

THE SUPERNATURAL LAND

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Eikev

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"A Land that Hashem, your God, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your God, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end" (11:12)

Not only were they punished for their report, but we continue to suffer as a result of it until today. The Tishah B'Av that we observe is part of the consequence of the Jews believing that report and crying all that night in the Wilderness.

But what, exactly, did the Meraglim do wrong? They honestly believed that it would be impossible to conquer the land. What should they have said?

The Baal HaAkeidah answers through an analogy.

A person sends his friend to the tailor's shop to check on a garment that is for sale. His mission is to investigate the material, the craftsmanship, dimensions, and price.

The messenger does as he was told, checking all the facts and figures. But when he returns, not only does he share the facts with his friend, he adds, "It's not the right color for you, and it's too expensive!"

This messenger has overstepped his mandate. He was supposed to deliver the raw facts, and instead he shared his opinion, which no one asked for. The buyer is the one who has to decide whether the color suits him and whether he can afford the garment.

The Baal HaAkeidah suggests that the Meraglim's sin was to add editorial observations to the facts. They should just have described the situation, and left it to Moshe to interpret it for the people. They should not have proclaimed that there was no way for the Jews to conquer the land.

The Shelah rejects the approach of the Akeidah. After all, he says, Moshe did ask them to share information regarding the strength of people living in Canaan at that point, which requires subjective judgment. One cannot expect a messenger to deliver only the facts on a matter that is so subjective without adding an editorial comment.

The Shelah suggests that Moshe was interested in hearing the Meraglim's opinion, but not one based solely on military projections, but on Torah hashkafah (philosophy) as well. Moshe knew that they would find fortified cities inhabited by powerful giants. But the appropriate response to such findings should have been, "Yes, they are strong, and yes, their cities are protected, and through natural means, we don't stand a chance. But Hashem has told us that we should go into the land, so we will certainly defeat them."

Their mission was to present the facts, along with a pep talk based on deep faith in Hashem. They were supposed to remind the people that just as Hashem had saved them miraculously at the Yam Suf, His Presence would negate the military advantage of the inhabitants of Canaan. The Meraglim's mistake was to present a dispassionate, secular analysis of the military situation without taking Torah hashkafah into account.

Rav Moshe Shapiro asks how the Shelah could suggest an approach that seems to run counter to the principle that one is not supposed to place himself into a situation of temptation. Not everyone is able to accept a report that the situation seems so bleak just because it comes along with a pep talk. If they were to say, "We can't win b'derech hateva (through natural means), but don't worry — Hashem will help," many people would question the wisdom of entering a battle with such weak odds. Why put the people into such a nisayon?

Rav Moshe Shapiro answers that although in all other areas of life, we should avoid nisyonos as much as possible, when it came to acquiring Eretz Yisrael, there was a need to spell out a precondition: There is no way to live in Eretz Yisrael under natural circumstances. Without Hashem's Presence, Eretz Yisrael is not inhabitable.

This lesson is spelled out clearly in Parashas Eikev, in which Moshe informs Klal Yisrael that Eretz Yisrael is, "A Land that Hashem, your God, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your God, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end" (11:12).

Eretz Yisrael has a supernatural existence.

Moshe knew that if the Jews did not enter the Land with that attitude, they wouldn't last there. Rather than try to sweep this unique quality under the rug, Moshe sent the Meraglim to find out for themselves just how unnatural the battle to conquer the Land would have to be. Unfortunately, they didn't complete their task properly, but delivered an analysis, not just the raw facts that they were meant to deliver.

Over the centuries, this message was delivered again and again to the Jewish people.

As Eretz Yisrael was being destroyed by Nevuchadnezzar and his army, Hashem instructed Yirmiyahu HaNavi (32:9-10) to purchase land and save the deed in a safe place.

Who buys real estate when values are plummeting, and in a few short years there would be no Jews left in the Land?

It depends which land. That logic would hold true for all other countries in the world. When housing prices go down throughout the "natural" world, there is no reason to purchase real estate until the market bottoms out.

But Eretz Yisrael is different. Since Hashem promises the Land to us, we will ultimately have it back. Even at the bleakest moments, it's worth investing in Eretz Yisrael.

This lesson is one that we saw repeatedly in the last 100 years. Whatever one's position is on secular Zionism, the fact that the country is inhabited by Jews again after thousands of years of exile is nothing short of miraculous.

To share just one example, when the "desert fox," Erwin Rommel ym"sh was already deep into Africa and advancing steadily with his German Afrika Corp toward Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, the Ponovezher Rav, borrowed some money to buy a parcel of land in Bnei Brak.

People thought he had lost his mind. What would be the point of buying land now, when it would fall shortly to the Germans, who would undoubtedly proceed to exterminate all of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael as they did in Europe? If the British running the country under the UN mandate were already burning all their classified documents, who in their right mind would buy land?

The Ponovezher Rav explained that not every prophecy was recorded in Navi. Only those that had some message for the future were recorded. In that case, he said, the prophecy in which Hashem told Yirmiyahu to buy land when the destruction of the country is imminent holds true throughout the generations.

As we all know, the Ponovezher was proven correct. In an absolutely shocking campaign, British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery defeated Rommel at El Alamein, a town on Egypt's northern coastline, several hundred kilometers short of Eretz Yisrael.

This is not the way it works in America or in France or in Brazil.

No other country has the promise of being "A Land that Hashem, your God, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your God, are always upon it" (11:12).

But Eretz Yisrael has always been, and will always be, a supernatural country.

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