

Shelach 5772

BS"D Parashat Shelach 5772

Part A:

Our Parasha tells of the crucial battle for the soul of the Jewish nation. On the one side were Moshe and Aharon, together with Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuna, two of the twelve miraglim who had just returned from scouting the Land. On the other side were the ten miraglim who opposed entering the Holy Land.

Many attempts have been made to explain the position of the ten miraglim. Speculations range from their personal interests which would have been compromised if they entered the land, to preventing Moshe's death which would occur when the nation entered the Land.

My understanding of this tragic episode is as follows:

The miraglim were God-fearing men who were motivated by Torah law.

The Torah states that when preparing for war, a kohen appointed for the task would speak to the troops for the purpose of weeding out those who might retreat from the battle, thus demoralizing other soldiers. The criterion for military rejection was based on a soldier's economic or personal interests back home which might prevent him from participating in life-threatening situations. The kohen would conclude his speech with the general statement that anyone who is afraid must return home.

The miraglim claimed that the moment the people would cross over the Jordan and see the enemy, no one would be left to fight. They said that only one year had passed since the nation left Egypt and that the people were still physically

and psychologically scarred from their slavery experience. Under these circumstances, the people would be totally unprepared to fight the powerful Canaanite nations. Therefore, halachically there were no soldiers prepared to go to war.

The leadership claimed that, after witnessing HaShem's miracles, the people were capable of the military effort. So, it was decided to put the nation to the test with the projected results of 60-40 to any side. On the 9th of Av, the ten miraglim presented their case to the nation by describing what they would have to face when crossing the River, and Yehoshua and Calev appealed to the people's faith in HaShem.

The results were disastrous – 100% of the men of military age sided with the ten. The wrath of God was aroused. The ten died immediately, and all men between the ages of 20 and 60 were sentenced to die in the next 39 years while the nation was sent back to wander in the desert.

In essence, the miraglim were correct in their assessment that the nation at that time was unfit for the courageous acts they would be called upon to perform. Their mistake was that HaShem had planned to instill His holy spirit into the people – the same spirit that pulsated in the hearts of Shimshon (Samson), Yehonatan, David, the Chashmonaim and, yes, in the hearts of the soldiers of today's Tzahal.

I will return to this.

Part B:

The city of Yericho (Jericho) is referred to in various rabbinic sources as *the lock of Eretz Yisrael* because it must be unlocked (conquered) if one wishes to enter the interior of the land.

Now just as Yericho is the "lock" that opens the way to Eretz Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael is the "lock" that when "opened" permits one to enter into the covenant between the Creator and

His people Yisrael. The gateway to the interior of the Torah is residence in the land designated by Hashem for keeping the Torah. In contrast, keeping the Torah in galut has an inferior “preparatory” status. Jews there are required to keep the mitzvot in order to insure that they will not be forgotten when they return home to Eretz Yisrael.

It must be very distressing for many to conceive that Shabbat, Kashrut, Torah learning, etc., are not primary mitzvot in New York, Lakewood, Vilna, Volozhin, and in the town of Mir. I too, would have thought so were it not for the fact that it was the great Ramban who stated it in his commentary to Vayikra 18:25 (including Rabbeinu Bechayai, Devarim 11:18 and many others).

The fact that contemporary religious leaders in the galut give Eretz Yisrael secondary status is the greatest roadblock to the Jewish nation’s spiritual advancement since the time of the miraglim (spies, scouts). In the best of cases, religious education in the galut teaches that living in Eretz Yisrael is a mitzva of choice, rather than one incumbent upon every Jew.

This critical issue of aliya to Eretz Yisrael and the negative and ambivalent attitude of religious leaders in the galut serves as the lock that denies entrance for countless numbers of Jews to lead an authentic Torah life.

For many Jews, the message is clear. According to the Torah, God gave us the Holy Land. Therefore, if these holy people prefer to remain in the galut, the conclusion is that the whole Torah is “pick and choose” – one may choose not to abide by Shabbat, not to adhere to the laws of kashrut, or to marry a gentile – just as long as he remains a “good” Jew. Reform and Conservative Judaism are super-sensitive to the nuances emanating from the orthodox communities in the galut where Torah is studied, Chassidic sects pitch their tents, and where great citadels of learning Torah dot the land.

There is another conclusion that can be made from the orthodox leadership in the galut. If someone presents you with the keys to a brand new Lexus and you refuse to accept them, it is a sign that you have spurned the giver, the gift or both. HaShem presented the Jewish nation with the majestic gift of the Holy Land. But if you do not reside there, it must be that you reject HaShem, the sanctity of the Holy Land, or both.

The ultimate chilul HaShem (degrading the Holy Name) will come about this summer when 90,000 orthodox Jews in the galut plan to celebrate the conclusion of another cycle of "daf ha'yomi". Honored rabbis will speak of the greatness of the Talmud. They will inspire everyone to begin another cycle of study. Shabbat will be discussed as well as the dangers of internet.

And the message will come across loud and clear: you can be a good Jew even in galut. Just pick and choose the level of Judaism that suits you. Manny can marry Mary, and Debby can marry Jose, because one can remain a Jew even when rounding off the jagged corners of the Halacha. Don't the leaders of orthodox Jewry do so every day as they turn their backs on the mitzvah of restoring the Torah way of life to God's Holy Land?

After residing in Eretz Yisrael for over 50 years and having long ago become a spectator rather than a participant in American Jewish society, my angle of vision is so much clearer. What I see is very similar to the episode of the miraglim in the desert.

Most orthodox adherents are sincere in their belief in HaShem and the Torah. However, life in the galut has weakened the fabric of their Jewish souls and bodies. It is not that they do not wish to come to Eretz Yisrael – the vast majority is incapable of doing so.

It is not a matter of educating and convincing this generation of Jews in America that the time has come to return home; It is beyond that.

The Rambam writes in his "Laws of Teshuva (chapter 4)

*4 Aveirot (sins) That Prevent A Person From Doing Tshuva.
Four that are so severe that Hashem will not permit the
transgressor to do Teshuva"*

*1. Causing the public to sin or preventing them from doing a
Mitzva*

2. Swaying your friend from the right path

*3. Watching idly as your son or anyone you have power over
goes in a bad way*

4. If you say you will do aveiros and then do tshuva later

Numbers 1 and 2 refer to leaders who prevent their followers from keeping the mizva of residing in the holy land by speaking against aliya or by being aloof from the issue.

Number 3 refers to leaders who see their community living as if they found the promised land, and they say nothing.

Number 4 includes people who say, "We will come on aliya but only after the kids finish school," and other lame excuses.

Our hope for the Jews in America, and in the other lands of the galut, is that the younger generation might be imbedded with a purer and less materialistic spirit to enable them to overcome the negativity of their parents' generation.

The cure for the ills of the miraglim's generation was to wait for the next generation to mature. How fitting are Shlomo HaMelech's words that "there is nothing new under the sun"!

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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