



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Shelach – The Spies: What was their sin?

Dr. Reuvain Rossio

from a drasha delivered on the 50th anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah

The spy episode in Parshas Shelach is very disturbing. Why did it happen? B'nei Yisroel all knew that Hashem had promised they would possess the land. There was no command from Hashem to send spies. When Moshe asks Hashem, the reply is "shelach lecha," "send for yourself." (Bamidbar 13:2) Don't do it for Me, but for yourself, as if Hashem is saying, "if you must, then I will allow it."

When we sit at the seder table, we are supposed to imagine that we are leaving Egypt. But what about the spies? They belonged to the era that actually experienced Hashem's miracles personally. They left Mitzrayim, walked through the Yam Suf and survived the battle with Amalek, experienced the wonders of Matan Torah, ate the manna, and saw the Mishkan built – all while protected by the Pillars of Fire and Clouds of Glory.

The spies did not have to imagine G-d's miracles and wonders, for they experienced them themselves, even hearing the voice of Hashem at Har Sinai!

So how can we understand their sin? Why didn't they have faith, after everything Hashem had done for them, that He would help with the conquest of Canaan too?

Moshe sent the spies with specific instructions to report on the land: its people, its cities, and the quality of the land itself. (Bamidbar 13:18-20)

יח וראיתם את הארץ, מה-הוא; ואת-העם, הישב עליה--החזק הוא הרפה, המעט הוא אם-רב.
יט ומה הארץ, אשר-הוא יושב בה--הטובה הוא, אם-רעה; ומה הערים, אשר-הוא יושב בהן--הבמחנים, אם במצרים.
כ ומה הארץ השמנה הוא אם-רזה, הניש-בה עץ אם-אין, והתחזקותם, ולקחתם מפרי הארץ; והימים--מי, בכורי ענבים.

- [18] See the land – how is it? And the people that dwells in it – is it strong or weak? Is it few or numerous?
[19] And how is the land in which it dwells – is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which it dwells – are they open or are they fortified?
[20] And how is the land – is it fertile or is it lean; are there trees in it or not? Strengthen yourselves and take from the fruit of the land; and it was the time of the first of the ripened grapes.

(Translation based on ArtScroll)

So they spied out the land and then they returned. How did they do? It appears from the rest of chapter 13 that they followed Moshe's instructions exactly to the letter. They took samples of the fruit and described the fertility of the land itself, and they also told of the mighty people and cities they saw there.

It also seems that they gave a truthful report, as even when Caleb and Yehoshua take issue with the conclusions of the report by the other ten spies, they do not dispute the accuracy of their facts.

So what was the terrible sin that caused Hashem to inflict such an extreme punishment as death, as described in Chapter 14?

I submit that a careful reading of the pesukim could reveal several sins, but one in particular is noticeable when we compare the report of Yehoshua and Caleb to that of the other ten spies.

Yehoshua and Caleb stated that "the land is very, very good," and that "if Hashem desires us, He will bring us to this land and give it to us...Hashem is with us; do not fear them." (14:7-9)

In contrast, the report of the majority of the spies in chapter 13 contains no mention of Hashem!

I submit that their sin was that they forgot about Hashem! The ten spies expected a natural conquest of the land and realized that would be impossible. Yehoshua and Caleb however, understood that Hashem planned to help them with a miraculous conquest of the land.

It is striking that ten of the very people who personally experienced G-d's miracles and wonders forgot about Him at the critical moment when He was about to lead them into Eretz Yisrael!

Although this degree of forgetfulness may seem surprising, in reality it is a part of human nature. Hashem knows well that we humans can be so forgetful as to sometimes even forget about Him and the things He does for us. Perhaps, even as they "saw" the miracles, they did not truly "see" and internalize what they meant, and that Hashem would help. Because Hashem knows this human weakness, He provided a remedy right there in the same parsha, a symbol so that we should pay attention and not forget.

What is this symbol?

If we go back to the beginning of the parsha, to chapter 13 verse 18, we find the wording "וראיתם את הארץ מה היא" – "see the land, what it is." This phrase marks the beginning of the disaster. While they indeed "saw" the land, their subjective perception was flawed.

Near the end of the parsha, in chapter 15 verse 39, we find: "וראיתם אותו וזכרתם" – "you will see it and remember [the mitzvos – i.e. Hashem]." The symbol that provides our remedy for the future is the commandment of tzitzis. We know this because the same word is used – "וראיתם"!

In His kindness and mercy, Hashem has given us a symbol, something to see daily as a reminder that we should look more carefully, to "see" clearly Hashem's role in our lives, and never forget the miracles and wonders that he performs for us every day.

One Day or Every Day?

Aliza Joel

In פרשת אמור the Torah provides a list of the various Jewish holidays and the details we must know about each one to ensure that we celebrate them in the proper way. For each חג we are told when to observe it, which קרבנות – sacrifices - are brought, on which days there is the prohibition to do מלאכה, and the unique qualities that belong to each טוב יום.

Upon closer reading we notice a difference between שבועות and the other holidays. For every other holiday we are told the exact date on which it begins. However, when it comes to שבועות we are not given a date. Instead, ה' commands us to count seven complete weeks from the second night of פסח. The פסוקים say:

- 15 And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the omer as a wave offering seven weeks; they shall be complete.
- 16 You shall count until the day after the seventh week, [namely,] the fiftieth day, [on which] you shall bring a new meal offering to the Lord.

טו וספרתם לכם
ממחרת השבת
מיום הביאכם את
עמר התנופה שבע
שבועות תמילת
תהינה :

טז עד ממחרת
השבת השביעית
תספרו חמשים
יום והקרבתם
מנחה חדשה לה' :

Why is there this discrepancy? Why is the date of שבועות missing? The יקר כלי offers a beautiful explanation. He says that שבועות comes to celebrate מתן תורה – the giving of the Torah to Bnei Yisrael – which is one of the most important days in our national history. The Torah is what unifies us as a people and teaches us how to lead a spiritual, moral, and ethical life. The Torah doesn't give us an exact date because it didn't want to limit the excitement of receiving the Torah to only one special day.

When we receive a new object or start a new project, we are usually completely invested in it and extremely enthusiastic about it. However, it is human nature that as time passes, the excitement we originally felt for that object or endeavor wanes. We get used to it or we go through the motions without much thought or feeling behind them.

This challenge of maintaining initial levels of excitement is one we experience daily in our spiritual and religious undertakings as well. A clear example of this can be seen by observing the differences of various age groups davening in schools. If you walk by a kindergarten or first grade classroom during תפילה right after they receive their סידורים, you can hear how beautifully all of the children are davening. They are looking inside their סידורים with their fingers pointing to each and every word. They are all focused and loudly singing the תפילות together. Their enthusiasm is

palpable. The excitement that they feel to be "big enough" to daven stems from the recognition that it is such a privilege to be able to talk with ה'.

Unfortunately, if you fast forward a bunch of years, teenagers - and adults - often don't approach davening with that same love and fervor. It becomes rote and we do it, but often don't appreciate the opportunity with which we are presented.

The Torah left out the specific date which commemorates מתן תורה because we should feel as excited about the opportunity to perform מצוות every single day of the year as if they were new to us and it was the very first day that we were observing them. That is the mindset with which we should approach learning Torah and keeping מצוות.

In a similar vein, one of the special קרבנות offered on שבועות is referred to as a מנחה חדשה – a new gift. The יקר כלי explains that this is likened to the Torah which should be viewed as "חדשה" – new - each and every day.

We reference this same idea in our תפילות twice a day. The pasuk (דברים 10:) that we recite in שמע reads:

והיו הדברים האלה אשר ו
אנכי מצוה היום על לבבך :
command you this day, shall be
upon your heart.

Why does it say "היום"? ה' didn't speak with us this morning and command us which actions we should take today. מתן תורה occurred over 3,000 years ago! What does this seemingly superfluous word come to teach us? רש"י comments:

אשר אנכי מצוה
היום: לא יהיו
בעיניך כדיוטגמא
ישנה שאין אדם
סופנה, אלא כחדשה
שהכל רצין
לקראתה. דיוטגמא
מצות המלך הבאה
במכתב :

which I command you this day: they should not appear to you as an antiquated edict (דיוטגמא) which no one cares about, but as a new one, which everyone hastens to read. The word דיוטגמא means: a royal edict which comes in writing. (Sifrei) (www.chabad.org)

The Torah emphasizes the word "היום" – today - because it carries such a vital lesson for us as how to approach our relationship with ה' and precious every מצוה is, thereby causing us to greet each opportunity for spiritual growth with the proper attitude. We need to ensure that we are focusing our thoughts, actions, and decisions on הקב"ה and using the lessons of the Torah to create a meaningful, purposeful life replete with excitement and joy as the ה' עם.

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