm down. I'm depressed. I'm poor. I'm this, I'm that, whatever. It will be good for me."

This is what we do. To accomplish this rationalization we need a heart. We need the heart-triggered process to somehow turn that sin into a mitzvah. This is the sequence of "do not stray after your hearts and your eyes." True, as Rashi says, it physically starts with the eyes. But psychologically it must go first through the heart. The heart has to "permit it" for us through its illogical process of rationalization.

This is precisely what happened with the 10 spies (all except for Yehoshua and Kalev). They were sent on a mission to view Eretz Yisrael. They all came back with a negative report. What was their problem? Why did they view everything that could have been viewed in a positive light, in a negative light instead? The answer, the commentaries tell us, is that they rationalized.

Either they saw themselves in a position of leadership and sensed that when they were settled in Eretz Yisrael they would lose that leadership, or life in the desert was too cozy. They would get up in the morning and find their Mann. They did not need to worry about their clothes wearing out. They did not need to worry about shelter. They did not need to worry about digging or planting. They did not need to worry about farming or earning a living. In the Wilderness, they were worry-free. Such a life was not easy to give up.

Whatever their logic, it was their rationalization and their fear -- all triggered by their heart -- that perverted their actions. This is the connection between the words "v'yasuru es Eretz Canaan" at the beginning of the parsha and the "v'lo sasuru achrei levavchem v'achrei eineichem" at the end of the parsha.

We need to be constantly on guard lest our hearts stray and turn -- through rationaliza tion -- every sinful matter into a mitzvah.

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:

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