



WHEN SEEING IS NOT
believing

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YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Shelach

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

The Meraglim Didn't Learn the Lesson of Miriam

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They Didn't See the Land Correctly

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Seeing is Believing – There Was a Lack of Trust

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They Believed They Weren't Worthy

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It Was in Moshe's Best Interest to Send Them

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Engendering A Metamorphosis Through One's Alignment

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1. The spies chosen were initially devoutly righteous & only became evil when returning with ominous reports.
2. Ten of the twelve spies said they could not go because it is a land that devours its inhabitants.
3. The spy mission lasted 40 days from the time they embarked until they returned.
4. When they returned, Torah says they went & returned.
5. Midrash: they returned as they went.
6. As when they returned it was with an evil intent they went with an evil intent.
7. The two verses are contradictory.
8. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: When one assumes the position as agent one is linked to the one he represents.
9. If the one represented has a lack of faith it will impact on the agent negatively.
10. Since the Jewish People had a lack of faith, they impacted negatively on their representatives, the spies.
11. When initially chosen, they represented nobody.
12. Upon departure, they were linked to the Jewish People.

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Securing Leadership Through Augmentation

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1. Moshe adds the letter Yud to Yehoshua's name.
2. Yud connotes a supplication that Yehoshua be saved from the machinations of the spies.
3. 12 spies: 10 were evil & 2 were devoutly righteous.
4. Why did Moshe not pray for Caleb?
5. Ethics Of Our Fathers: Moshe transmitted the Torah to Yehoshua.
6. Yehoshua was responsible to transmit the Torah in its perfect form as it was given at Sinai to Moshe.
7. Rashi: Yehoshua was the dedicated student of Moshe who never departed from the Tent.
8. Eldad and Meidad prophesized Yehoshua would be his successor: Moshe therefore prayed that he should not be influenced.

Enabling A Subversive Force Of Action

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1. The Jews asked to send spies to scout out the land.
2. G-d said: I've told them that it is a good land, if they wish to send spies they can; Moshe acceded.
3. Midrash: The Jews understood they could not reveal their true intent to Moshe that they lacked in faith.
4. They said they were concerned G-d's name should not be desecrated.
5. G-d said we will find houses filled with wealth; the Canaanites will surely bury their wealth.
6. Why wouldn't Moshe have been concerned had they presented their real intent?
7. Torah: You will eat to be sated in the Sabbatical year.
8. Midrash: You will eat a minuscule amount & be sated.
9. Torah: "If you will ask what will we eat if we don't plant etc, I will command my blessing: the 6th year will have a 3 year yield."
10. Sforno: "If you have faith, the less will be equivalent of the more. If you don't, you will have a 3 year yield."
11. If Jews have faith, the word of G-d will come to fruition; if not, you must locate the wealth to avert a desecration of G-d's name.

When A Test Is Not A Test

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1. The Jews asked to send spies to scout out the land.
2. G-d said: I've told them that it is a good land; there is no need to send spies...
3. When they send spies, I will give them a setting for them to err and they will not inherit the land.
4. Only authorized to send spies to fail to understand why they are not worthy to enter into the land.
5. Conventionally, a test is to determine one's ability.
6. If it is beyond one's ability, it is not a test but a definite failure.
7. Regarding the spies: There never was a consideration they would succeed due their lack of faith.
8. It was only for them to understand they were unworthy.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Shelach



The Consequence of Spiritual Impairment

Rashi citing Chazal at the beginning of Shelach: "Why is the portion of the meraglim (spies) juxtaposed to the portion of Miriam?"

Midrash: The juxtaposition teaches us, "Although these evil people (the rashaim) saw what had happened to Miriam they did not take heed." Miriam had spoken critically (lashon harah) of her brother Moshe and was punished by G-d with the affliction of leprosy (tzaras), which caused her to be sent out of all of the camps for a period of seven days. These people had witnessed the consequences of negative speech (lashon harah) yet they did not learn from what they had seen and repeated this behavior in a more negative manner by slandering the Land of Israel (Hashem). What lesson should have the meraglim learned from the incident of Miriam?

Miriam spoke critically of Moshe to Aaron because she did not understand and appreciate his dimension of prophecy. She had believed that Moshe's level of prophecy was similar to theirs. Therefore just as they did not separate from their spouses, so too Moshe should have not separated from his wife. Hashem reprimanded her by saying, "Mouth to mouth do I speak to him (Moshe), in a clear vision and not in riddles, at the image of Hashem does he gaze. Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe?"

It is important to note that Hashem did not say to Miriam, "How could you have spoken so critically of Moshe?" Rather, He said, "Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe." Meaning, if Miriam had understood and appreciated the dimension of her brother Moshe (as one who speaks "mouth to mouth" with G-d), then she would have revered him to the point (fear) that she could not have spoken critically of him. Miriam did not need to understand why Moshe had separated himself from his wife.

If *Miriam* had revered her brother sufficiently she would have not questioned his behavior vis-à-vis his wife. If the *meraglim* (spies) would have understood that *Miriam* was punished because she did not have sufficient reverence for *Moshe*, they would not have slandered the Land because they in effect were questioning the word of *Hashem*. If *Miriam* was punished for not having sufficient reverence for *Moshe*, a mere mortal, how much more so are those who do not have sufficient reverence for *Hashem* liable for punishment?

Despite the fact that *Hashem* had promised the Jewish people that the land would be filled with blessing, they requested that spies be sent to scout it out before they entered. They believed that *Hashem* was plotting to destroy them by bringing them into an environment in which they could not survive. They did not understand that if *Hashem* wished to destroy them He could have done so at any time without the need for an elaborate plan. *Hashem* is not similar to man who has hidden agendas. It is clear that they reflected their own insecurities upon *Hashem* and thus suspected that He had a hidden agenda. If the *meraglim* had a sufficient level of reverence for *Hashem* they would not have behaved as they had done.

Midrash: *Moshe* posed the question of sending spies into the Land because it was a question of *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d's Name). The people had approached *Moshe* and said that *Hashem* had promised them upon entering the Land, that they will find "houses filled with "good" (meaning: wealth)." They had said to *Moshe*, "Do you not think that the *Canaanites* would not burry and hide their wealth? If we should come into the Land and find no wealth it would be a *Chilul Hashem*. Therefore we would like to send spies."

Moshe thus agreed to pose the question to *Hashem*. However their true motives were not for the sake of preventing a *Chilul Hashem* but rather it was their lack of trust in *Hashem*. Since they did not revere *Hashem* sufficiently, the *meraglim*'s view of Him was limited and thus they suspected Him as they would have another person. Just as one could mistrust another man so too they mistrusted *Hashem*. The Jewish people at the time of the Sinai experience prophesized at a level which was very unique.

Tosfos in Tractate *Shabbos*: Although the Jewish people had already said "*Naaseh v'nishmah* – we will do and we will listen" *Hashem* held a mountain over their heads in

order to compel them to accept the *Torah*. When the *Torah* tells us that when the Jewish people saw the fires at Sinai, *Hashem* had actually shown them the fires of *gehenim* (spiritual purgatory), which caused them to want to retract their commitment. After experiencing such a level of truth and prophesizing in a wake state (similar to that of *Moshe*) how could the *meraglim* not have had a sufficient level of reverence for *Hashem*?

Gemara in Tractate *Gittin*: *Unkolos* the Convert, before converting to Judaism, summoned *Bilaam HaRasha* (the evil one) and *Titus* (Roman Emperor who destroyed the Second Temple) from the grave to consult with them regarding his consideration to convert. Both of them, although they had shared with *Unkolos* each of their suffering in spiritual purgatory – receiving Divine Retribution first hand, they nevertheless advised him to do whatever he could to harm the Jewish people. Every day both *Titus* and *Bilaam* suffer unimaginable torture in *gehenim*, yet they still do not recognize the truth – how is this possible? One could be so spiritually impaired that although he can comprehend the truth at the most advanced level, it is merely abstract and he is not able to internalize it to make it his reality.

Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (*Laws of Repentance*) states, that a person who falls to an advanced level of evil loses his ability to process information rationally (as we find with Pharaoh). However, this is not the case with the spies and the Jewish people. They had the capacity to overcome their spiritual blockage. Regardless of what the Jewish people and the spies had witnessed at Sinai, their experience did not impact upon them sufficiently and were therefore unaffected by witnessing the punishment that was brought upon *Miriam*.

Understanding the Concept of Agency

Torah: "*Hashem* spoke to *Moshe* saying, 'Send for yourself men and let them spy out the Land of *Canaan* that I give to the Children of Israel...'" After *Moshe* had chosen the "men" who were to scout out the Land, he had instructed them to seek out information that would indicate the formidability of the nations of *Canaan*. They were told to seek out, "If there is a tree or not?"

Rashi based on the *Midrash*: *Moshe* wanted them see if there was a special *tzaddik* in the Land whose merit would protect the *Canaanite* (as a tree protects with its shade). This aspect of their mission was not a simple

task. How is one able to evaluate another to make a determination if he has sufficient merit to protect the people of *Canaan*? Evidently the spiritual caliber of those who were chosen by *Moshe* was such that they had the ability to make this specific evaluation. If this is their dimension of spirituality, how could they have failed so seriously by slandering the Land? The “men” of stature who were sent to scout the land represented the Jewish people as a whole.

Rashi: At the time that *Moshe* had sent them, they were righteous. Only later when they had embarked on their mission were they inclined to misinterpretation of fact. Two of the twelve spies that were sent did not become corrupt. *Yehoshua Bin Nun* did not become corrupt because *Moshe* added the letter “*yud*” to his name (*Hoshea*). The letter *yud* represents the Name of *Hashem* to indicate that *Hashem* should come to his aid and not allow him succumb to the plottings of the other spies. *Calev*, of the Tribe of *Yehudah*, did not become corrupted because he went to *Chevron* and prostrated himself on the tombs of the Patriarchs that he should not be ensnared in the plottings of the other spies.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: If the spies were all initially righteous when they were chosen by *Moshe*, what caused them to become corrupted? The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* answers with a profound principle explaining the concept of agency. When one is chosen as an agent to represent another individual or group of people, he is affected by the mindset of the one he represents – for the positive or the negative. Within an halachic (Jewish law) context he is the equivalent of whomever he is representing.

Since the ulterior motive of the Jewish people to send spies emanated from their lack of trust/faith in *Hashem*, regarding the feasibility of entering and succeeding in the Land of *Canaan*, the spies were impacted by their negative intent. The shortcomings of the Jewish people, who they were representing, diminished these special people. Although the spies did have free choice (until the very end), their mission became more tenuous because of those who they represented. We learn from this that an agent’s functionability is directly linked to the intent of the one who he represents.

Torah: When *Hashem* told *Moshe* to build the *Mishkan*, it was communicated to him in a context that he should appoint the Jewish people as his agents.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: The reason *Hashem* wanted the Jewish people to be *Moshe*’s agents vis-à-vis the building of the *Mishkan* is so that *Moshe* should be the beneficiary of the reward for the building of the *Mishkan* (because the Jewish people were representing him as his agents).

However, according to the *Ohr HaChaim*’s commentary on this week’s Portion, we are able to understand it differently. The reason *Hashem* wanted the Jewish people to be *Moshe*’s agents vis-à-vis the building of the *Mishkan* is to allow *Moshe*’s intent to affect the spiritual quality of the *Mishkan*. The *Mishkan* was the dwelling place of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) and thus needed to be infused with the most pure and advanced level of intent. Therefore, by giving *Moshe* the responsibility for its building and the Jewish people acting as his agents, *Hashem* created a setting in which this advanced level of intent would come about.

There is a concept mentioned in the *Gemara* which is referred to as “G-d’s agent.” Based on the principle of the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*, if one’s involvement in his mitzvah activity is for the sake of G-d then because the person is representing *Hashem*, G-d’s unlimited and infinite capacity is associated with the person’s mitzvah. If our objective of our own existence is to fulfill the Will of *Hashem* then all of our endeavours, whatever they may be, take on that special level.

We must ask ourselves the question – What is our objective in existence? If the answer is, that we exist to do the Will of *Hashem*, then we are acting as His agents, thus being impacted continuously by *Hashem*. However if our performance of *mitzvos* is for the sake of self advancement or any other ulterior motive, then our performance is on a limited level because we are not representing G-d.

The Value of Trust

Torah: “*Hashem* spoke to *Moshe* saying, ‘Send for yourself men and let them spy out the Land of *Canaan* that I give to the Children of Israel...’” The *Torah* could have simply stated, “Send for yourself men and let them spy out the Land of *Canaan*.” Seemingly the part of the verse, “that I give to the Children of Israel...” is superfluous because it is known that the land of *Canaan* is the Promised Land. What is this part of the verse coming to add?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: The Land of Israel (as it was at the time) was in fact impossible to conquer through human efforts because of what the spies had actually witnessed. The spies witnessed giants of extraordinary dimension, cities that were fortified in a way that made them impregnable, and the nations in the land were unconquerable through natural human ability. Because they believed that the conquest of the land was going to be determined only through their own effort, the conquest was impossibility. Therefore they believed that the gift, which was being given to them by *Hashem* in actuality, was not a gift but a death trap.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: When the *Torah* states, "...let them spy out the Land of *Canaan* that I give..." *Hashem* is telling them initially that when the spies embark on their mission to spy out the land that the conquest of *Canaan* is an impossibility through human efforts and they will only succeed because "I (*Hashem*) am giving the land to the children of Israel." To indicate that it is important for them to know that only in this manner (through G-d's intervention) will they be able to conquer the land and not think for one moment that it is through their own efforts. If they should consider this even for a moment they will despair and question G-d's true intent.

If *Hashem* told the Jewish people that He is giving them the land then it is obvious that it would be without any difficulties. The Jews did not perceive it as a gift being given to them "free and clear." They saw the Land of *Canaan* only as a dwelling place for giants and a location where they would meet their fate. If the Jews had understood and internalized what *Hashem* had said to them (that He was giving them the Land) they would not have had such a misperception. Why did the Jewish people not have the level of trust in *Hashem* that would have had them perceive the land in accordance with His promise?

Trust is not merely a concept but rather it is a reality that is sensed. The difficulty is – how could the Jews not have absolute trust in *Hashem* after being beneficiaries of the revealed miracles in Egypt, the splitting of the Sea, the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai, and the daily miracles in the desert? The answer is – that all the good that they had experienced through *Hashem's* beneficence was problematic to them. How is it possible that after being idolaters in Egypt could they be worthy of such kindness? Especially after *Hashem* had taken them as His Chosen People, they failed though idol worship with the Golden Calf. The

question they asked themselves was – "Why is *Hashem* treating us like royalty when we are not deserving of such treatment?"

Because of their sense of unworthiness the Jewish people could not have absolute trust in *Hashem*. They believed that ultimately *Hashem* would destroy them. Because of their lack of trust in *Hashem*, they saw their entry into the Land of *Canaan* as a ploy to bring the Jews to their death. The new generation that survived the forty-year trek (anyone less than the age of twenty at the time of the sin of the spies) could have also perceived the demise of the previous generation as a proof *Hashem* to ultimately lead them all to their destruction. All of these misperceptions are based on a lack of trust. When circumstances become incomprehensible do we suppress our own difficulties and trust *Hashem* or do we fall prey to our difficulties which have no resolution?

Throughout history the Jewish people have only survived because of their trust and faith in *Hashem*. The fate and survival of the Jew has always been difficult to comprehend. If we would focus on the statistics and circumstances that the Jews have been subjected to, there should not be a Jewish people. It is only because of the Jew's trust in *Hashem* that circumstance and statistics have no relevance whatsoever. The reason the spies reported that the Land was unconquerable and the Jews believed this information as fact was because they did trust *Hashem*.

If *Calev* had not prostrated himself on the tomb of the Patriarchs and asked for Divine Assistance to help him perceive the situation correctly or if *Moshe* did not add the letter "yud" to *Yehoshua's* name they too would have failed despite their spiritual level. If a person feels that he could not earn a living unless he works on *Shabbos*, then he is demonstrating a lack of faith and trust in *Hashem* because the *Talmud* tells us that one's livelihood is determined by *Hashem* on *Rosh Hashanah* for the entire year until the following *Rosh Hashanah*. With this issue as well as all other aspects of our life we must trust *Hashem* to perceive reality correctly. Thus assuring our survival.

Why Did the Women Not Succumb to the Slander of the Spies?

Torah: The twelve *meraglim* (spies) scouted the Land over a forty-day period. When they returned ten of

them reported negatively about the Land. They had said that it is a Land that devours its inhabitants. Two of the spies – *Yehoshua* and *Calev*, said that *Hashem* would assist the Jewish people and they will conquer the Land. The Jewish people believed the report of the ten spies and reject that of the two.

Torah: “The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night.” As a result of their weeping (which was inappropriate and unacceptable), *Hashem* decreed, “Since you gave forth unwarranted tears on this day, it will be a day of tragedy for you in the future during which you will have reason to shed tears.” This was the ninth of *Av* (the day of the destruction of both Temples and other untold tragedies throughout history). All of the individuals of that generation who were between the ages of 20 and 60 perished in the desert over a forty-year period because they had lacked faith and believed the negative report of the spies.

Chazal: The women did not believe the negative reports of the ten spies. Rather they believed that the Jewish people would conquer the Land of *Canaan* as *Hashem* had said. They therefore did not perish as the men of that generation. How do we understand this? In the merit of the “righteous women” the Jewish people were taken out of Egypt. The Jewish women who were in bondage did not despair and maintained hope that they would be redeemed.

Midrash: The Jewish women, who were in Egypt for a period of 210 years, were not defiled (except for one woman). They had no interest to ingratiate themselves to their Egyptian masters in an attempt to alleviate their plight. The women remained pure in the merit of *Sarah* our Matriarch. *Sarah*, the wife of *Avraham* our Patriarch was taken by the Pharaoh who wished to make her his queen. She had no interest in this despite the prestige and glory of becoming the queen of Egypt. The Jewish women in Egypt merited Divine Protection and clarity because of *Sarah* their ancestor. Even *Avraham*, our Patriarch, did not have this level of clarity. *Avraham* presented *Sarah* as his sister when they had entered Egypt in order to protect himself from being killed. *Sarah* believed that this was not the proper approach because it was an exercise in futility.

Ramban: Although *Sarah* disagreed with *Avraham*, she did not openly show her disapproval. Because *Sarah* our Matriarch did not allow herself to be defiled, the Jewish women in Egypt merited Divine Protection and

clarity. Understanding that they would eventually merit redemption, the women of Egypt encouraged their husbands to procreate and establish large families. Thus, they are the cause of the multitudes of Jews who left Egypt.

This is the meaning of the words of *Chazal*: “In the merit of the righteous women the Jews went out of Egypt.” Their righteousness was that they caused the Jews to proliferate in Egypt despite the unending bondage. The women in the desert rejected the negative reports of the ten spies. The men on the other hand believed the negative reports and thus believed that the Land could not be conquered. The women merited clarity despite the confusion of the moment because of their contribution to the Jewish people by establishing large families. It is a known fact that without *Shalom Bayis* (Harmony in the Home) between husband and wife, there cannot be blessing in the home. *Shalom* is the context for *Beracha* (blessing).

Chazal: The only vessel which can contain blessing is that of *Shalom* (peace). Only a whole vessel is able to contain what is put into it. However if the vessel is broken it does not have the capacity to contain. Similarly if the relationship between husband and wife is not whole and is fractionalized, the blessing coming to them will not be contained.

Understanding the Adversity of Our Inclination to Spirituality

Torah: The Jewish people wanted to spy out the Land of *Canaan*, despite the fact that *Hashem* had promised them that it is a bountiful land flowing with milk and honey. How could the *meraglim* (spies) even consider approaching *Moshe* to ask if they could spy out the land. They knew that he would reject their request because *Hashem* had already said that it was a bountiful land that flows with milk and honey.

Midrash: The *meraglim* could not reveal their true motive to *Moshe* which was to determine if the land was conquerable or not. Knowing that they would be rebuffed, they made their request under the pretext that they were concerned about a *Chilul Hashem* (desecration of *Hashem*’s Name). Their concern was that *Hashem* promised that the Jewish people would find houses filled with great wealth upon entering the Land of *Canaan*. Their concern was that the *Canaanites*

would bury their wealth so that the Jews would not be able to find it, thus causing a *Chilul Hashem*.

Therefore, it was an imperative to take the initiative to send spies to locate the hidden wealth, thus causing the Word of *Hashem* to be fulfilled. When *Moshe* understood their concern he immediately became blinded, not understanding their true intent. *Moshe* posed the question to *Hashem*. *Hashem* responded by saying, "Send for yourself men..." Meaning, if you feel the need to send spies then I authorize the mission; however from My perspective I have already assured you that the land is filled with blessing.

The inference of *Hashem's* words was that there was a risk factor if *Moshe* sent spies because the facts could be misconstrued. *Moshe*, understanding the possibility of misinterpretation, prayed for his disciple *Hoshea Ben Nun* and added the letter "yud" to his name to be called *Yehoshua*. The added letter was to signify that *Hashem* should protect him from negative influences and all evil. If *Moshe* understood the risk of the mission then why did he only pray for *Yehoshua*? He should have prayed for all of the *meraglim*. How do we understand this?

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Basra*: "The Face of *Moshe* was like the sun and the face of *Yehoshua* was like the moon." *Moshe Rabbeinu's* spiritual dimension was comparable to the sun because just as the sun generates its own energy and light, so too *Moshe* was a dimension of spirituality on his own. *Yehoshua* being the primary disciple of *Moshe*, was comparable to the moon because his dimension of spirituality was only a reflection of his teacher *Moshe*. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so too, *Yehoshua* was a reflection of *Moshe's* spirituality. None of the other spies were at the same level as *Yehoshua*. He continuously was learning with *Moshe Rabbeinu* and never left *Moshe's* tent.

Rashi on *Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers)*: The reason the transmission of the *Torah* was through *Yehoshua* rather than *Aaron* or the other disciples of *Moshe* was because he never left the presence of his *rebbe*, *Moshe*. *Yehoshua* literally lived in the shadow of his *rebbe*. The *Vilna Gaon zt'l* who lived in the eighteenth century was considered equivalent in greatness to the *Rambam* (Maimonides). Regarding his spirituality, he was depicted by all of the *Torah* sages of his time as a living angel. The students of the *Vilna Gaon zt'l* once

commented to him, "*Rebbe*, we wish we would have your *yetzer ha'ra* (evil inclination)." To this the *Vilna Gaon* answered, "You would not want my *yetzer ha'ra* because as the *Gemara* in Tractate *Succah* states, "The greater one is the greater is his *yetzer ha'ra*." Why is this the case?

If a person's evil inclination does not continue to match his dimension of spiritual growth, then the person would no longer be in a context of making choices. Thus, the person's spiritual accomplishment would no longer have that special value. Since the *Vilna Gaon* was the equivalent of the *Rambam* in terms of *Torah* scholarship and spiritual dimension, then it is understood why his response to his students was that they would not want his *yetzer ha'ra*.

Gemara: Abayei had overheard a conversation between a man and women who had made plans to commit adultery deep in the marshes. *Abayei* followed them secretly and overheard how the prospective adulterer had a change of heart because he believed that it would be too difficult to maintain the relationship on an ongoing basis. When *Abayei* saw this man's self control to suppress his desire and not commit adultery he was astounded because he felt that if he were in the same situation he would have succumb to temptation.

Abayei realized that an ordinary person could restrain himself and yet he could not. This caused him to become depressed because he realized that he was not at the level he should have been. He shared this disappointment with his colleagues. They responded by telling him, "There is nothing to be concerned about; it is only because of your spiritual dimension that your *yetzer ha'ra* is so overbearing. Therefore you are concerned that you would have succumbed." With this principle we can understand why *Moshe* only prayed for *Yehoshua* not to be affected. Since *Yehoshua* reflected a semblance of *Moshe's* spirituality he was the most susceptible to the evil inclination. *Moshe* added the letter "yud" to *Yehoshua's* name and prayed for him so that he should be able to overcome his evil inclination.

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: If a person truly wishes to advance himself spiritually, *Hashem* will help him along this journey; on the other hand, if a person wishes to contaminate himself (spiritually) then *Hashem* will allow him to fall as he chooses to do so.

The Challenge of the Jew (*Beha'aloscha*)

Torah: The Jewish people complained in the desert saying, "Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge (*chinum*); and the cucumbers, melons, leeks onions, and garlic." How do we understand this fond reminiscence over the period of time when the Jewish people were in Egypt? In Egypt they were slaves and endured untold hardships. Their statement may be compared to a survivor of the concentration camps reminiscing over the stale bread and putrid soup that he had eaten in the camps. The question is even more difficult since the Jewish people had reached an advanced level of spirituality at Sinai experienced when they declared, "*Naaseh V'nishma* – we will do and we will listen." How could they even consider putting the Egyptian experience in a positive context?

Torah: The Jewish people had said, "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge (*chinum*)..."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: "Does this mean to say that the Egyptians fed the Jewish people fish without payment? If the Egyptians would not give the Jewish people straw to make bricks would they have given them fish without payment? Or perhaps we could understand the word "*chinum* (free of charge)" to mean "free from *mitzvos*."

Sifse Chachumim: "Free from *mitzvos*" can mean that as slaves the Jewish people were provided for by their masters, the Egyptians. However after Sinai the sustenance of the Jewish people was provided by *Hashem* and was contingent on their observance of *mitzvos*. If they observe the *mitzvos* properly then the earth will give forth its bounty. If they do not observe the *mitzvos* properly then the earth will withhold its bounty. While in Egypt as slaves, this level of accountability did not exist. Regardless if their masters were the Egyptians or their master was G-d Himself, in either situation the Jewish people would have been provided for only if they performed adequately. If so, why is the accountability to *Hashem* more taxing than that of their Egyptian masters?

As a result of this question, there is a profound principle that can be learned. The level of accountability of the Jew is very different than that of the nations of the world. For the non-Jew it is sufficient not violate capital crimes and all that is required of him is to behave responsibly as a moral human being. However,

the level of expectation of Jew is at a different level because he is bound by the 613 *mitzvos* which govern every aspect and nuance of his life. There is no area in a Jew's life that is not governed by the *Torah*. Thus he is held accountable.

Torah in *Haazinu*: "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak and may the earth hear the words of my mouth."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: *Moshe* was telling the Jewish people that heaven and earth are his witnesses. If the Jew follows the ways of the *Torah*, then the rain will come in its time and the earth will give forth its bounty. However if they do not observe the *mitzvos* then they will be denied these blessings. This means that the Jewish people are continuously evaluated and are subject to *Hashem's* scrutiny at every moment. This unlimited level of accountability is what the Jewish people in the desert could not tolerate.

Relatively speaking, in Egypt they received their sustenance "for free (without charge)" because their level of accountability was limited to their quota of productivity. During the forty-year period, in the desert, if the Jewish people were to deviate and transgress (even to the smallest degree) the Will of *Hashem*, the *Midas HaDin* (Attribute of Justice) would be brought upon them instantly. When they were finally settled in the Land, every community was required to have *shoftim* (judges) and *shotrim* (officers) who were responsible for continuously enforcing the dictates of the court. If one were to violate the *Torah*, he would be reprimanded and punished accordingly.

If a community had as few as 120 individuals it was required to appoint a *Sanhedrin Katana* (lower Jewish Court) comprised of 23 judges of special status. These judges were ordained through the ordination of *Moshe Rabbeinu* and therefore were qualified to render rulings in every area of law (death penalty, capital, corporal, etc.). The only way one was able to sin and not be punished was to sin in private. This level of vigilance and holding one accountable to this degree was unprecedented. What is the special value of accountability? Is it only to instill fear of punishment or is it something of greater value? It would not say much for society if people did not violate the law because of their concern of prosecution.

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* (*Ethics of our Fathers*): One should pray for the welfare of government because

without fear of government, people would swallow one another alive. Is this to say that the only reason a moral/ethical person does not break the law is because he would be punished? Rather, accountability establishes a baseline to determine what is considered appropriate or unacceptable. Accountability causes one to understand the nature and gravity of one's actions.

When the Jewish people in the desert had said that the Egyptians had given them fish "free of charge", they were reminiscing about the time they were not held accountable for their personal behavior. All they needed to do was to provide the quotas that were demanded of them and they were fed by the Egyptians. However, after the receiving of the *Torah*

at Sinai, when the Jewish people became the "priestly, kingly and holy people", their level of accountability was of a different dimension. *Hashem* held the Jew accountable for every aspect of his life and if he did not adhere to the *Torah*, he would not be provided for. If a Jew is cognizant of his obligation, he will perform and conduct himself accordingly. How does one maintain that cognizance?

Gemara tells us in Tractate *Kiddushin*: "The study of *Torah* is great (value) because it brings to action...I have created the evil inclination and I have created the *Torah* as its antidote." Thus, if one studies the *Torah*, he will have a sense of "right" and "wrong."



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