



Parashat Shelach Lecha - #284

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On the Parashah... The Sin which Haunts Us

[Tal Chermon]

On the way to Eretz Yisrael, traveling through the vast threatening desert, the Nation of Israel continued to experience crisis after crisis. These crises taught them the values of the Torah and what it means to belong to the Nation of Israel. The greatest crisis was that of the Spies: their failure revealed Israel's rejection of the Promised Land. The severity of the sin may be deduced from the severity of the punishment: "Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness" (Bemidbar. 14:29). All adults who accepted the evil report of the spies were to die in the desert.

But that was not the end. This sin has haunted us throughout the centuries. The maxim, "The deeds of the fathers are a precedent for the sons" (see commentary of Ramban to Bereshit 12:6) holds in both positive and negative cases. It is not merely a case of formal precedent-setting; the deeds of the fathers set a precedent for us because we are their continuation, cut from the same cloth. We have inherited their character traits, and our deeds therefore reflect and repeat theirs, both positively and negatively. The sin of the spies revealed a certain spiritual flaw, a lack of faith and of love for the Land, of indifference, emotional distance, and even rejection. This flaw has passed from one generation to the next, infecting the sons and their sons after them.

Historically, the phenomenon of the rejection of Eretz Yisrael repeated itself during the Second Temple Period, when only a small fraction of the Nation chose to return to Eretz Yisrael. In general it was the poor and underprivileged who followed Ezra. The scholars, the wealthy, and the Levi'im chose to remain in Babylonia, a prosperous, flourishing Jewish community (See Ezra 2 with Rashi. See Ketubot 25, Kiddushin 69a with Rashi). According to the Kuzari (2:24): "Only a few of them

responded to Ezra's call, most, including the important people, remained in Babylonia."

A similar phenomenon occurred in the past century when many great rabbis and leaders ignored the national revival and preferred to remain in the Exile. Sadly, just as the spiritual flaw and the sin repeat themselves in history, so too does the punishment. The weeping which occurred that night, the eve of Tisha B'Av, has become "a weeping for all generations." (Ta'anit 29a).

Both the First and the Second Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'av. The exile from Spain and World War I, among other catastrophes, began on Tisha B'Av. Only partial punishment was meted out to the Generation of the Wilderness. We have been receiving the remainder bit by bit ever since.

Who were the men who spoke evil of Eretz Yisrael? "And Moshe sent them from the wilderness of Paran according to the word of G-d, all of them important personages, the leaders of the Children of Israel" (Bemidbar 13:3). "They were important men, and the righteous ones at that time" (Rashi *ibid.*). There was no sudden change in their personalities. The weakness which had existed in potential simply now found its expression: "And they went ... and they came" (*ibid.* 13:26). "Just as they returned with bad intent, so too did they start out with bad intent" (Sotah 35a). Were they wicked or were they righteous?

The answer is that there are different kinds of righteousness. There are people who are personally Torah observant, but when it comes to national concerns, their behavior leaves much to be desired. In contrast, there are those who are devoted with all their hearts to their Land and Nation, but are not personally devout. King Shaul, for example, was more righteous in his personal life than King David (Yoma 22b and Moed Katan 22b), but he failed as a King when it came to leading the Nation in the war against Amalek.

This also explains the conclusion of the Chesed L'Avraham (Ma'ayan 3, Nahar 12) that anyone who lives in Eretz Yisrael may be considered righteous - otherwise the Land would expel him.

Superficially, this is hard to comprehend. However, if this refers NOT to the righteousness of his private life - how observant he is of the 613 Mitzvot - but rather to how devoted he is to his Land and Nation, then it is quite reasonable. Both types of righteousness are needed, and the Redemption will come when each type of person perfects himself by becoming wholly righteous (Orot of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, p.84).

The Spies, like many other righteous men, did not behave in such an admirable fashion in their public lives. The Zohar tells us about the special evil impulse reserved for the very (personally) righteous: "The Serpent nests in the highest mountain tops - i.e. the sages and the righteous" (Tikunei Zohar, end of Tikkun 13 and commentaries). This evil impulse feeds on spiritual motivation. Defense of Torah observance and the need to combat evil practices among those who build the Land become excuses for not supporting our national redemption. This is the evil impulse disguised as Torah observance. "And the great leaders of Israel will have to stand trial in the Heavenly Court for this matter. G-d will hold them responsible for humiliating His House" (Or Ha-Chaim Ha-Kadosh, Vayikra 25:25).

How could such great men commit such a sin? What were the spiritual and psychological elements which led them to do it?

An important factor in any sin is personal interest. When a man imagines that he will suffer some personal setback, it is difficult for him to remain objective. As Mesilat Yesharim teaches in chapter 11: "The heart may be deceived, and if we investigate, we discover that it had some slight unworthy desire...for man is by nature weak and it is easy to deceive him into permitting things in which he has a personal interest." According to our sages, the Spies had reason to believe that once they entered the Promised Land, they would no longer be the leaders of the Nation, as they had been in Egypt and in the desert.

There is another explanation: it was not personal wealth or honor which the spies sought, but rather spiritual wealth. They did not share the vision of "Malchut Israel" [the Kingdom of Israel], as the only way to bring about the greatest sanctification of G-d's Name and the means by which G-d's rule in this world evidences itself, as we pray every day in "Aleinu". According to the Kuzari (2, 24), the Holy One rebukes the righteous of each generation, saying: "You righteous! Although the words of my Torah are dear to you, it is unseemly that you yearned for My Torah and not for My Kingship."

The Spies panicked at the idea of the Nation of Israel settling the Land. They worried that preoccupation with politics, military and economic affairs would estrange them from the Torah. It was the "Eidah," the Sanhedrin, who were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Nation, who wanted to stone Moshe Rabeinu. They claimed Eretz Yisrael was "a Land that devours its inhabitants," that the temptations there would spoil their character (Chidushei Ha-Rim). This same claim reappears at the beginning of the Second Temple Period, when many of the great leaders of the Nation refused to leave Babylonia and go to Eretz Yisrael because Jewish life in Babylonia was much more established and secure (see Kuzari 2:22-24). This is a negative phenomenon, even if motivated by spiritual considerations, as our Sages taught: "One should always try to live in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city where the majority are idol-worshippers, rather than live outside of Israel, even in a city where the majority are Jews (Ketubot 110b).

There is no doubt that it is difficult to sustain a spiritual existence while concurrently leading a public life, however, it is not impossible (see Rav Kook's introduction to Shabbat Ha-Aretz). Although the spies, "the heretic Tzadikim" (see Sotah 48b), warned: "We cannot go up against the people [of Canaan], for they are stronger than us" (Bemidbar 13:31), Calev and Yehoshua were adamant that "We shall surely go up and possess it, for we are certainly able to" - Even if Eretz Yisrael were in the sky, and G-d had commanded us to build ladders and climb up, we would be able to do it! (ibid. v. 30, and Rashi's commentary there). Eretz Yisrael is the ladder by which we reach heaven. It is precisely the "earthly" preoccupation with settling the Land which raises us to the highest spiritual heights, by virtue of the sanctity of the Promised Land.

Rav Aviner on...

I am Mentally Ill

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Behaalotecha 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: I am worthless. I've got a serious mental illness. I'm just not worth anything. Occasionally I go to the hospital for treatment and then I come back a nothing. I'm a wretch, my wife is a wretch, my children are wretches. I don't do anything of worth in life.

I see my friends who went to school with me. All of them are successful. They teach Torah, they are rabbis, educators, while I'm just a dishrag. I study Torah several hours a day. I barely understand anything, I forget it all, due to the treatments I receive. What am I worth?

What is the purpose of my whole life? Very often I am sunk in depression, and I ask myself what I am living for? I'm not worth a thing.

Answer: To answer this question, one has to determine man's purpose on earth. Is it to be a Torah scholar? Is it to be important? Is it to have high status? No. Man's purpose is to serve G-d, as is explained in the first paragraph of the book *Mesilat Yesharim*. There are different avenues and modes of serving G-d, each one in accordance with its nature and place. The rule of thumb is: "The greater the pain, the greater the reward."

The Master-of-the-Universe is not an achievement-oriented elitist. Rather, He appreciates the effort we make: "When Naomi saw what an effort Ruth made to go with her, she ceased arguing with her" (Rut 1:18). The Jerusalem Talmud states, "One Mitzvah involving pain is worth a hundred painless Mitzvot." In your case, every Mitzvah is very hard, hence it is as precious in G-d's eyes as a hundred Mitzvot that anyone else might do.

And the same goes with your Torah learning.

Rambam writes that man is judged in accordance with the majority of his deeds. If most of his deeds are meritorious, he is a *Tzadik* [righteous]. If most are sinful, he is a *Rasha* [evildoer]. If his deeds are half and half, he is a *Benoni* [in between]. If most of one's deeds are evil, he will immediately die for his wickedness (Hilchot Teshuvah 3:1-2).

We thus have a question against Rambam. Surely we see many people with many more sins than merits, yet they do not die immediately.

Obviously, Rambam was aware of this question and he answered it in advance: It is not we who appraise the value of each mitzvah. Neither are we talking about a mere numerical calculation. Rather, there may very well be one Mitzvah that is worth thousands of other Mitzvot, "Only the Master of Opinions knows how the comparison between sins and merits is made" (ibid.).

You, my dear friend, have a great many merits. Truly a great many.

How lucky you are! Every Mitzvah you perform and all of your Torah learning involve great toil. Surely, in the Supreme World, the World of Truth, there will be surprises... People who are considered important here will be considered worthless there, and people who are derided here will be highly important there. "The elevated ones will be down low, and the low down ones will be up high" (Pesachim 50a).

You, my friend, will be very important there. The main thing is there and not here. This world is a mere crumb, a minute spark of eternity. Moreover, this great and bright future is not just in the future, but in the present as well. The millions of fluorescent bulbs in the banquet hall light up the waiting room as well.

Do your best, and be aware that you are precious in G-d's sight.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Har Ha-Bayit - Temple Mount

Measuring the Temple Mount

Q: Is it permissible to measure the Temple Mount in order to determine which areas were not part of the original Temple Mount?

A: It is not possible for us to definitively demarcate the borders. Piskei Teshuvot 561 note #26 (and Maran Ha-Rav Kook wrote that one infringement on the holiness of the Temple Mount will undo millions of settlements we build. Igrot Ha-Re'eiyah 2:285. And when a Torah scholar brought to Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah researchers of the Temple Mount, whose purpose was to identify the boundaries of the Temple (since in their view it was permissible to enter there without fear of harming the sanctity of the Temple) our Rabbi said to the scholar: "What is all this for?!" He compared this to a rabbi who gathered many proofs for the existence of G-d, and the Aderet ztz"l [Rav Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim, former Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem and father-in-law of Maran Ha-Rav Kook], said about this rabbi's book: "For what do we need proofs? [and he quoted the words of our Sages, "Any matter which is not clear, bring sources from the Talmud for it" - Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 2:3, Eruvin 10:1]. We believe in Hashem above all proofs". Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, sidra 2 Tazria, Parashat Ha-Chodesh 3-4; Emunah, sichah 15, 8. And so too in our matter: Behold, the Temple Mount's boundary is surrounded by a wall. We do not traverse it, and we have no need for researchers).

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