

Shelach 5771

BS"D Parashat Shelach 5771

A fundamental principle in Halachic observance, perhaps the most fundamental, is

that after the written and oral forms of the Torah were presented to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, all further halachic decisions will no longer be in the jurisdiction of the spiritual world (angels or prophecy), but will be decided on in three methods:

1. For text book perfect cases, we follow what is found in the written Halachic source, which for us is the Shulchan Aruch.
2. For non-textbook perfect matters we rely on our scholarly rabbinic leaders to implement the principles of Halacha.
3. In the absence of such Halachic authorities, we follow the accepted practice of the majority of Jews in our respective places. And where there is no Halachic authority and no previous precedents, we are in Halachic limbo and do what we can and pray that HaShem will not let us falter.

However, the miraglim (scouts) episode poses a challenge to the above.

Let's assume for a moment that we are part of the 600 thousand men from the ages of 20 to 60 who were present when the miraglim returned from their mission in Eretz Yisrael. All our possessions are already packed for the grand entrance into the land, and we are straining our ears to hear the technical data from the miraglim regarding the points of entry and what we

will find upon crossing the Jordan River.

Silence passes over the people, as the 12 great rabbis who were chosen by HaShem to be the miraglim ascend the rostrum to deliver their report. It was an unexpected report. Ten out of the twelve, to the exclusion of Yehoshua Bin Nun and Calev Ben Yefuneh, gave a terrifying account of what they saw, "The land is occupied by men of great physical height and strength, making our chances of surviving a military conflict almost nil, and certainly no chance at all of uprooting them from the land".

After the detailed military report, the last two miraglim, Yehoshua and Calev, rose up to speak. They did not deny the basic realities of the enemy's strength, but they said that HaShem will perform miracles, as he had done before.

Now, we as innocent bystanders, have to make the halachic choice with whom to go. The great leaders of the tribes who constitute the majority and their dire warning of a holocaust if we enter the land, or the two rabbis who encourage us to believe that HaShem will make us victorious. As the moments pass, more and more men are accepting the pessimistic appraisal of the majority, until it appears close to a unanimous decision to refrain from entering the land, except for Moshe, Aharon and his sons, Yehoshua and Calev.

So, we who are present at this time have to make the hard choice. However, our halachic training says that we must go with the determination of the majority of rabbis, and certainly when it is upheld by 600 thousand men.

So when HaShem declared that all those who chose the Halachic way would not enter the land, but they would end their days during the next 38 years in the desert, we were confused and frustrated at the "injustice" of our lot.

So where indeed, lies the Halachic justice meted out by HaShem to that generation of 600 thousand men?

I submit:

A group of hikers is lost at night in the thick jungles of Africa, but they know that they must continue in a northerly direction. The experienced guide says that north is to the right, but your expensive military compass that always points to magnetic north points to the left, who do you follow?

If you value your life you will follow the compass.

HaShem built into the Torah a compass – it is called Eretz Yisrael.

A Halachic decision that will draw you closer to the Holy Land, is the true one to follow. A decision that draws one away from Eretz Yisrael is fallacious and injurious to one's Jewish soul.

Our "innocent bystander" – one of the 600 thousand – who had to determine whom to follow (the majority who said not to enter the land, or the minority who said that we must rely on HaShem's miracles and enter the land) was not so innocent because he should have known that the majority view would distance the Jewish people from taking root in the Land set aside for them by the Creator of heaven and earth.

Here one might argue that the intention of the miraglim was indeed to distance the Jews from Eretz Yisrael, but their motive was highly spiritual – to remain in the desert under the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. This is a convincing, rational, frum yeshivashe point of view, but the problem with it is that HaShem disagreed. Six hundred thousand Jewish men, who had stood at the foot of Mount Sinai when HaShem said, "I am the Lord your God who has taken you out of Egypt," were to die on the ninth of Av over the next 38 years, because they did not follow HaShem's compass of Eretz Yisrael.

The magnetic north of a compass is an inhospitable place, and at times HaShem's compass point of Eretz Yisrael can also be

an inhospitable, dangerous place. But that is immaterial! Because the only border crossing between heaven and earth is Eretz Yisrael, and it is only here that HaShem makes Himself known to the world through His relationship with the Jewish nation. Before the Medinah was established the majority of the world's population never heard of Jews or Judaism. Today, the entire world has an intense interest in the tiny land of the Jewish people where miracles seemingly never cease to occur. And with the miracles comes the name of Hashem Echad.

How unfortunate are those Jews who are today under the influence of the proteges of yesterday's miraglim. Jewish presence in chutz la'aretz diminishes the Holy Name, as stated by the prophet Yechezkel.

Dialectic cover-ups of spiritual weaknesses as to the necessity to remain in the galut, which are cultivated by various cults and sects there, will drag many galut Jewish communities down with them, in a repeat of what happened in the desert 3500 years ago.

And no man is immune to the spiritual poisoning of the Jewish soul in the Galut.

For who is greater than our father Ya'akov? In parashat Vayaitze, Ya'akov, while asleep on the Temple Mount, dreams of Angels ascending and descending from heaven and hears HaShem speaking to him; but the same Ya'akov, after his sojourn in a foreign land, dreams of sheep and goats.

Next week, on the 19th of Sivan, my wife and I will be"ח enter our 50th "Jubilee" year in Eretz Yisrael. There is no way that we can express our gratitude for the brachot that Hashem has showered upon us. In all these years, we did not have the feeling that we were witnessing great historic events, because we were part of the people making those events happen. From day one, we became part of Israeli society and felt the huge brotherhood that was here regardless if our fellow Israeli was

a Torah observant person or not. Ivrit was our language. Torah learning and writing occupied me from dawn to dusk, with the huge co-operation of my wife. Military service. Teaching in yeshivot with a stint of serving as the assistant to the Minister for Religious Affairs. The liberation of Yerushalayim, the Yom Kippur War, all the ups and down of our relations with foreign powers. Children, grandchildren, great grandchildren. Who can enumerate the joys of being part of HaShem's great master-plan for His people Israel.

While growing up in Brooklyn, I had my share of miraglim and their teachings. And if not for the grace of HaShem, I too could have fallen victim to their sweet, seductive promises of Paradise if I would only remain in the galut of America.

As we enter our Jubilee year here, I call out to all young Jews, men and women, **"Make a life for yourself. Return to the source of who you are – HaShem's nation, chosen to sanctify His name through the united nation of Am Yisrael in the Holy Land, as we write huge chapters of Jewish history as we continue in the golden path towards the final redemption of our people"**.

Shabbat Shalom

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