# THE PRICE OF SEEKING AND RECEIVING HONOR

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Shlach

## The Price Of Seeking and Receiving Honor

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah CDs on the weekly portion: CD #861 - Do We Knead Challah in America? Good Shabbos!*

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One of the great difficulties of Parshas Sh'lach is how to understand the sin of the Spies. One must bear in mind that the individuals about whom we are speaking were not a bunch of rabble rousers. They were all - certainly at the time that they were sent - distinguished and righteous individuals. Chazal say that the connotation of the word "Anashim" in the pasuk "...They were all 'Anashim'; heads of the Children of Israel were they." [Bamidbar 13:3] indicates that they were distinguished and honorable men.

The Ramban points out that the sequence of the names of the Spies as presented in Chumash follows neither their strict chronological sequence based on tribe nor their strict geographic sequence based on travel formation. Rather, they are listed in descending sequence of importance. The most distinguished individual among them was Shamua ben Zakur, who is mentioned first. Yehoshua bin Nun, who later became the next leader of the Jewish people, was only number 5 on the list, indicating that the people ahead of him were on an even higher spiritual level than he was!

The question then becomes, what happened to them? Why did they come back with such a negative report? We know from Chazal that it was not just a "negative" report. It was a report that bordered on heresy. The Rabbis interpret the statement "ki chazak hu mimenu" ["they are stronger than us"] to have the nuance that "they are stronger than Him". They doubted the ability of the Almighty to successfully take them into Eretz Yisrael. After all they witnessed, this statement certainly borders on heresy if not being heresy itself!

What happened to the Spies? The Zohar addresses this problem and states that the motivating factor that led the Spies to this debacle was a matter of 'Kavod' [honor seeking]. At this point in time, these people all occupied positions of prominence in the Wilderness. They were afraid that when

the Jewish people came into the Land of Israel, there would be a new administration, a new world order, and as a result, they would lose their positions of prominence.

Since prestige and honor plays such an important role in people's lives, this skewed their entire view of the situation. They lost their objectivity. They had their own agenda. Their agenda was to NOT go into Eretz Yisrael and not to lose the prestige and importance that they had maintained in the society of the Wilderness. This agenda warped and perverted their whole view of Eretz Yisrael and of the Almighty's ability, to the extent that they said things that bordered on heresy itself.

We find the same idea in the eleventh chapter of Mesilas Yesharim. The Ramcha"l gives examples how a person's penchant and desire for honor can literally destroy his life. When the Mishna says that "Jealousy, Lust, and Honor Seeking drive a person out of this world" [Avot 4:21], it is not hyperbole. It is not an overstatement. It is the unadulterated truth.

It is part of the human condition that the older we get, the more important 'Kavod' becomes to us. That is why when we often see people acting in a manner that seems appalling to us (How can mature people act like that? How can adults act like that?), it is because their 'kavod' has been affected. People can go on vendettas against others who they perceive have infringed on their honor. Unfortunately, these are every day occurrences that I am sure we have all witnessed. As we do get older, we must become more cognizant of this fact, more aware of this phenomenon, and more on guard against letting ourselves fall victim to this tendency.

I recently read an incredible story involving Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz (1690-1764). Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz was the Rav in a town in Europe called Altuna. Rav Eybeschutz was travelling to Altuna to take over the position in time for Yom Kippur, but was delayed on the road. He decided he would need to spend Yom Kippur in a smaller town not far from Altuna.

Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz came into shul in the small town on Erev Yom Kippur to daven Mincha. He found a place to daven and was standing next to an old Jew. He could overhear the old Jew pouring out his heart over each of the "Al Chets" that are recited in the Erev Mincha Yom Kippur davening. The Jew would recite each line in German, which was the spoken language of the town and would cry bitterly with each utterance. When the Jew reached the final paragraph containing the words "My G-d, before I was created I was worthless and (even) now that I have been created it is as if I was never created; I am (like) dust in my life, all the more so after my death" the person broke out in such uncontrollable tears.

When Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz finished Mincha, the Gabbai came up to him and asked him where he would like to sit during the Yom Kippur day services. Rav Eybeschutz responded that he would like to sit next to the Jew who he had been sitting next to during Mincha. His request was granted.

During Kol Nidre, this Jew was crying throughout. During Ma'ariv, the Jew again recited the Al Chets in German and cried at every recitation of his sins. He broke down at the paragraph "My G-d, before I was created..." even more so than by Mincha. The same thing happened the next morning by

Shachris. Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz, who himself was a spiritual giant, was in awe of this Jew.

The time came for Krias HaTorah and the Aliyos were distributed. By the fifth Aliyah, the Gabbai approached this Jew and asked him "How do you call yourself when you are called up to the Torah?" The Jew said to the Gabbai "Chamishi? So and so you gave Shlishi and so and so you gave Revii, but me you only are giving Chamishi? What do you know? How dare you! I don't want your Chamishi!"

By Mussaf, the Jew was back to his protestation of worthlessness in his prayers of "My G-d, before I was created I was worthless, etc." Between Mussaf and Mincha, there was a break. Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz could not hold himself back. He approached the gentlemen and asked the obvious question. "You say you are worthless in your life, certainly so after death. So how could you make the comments you made to the Gabbai? You claim you are like the dust of the earth and then you curse out the Gabbai for offering you Chamishi? How could that be? What kind of hypocrite are you? What kind of faker are you?"

The Jew turned to Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz and said, "I can't understand your problem. When I say 'I am dust in my life, certainly in death' I am speaking to the Master of the World. Compared to the Master of the World, I am like dust. But compared to that Gabbai, that's another matter! I am a great person compared to this Gabbai."

Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz, in his classic fashion, said that he then understood the interpretation of a passage in the Talmud "Greater is that which is taught by Moshe Rabbeinu than that which is taught by Avraham Avinu. Avraham Avinu said 'We are dust and ashes' [Bereishis 18:27] and Moshe said 'What are we?' [Shemos 16:7]" Rav Yonosan Eybeschutz explained why what Moshe said was greater. When Avraham said 'We are dust and ashes,' he was talking to the Master of the Universe but when Moshe said 'What are we?' he was talking to the rest of the Jewish people. This is in fact tremendous humility!

This is a reality of human nature. People have done much worse things just because they 'only' got Chamishi! They have done terrible things because the Rav forget to mention "their great grandmother who is visiting from New Mexico" or other such iniquities. People can become vicious over such trivialities.

Such is the Yetzer HaRah of Honor Seeking ('Kavod'). It did in the Spies. It can do in any of us. We need to be on guard for this. We need to remember that which many ethical works teach: "For every bit of honor we get in this world, that much reward is deducted from our account in the World To Come." Kavod comes at a terrible price. It is not free. The more honor we receive in this world, the less reward we receive in Olam HaBah.

This leads me to one final story.

The Gerer Rebbe and the Chofetz Chaim, both of blessed and righteous memory, once travelled together on a train in Europe. At every stop along the way, throngs of people gathered at the railroad

station to greet the great Tzadikim. The Gerer Rebbe would go out at each stop to greet the crowds and to dispense 'blessings'. When the Gerer Rebbe came back to his seat after the first train stop, the Chofetz Chaim told him, "You know that for kavod in this world, they deduct from your account in the Next World. So you go out at each stop, but you are going to have to pay for it!" The Gerrer Rebbe responded, "To do a favor for another Jew, one sometimes must give up a portion of his world to come." In other words, to give chizuk [spiritual encouragement] to another Jew, it is worthwhile to even sacrifice a person's own share in the world to come. "I know I will need to pay for it, but I want to honor these Jews who came to see me and I want to strengthen them."

At the next station stop, both the Chofetz Chaim and the Gerrer Rebbe went out to greet the assembled people. The Gerrer Rebbe had convinced the Chofetz Chaim that it was worth it to sacrifice one's own Olam HaBah to do a favor for a fellow Jew.

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