

# Shelach 5773

**BS"D Parashat Shelach – The parasha of the Meraglim (scouts) who spoke badly of HaShem's holy land.**

## **Part A:**

Rashi begins his commentary on parashat Shelach by explaining the connection between the last episode in last week's parasha (Beha'alot'cha) of Miriam's criticism of Moshe and the episode of the meraglim (scouts) at the beginning of this week's parasha Shelach. Rashi explains that the conduct of both Miriam and the Meraglim were affronts to the two most fundamental precepts of Judaism. Miriam degraded the Torah by insulting Moshe who is the personification of Torah, and the Meraglim degraded the mitzva of "yishuv ha'aretz" – to reside in HaShem's holy land of Eretz Yisrael.

Indeed Torah study and Eretz Yisrael are the twin pillars which support and sustain the relationship between HaShem and the Jewish nation; however there is a fundamental difference between them.

Torah study is available to all, with success dependent upon the quality and quantity of grey matter one is born with, combined with 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration.

Eretz Yisrael is another story altogether. Residence in Eretz Yisrael is an exquisite, unique mitzva reserved only for those who Hashem desires to host in His land.

Yishmael and Aisav were expelled from the Holy Land. The meraglim and their generation of 600 thousand men were denied entry into the land. Twice, when we sinned, HaShem exiled us from the land. And those who are here today are invited guests and those who are not are not invited.

## **Part B:**

In the more than five decades of living in Eretz Yisrael, I have seen people come and go. There are those who merited a successful aliya, being absorbed into society and contributing to the advancement of the Medina in many ways, and those who were rejected and expelled from the land. There are also many people who have never even tried to come home.

Now since living in Eretz Yisrael is a major Torah requirement, why are there so many observant Jews who are still in the galut? And how is it that some Jews are expelled from the land?

From two words in this week's parasha – "ru'ach acheret" (a different spirit or inclination), we can learn who is desired by Hashem. The Torah states that Calev ben Yefuneh was permitted to enter the land because out of all the other 600 thousand Jewish men there was a "different spirit" within him. Yehoshua was in a different category than even Calev, as he was endowed with the Godly prophetic spirit which emanated to him from Moshe. The Godly spirit of Yehoshua and the "ru'ach acheret" of Calev were the factors that determined Hashem's choice to permit them to enter the Land.

The meraglim were more deeply steeped in the knowledge of Torah than any of the Torah giants in whose shadows we walk today, and their spiritual level was far above any tzadik who we wish to emulate! Yet they do not possess that profoundly mysterious "ru'ach acheret" that drove Calev to defy all rationality as he thirsted to enter the land and do battle with giants. Calev and Yehoshua possessed total confidence and emuna that HaShem would bring them victory and fulfill His promise to make the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov sovereign over the Holy Land.

Hashem, who knows the inner thoughts of all men, rejected the 600 thousand, who although outwardly appeared to be God fearing, were in fact more fearful of man than of God.

## Part C:

I was witness to "ru'ach acheret" from a most surprising source.

I have a cousin by marriage who is a radical leftist with high sensibilities for the rights of the poor Arabs. His best friends are Arabs and he produces motion pictures to further their cause. But for some strange reason he sincerely likes me, and I have feelings for him as a person.

At the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, he found himself in London with little chance of returning home on a civilian airline. He performed astounding feats to get on a plane to Eretz Yisrael, and upon arrival immediately joined his active military unit where soldiers had been killed. How can one explain it? It was the spark of Yiddishkeit in his soul that drove him to stand against a formidable enemy when he could have easily waited out the war in London.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are observant Jews whose souls are insensitive to the mystical attraction of the Holy Land. They are found in many lands of the galut, and many even fulfill religious functions in their communities.

I received two articles, one penned by a young man and the other by a young woman who claim to be orthodox .

They both share the almost terminal disease of galut, although there is a great difference in their outlooks. I do not condemn them, because I am not the "sheriff of this town", and more so because they were exposed to rabbis and teachers who themselves are products of modern day miraglim.

The young lady writes:

*"Within the Modern Orthodox community, the question is rarely one of loving Israel. Our allegiance is assumed, our reverence expected. Israeli flags in dorm rooms and teary*

eyes during the recital of Ha'Tikvah serve as confirmations. We dance on Yom HaAtzmaut and cry on Yom HaZikaron. We visit Israel for holidays and reminisce fondly about our seminary and yeshiva experiences, traipsing around the cobble-stoned streets of Jerusalem.

*But who's going back?*

Those who answer deal breaker have chosen Israel. But for those of us who finagle around the question of aliyah, talking about jobs and family ties and war-zones, we've chosen America.

I don't make light of these considerations. I don't make light of the decision to stay in the United States. What I find interesting, however, is the way we acknowledge the decision we have made to stay in America. More oft than not, the challenge to verbalize the decision is accompanied by justifications, rationalizations, ambivalence, and even shame.

We justify: we're here, yes. But our hearts are with Israel. We proudly display *libi ba'mizrach*(my heart is in the east) quotations on necklaces, rings and bracelets. We assiduously keep up with the news, visit when we can, and add the names of soldiers to our daily prayers. But are we going? Make no mistake: aliyah is not a passive choice. It is a dream that has to be prioritized. No choice is the tacit agreement to stay here.

When the aliyah question is addressed to me, my response is wrought with ambivalence. When I am posed with the question, I recall longingly the unique experience of being a Jew in Israel. I recall the *chag sa'meach* greeting signs on buses, the taxi driver who handed me a small book of *tehillim* and told me to recite after him, and the elementary school children at Shabbat tables who could recite entire sections of *chumash* by heart. I respond that aliyah is an ideal. A far

*off dream, perhaps – but a dream no less vivid.*

*However, the pronouncement of aliyah as an unequivocal ideal is quickly followed by a laundry list of buts. My career. The language. Money. The precarious way of life. The foreign culture. The school systems.*

*An ideal? Yes. Am I going? No. This is the response I give. It is also the response I have received, time and time again, in return.*

*I don't usually let the contradiction and inconsistency of this reply bother me. The response has enabled me to affirm my unwavering allegiance to the dream of Israel while simultaneously excusing my decision to stay here. Though we usually strive to achieve ideals, somehow we are okay with leaving the dream of aliyah respectfully untouched. Israel has become more a statement of ideology than a plan of action.*

*But sometimes the disingenuousness does bother me.”*

*And the article continues.*

Clearly, the writer acknowledges that aliya is the demand of the Torah but she cannot rise above her doubts and weaknesses.

The second article, a response to the above, is much more offensive to the mitzva of aliya, as follows.

*“After coming across ‘My friend (her name)... Aliyah: A sacrifice too big?’ I immediately decided to respond to some of her assertions. Though her prose is well-crafted, she establishes an allegation about the Modern Orthodox Jewish establishment that I believe to be incorrect. She asserts that Aliyah is viewed as an ideal by most in America’s Modern Orthodox community, and that those who stay in America understand their decision through “justifications, rationalizations, ambivalence, and even shame.” For myself*

*and many other American Orthodox Jews, I know this to be hardly the case. Our decision to remain in America rests on the fact that we identify ourselves firmly as Americans. We don't view living in America as a timid compromising of ideals; we see it as an ideal in and of itself...*

*For me and many other American Orthodox Jews, we proudly see America as our homeland. We believe that American culture is our culture, and certainly Jewish culture has contributed to it. There isn't anything shameful about being an American, quite the reverse is true.*

*To me and the overwhelming majority of America's Jews, we have no reason to apologize for living in America. I am proud to be an American, and I don't see Aliyah as that 'unequivocal ideal'."*

The author of this article is truly focused on being a loyal son of the galut. However, he does not hear the echoes of the Jews in many lands who made similar statements, but retracted them while on their way to the pyres of Spain and Portugal, and to the death camps and crematoria of Eastern Europe.

In conclusion: Aliya is an exquisite mitzva whose fulfillment is conditional on being invited by HaShem to His holy palace.

We who have received the invitation by virtue of the "ru'ach acheret", which we have been fortunate to acquire, must thank HaShem every moment that we are blessed to be in Eretz Yisrael, and pray for our brothers and sisters in the galut to awaken their souls and come home.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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