

BEING TAUGHT FROM THE GET-GO: ERETZ YISRAEL HAS SUPERNATURAL REQUIREMENTS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shlach

Being Taught From The Get-Go: Eretz Yisrael Has Supernatural Requirements

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 685, Art Museums. Good Shabbos!

Virtually all Torah commentaries - going back to the early Rishonim - grapple with the issue of defining the sin of the meraglim [spies]. After all, the meraglim were sent on a mission to spy out the Land of Israel and to come back with a report. That is precisely what they did. Moshe asked them to report on whether the inhabitants were strong or weak and they reported back that they did not like what they saw - the inhabitants were fearfully strong.

They were punished for this report and we were punished and are being punished to this very day! The question is, what exactly did they do wrong?

The approach of the Baal haAkeida is that their sin was adding editorial comment to the factual report. The editorial comment that they made was adding the words "Efes,ki az ha'Am" (But all this is for naught, because the nation there is too strong) [Bamidbar 13:28]. This addition deviated from the facts. It constituted personal assessment and editorial comment.

The Akeida gives an analogy. Someone sends a friend to go to the tailor's shop and check out a specific garment. He is supposed to investigate the materials, the craftsmanship, dimensions, size, and price. The friend did as he was told - he checked out the quality of the garment, he measured its size, he noted down the price. He came back and reported everything he learned about the garment, but then he added "It is not the right color for you and it is too expensive!"

This friend went beyond his designated mission. Whether or not the garment is the right color and whether it is too expensive is a matter of opinion and should depend on the opinion of the buyer, not of his agent!

The Shalo"h rejects the approach of the Akeidah. The Shalo"h says that it is incorrect to blame the spies for giving "editorial opinion". After all, Moshe did ask them to determine if the nation was strong or weak. This requires subjective judgment. Such a request invites editorial comment, so to speak, by the meraglim.

The Shalo"h takes a totally opposite approach. Moshe Rabbeinu indeed wanted their opinion, however he did not only want their military opinion, but he wanted their opinion based on a Torah philosophy (hashkafas haTorah). Moshe knew full well that they would find a land in which there were strongly fortified cities inhabited by giants. The appropriate report for the spies to have returned with was "Yes they are strong and yes they are mighty and maybe even by the ways of nature we would not be successful against their armies, but we have the Master of the World on our side."

Moshe wanted a pep talk from the spies. Their mission was to present the facts as they were (the people of Canaan are mighty), but to encourage the nation that with G-d's Help, these Canaanite armies would be delivered into the hands of the Jewish people. Moshe expected the spies to remind the people that they were also outnumbered by the Egyptians and they had no way to survive by natural means at the Red Sea, but that G-d's Presence on our side negates all the military advantages that our adversaries may possess.

Instead, Moshe received a dispassionate and secular analysis of the military situation as if G-d would have no role to play in the upcoming battle for the Land of Canaan.

Rav Moshe Shapiro, shlit"a, asks that this approach of the Shalo"h seems to fly in the face of that which the Rabbis tell us that one should never put himself in a situation of temptation. We should never tempt the evil inclination. For the spies to come back and say "The Canaanites are strong and they are giants and they would overwhelm us military if the battle would be conducted based on the rules of nature (derech haTeva)" inevitably would tempt those of weak faith to panic - as they did - and question the wisdom of proceeding onwards to Eretz Yisrael. Why tempt the yetzer hara? A person should try to avoid tests of faith (nisyonos).

Not everyone is on the spiritual level to hear such a report with equanimity and bitachon (faith). Certainly, when we are dealing with an army of 600,000 potential soldiers there will be a significant contingent that will react negatively to such news. What was Moshe Rabbeinu thinking (according to the Shalo"h's explanation) by inviting such a report from the meraglim?

Rav Moshe Shapiro answers that maybe in other areas of life we should never tempt the evil inclination or test people in matters of faith, but there is a pre-condition (t'nai) in acquiring the Land of Israel that must be clearly spelled out. Before acquiring the Land of Israel, one must have the realization that without the Almighty we are not going to make it! This is why they had to hear this grim report. The aleph-beis (A-B-Cs) of acquiring Eretz Yisrael is "If you think you will be able to live there "b'derech haTeva" [according to the ways of nature], forget it!" The Land of Israel only works

with the Ribono Shel Olam. "The Land upon which Hashem your G-d seeks its welfare constantly; His Eyes are upon it from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" [Devarim 11:12] Eretz Yisrael is a different place, a different environment. Moshe knew that if the Jews did not come with this attitude from the get-go, then they would never succeed in Eretz Yisrael.

This special quality is not something that can be hidden under the carpet. It is not something that can be "brought up later". In order to receive Eretz Yisrael, it had to be clear from the outset that this would NOT happen according to the laws of nature.

When Eretz Yisrael was literally being destroyed, the Almighty told the prophet Yirmiyahu to go buy a field and record the deed [Yirmiyahu 32:9-10]. Real Estate values were collapsing. The country was about to be captured. Was this the time to buy land? The answer is - as the prophet says - that despite the bleak outlook in the short run, our promise from G-d is that He will return us to this land and we will once again build houses therein. Even in the bleakest of moments we needn't worry. But it is always only with the Help and the Power of the Ribono shel Olam - supernatural occurrences. This is the way one conquers and takes possession of the Land of Israel.

A famous story was told at the eulogy of the Ponevitcher Rav, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman. Rav Kahaneman bought a piece of land in what is today Bnei Brak with borrowed money. The context in which this Lithuanian Rabbi purchased the future site of the Ponevitcher Yeshiva is most interesting: The Nazis were on the gates of over-running Egypt in the African campaign of World War II. The British in Palestine were already burning their documents because they were afraid they might fall into German hands. Hitler's favorite general Erwin Rommel was finally defeated by General Bernard Montgomery, but had that not occurred, the Nazi armies would have been on their way to Palestine to massacre the Jewish community there.

It was at that moment in history that Rav Kahaneman bought real estate in Bnei Brak with borrowed money in order to build his future Yeshiva. The Ponevitcher Rav said at that time that the only prophecies recorded in the Torah were those which were needed for future generations. The command to Yirmiyahu to buy land when things looked bleakest was a command, he said, that was needed for his own generation as well. It was Rav Kahaneman's faith in the eternity of that command to Yirmiyahu which prompted him to buy real estate in Palestine while the Nazi army was on the verge of conquering Egypt.

This is not the way it works in America or in France or in Brazil. These places do not have the promise that they are lands "upon which Hashem your G-d seeks their welfare constantly". Eretz Yisrael is a special land and things work there in special - supernatural - ways.

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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