

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"Send for yourself spies and they will investigate the land of Canaan"

Bemidbar 13:2

The people of Israel came as a mob and pressured Moshe to send spies to the land of Canaan because they did not truly believe that it was a land flowing in milk and honey as Hashem had promised. "In the way that a person desires to go that is where they lead him" is a principle as to the way G-d runs the world and so He told Moshe you may send them -- but it will lead to disaster -- and so send for YOURSELF [lekha].

There was a basic flaw in the understanding that the people had as to why Hashem had chosen this particular country for them. Since it was referred to as the Land of Milk and Honey they saw it as a place for physical bounty and enjoyment of the best this world has to offer. However,

G-d's intention was to bless them with special opportunities for spiritual advancement that only may be found in the land of Israel.

Once there was a man who lost his fortune and was forced to travel to a far away land in order to earn a living. He arrived at a remote place where the simple folks did not even know how to plow or plant produce. The land, however, was strewn with valuable jewels and pearls. The people traded the valuable gems for food and produce that merchants from other countries brought to barter.

The visitor decided to buy a farm and plant various grains and vegetables. He married and had children and eventually became the wealthiest man in the country because he supplied the ignorant residents with their physical needs in exchange for valuable gems. When he reached a ripe old age he called in his sons and told them that he had another son from his first wife in his country of origin that was very intelligent and that they should bring him to share in the inheritance when he died. The man requested that they give the intelligent, other son his choice of either the farm or the jewels and wealth he bequeathed.

And so they did. The half brother came to live with them and was asked which part of the father's inheritance would he like to have. He chose the farm -- much to the dismay of the others who thought that if he were so smart he would certainly choose the gold, silver and jewels.

Several years later a wise king came to the land and taught all of the residents agriculture. The economy grew as they all sold their jewels to foreigners and produced what they needed to live for

themselves. It was then that the brothers realized the wisdom of their half-brother that chose the farm over the wealth. "He was the one who chose the thing of real value and left us with the rest."

The lesson of the parable is clear. The value and benefit of living in the Land of Israel is not only the physical bounty but also the spiritual benefit that one can earn -- if one knows how to do it. It all depends on the person. One who knows the true value of the spiritual will use the physical bounty of the land to perform the misvot and to live by the dictates of the Torah in order to accumulate true wealth for the World to Come. How fortunate is one who can gain eternal wealth while he enjoys the temporal blessings of G-d. It is the best of both worlds.

NOTE: Although the spiritual gain one can earn in the Land of Israel is easier to achieve and of higher eternal value than any reward one may earn elsewhere on Earth, one should know that wherever one lives the proper use of the gifts bestowed on a person by Hashem is to use all that one has for the sake of G-d and His misvot. One should not squander what one is blessed with for mundane temporal pleasure.

Shabbat Shalom

TABLE TALK --QUESTION FOR THE SHABBAT TABLE

"And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua" (Moshe changed his name by adding the letter yud to his name)

[Bemidbar 13:16]

Rashi explains that Moshe was fearful that Hoshea would be influenced by the evil plans of the spies and so he added a letter to his name and prayed on his behalf -- "Yah yoshiakha me-asat hameragelim--G-d should save you from the evil counsel of the other spies." The question is: if Moshe knew that trouble lay ahead-- why didn't he pray on behalf of all of the spies -- especially for Caleb to whom he was a brother-in-law?

There are several answers:

- 1] Perhaps Moshe prayed for Yehoshua because he was Moshe's student and he wanted to make sure that all that he taught him would not be spoiled by his association with the wicked spies.
- 2] The Midrash teaches that Moshe was bothered by the fact that Yehoshua was a descendant of Yosef who brought bad reports about his brothers' behavior back to Yaakov. He feared "like father like grandson" might give Yehoshua a greater tendency towards Lashon Hara than his associates.
- 3] Moshe knew that he was subject to G-d's decree that he would die in the desert and that he would not be permitted to enter the land of Israel with the Jewish people. Perhaps Yehoshua -- who knew of this decree -- out of love for Moshe and to extend his life -- would bring back a false, negative report about the land so that the people would rebel. When G-d would punish the people, Moshe would benefit by living longer because of the delay in the entry to the land. [Source Vayomer

Abraham]

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