

ohr SHABBOS

PARSHAS SHELACH

By R' Moshe Bauman

This week's Parsha tells us the unfortunate story of the Meraglim - the spies who were sent to scout out the land to prepare the Jewish nation for their imminent arrival in Eretz Yisroel. After surveying the beauty and richness of the land, the Meraglim, who were also the Nesiim, the leaders of the tribes, returned with an extremely negative report, instilling a tremendous fear into the hearts of the Jewish people. This led to an extra 38 years of wandering in the desert as well as many tragedies which occurred throughout the years.

It seems like an extraordinary phenomenon that the leaders of the tribes, who all experienced the numerous miracles Hashem performed - beginning in Egypt until that point of their miracle-filled journey - were the ones to speak Lashon Hara about Hashem and His land, Eretz Yisroel! How could the elite of Klal Yisroel have doubted Hashem's ability to bring them safely into His holy land?

Rav Moshe Shternbach, Shlita, shares an enlightening view. He suggests that they certainly did not doubt the ability of Hashem, the Almighty. However, they understood that they would not be able to conquer and settle the land B'Derech HaTeva, according to the laws of nature. Only with constant assistance and miracles from Hashem would they be able to overcome the stronger occupants of the land. Their fatal mistake lay not in their lack of faith, but rather in their faulty assumptions: they incorrectly assumed that, after the sin of the golden calf, the Jewish people no longer deserved Hashem's open and constant miracles, which would be necessary to lead them as victors against the seven nations residing in Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, they stressed the outstanding strength of the seven nations and the agricultural differences to be found on the holy soil, implying the impossibility of conquering such a land.

It is understood, however, that even with their worthy intentions of protecting the Jewish nation, they sinned grievously. What then was their sin exactly? Their sin was their failure to heed and follow Hashem's directives. What we can all learn from this tragic episode and Rav Shternbuch's explanation is a simple, yet powerful point, namely to put the will of Hashem before our own calculations and views when deciding on which direction to take. Many times in life, we are faced with various options, and we question and debate which path makes the most sense for us. It is then that we must remember the lesson to be learned from the Meraglim: never forget that our true goal is to follow the will of Hashem unquestioningly and faithfully.

THE REST OF THE STORY:

By R' Yosef Dovid Rothbart

The spies returned to the Jewish camp and addressed the Jewish nation that was eagerly anticipating this moment. The spies began with a positive portrayal of the land. They displayed the gargantuan fruit that they found in Eretz Yisroel and described the land as a land flowing with milk and honey. A murmur of excitement began to ripple through the people listening. They visualized themselves settling in the fertile land; they tasted the succulent fruit. But the spies had only begun their report.

"However," they continued in a more sombre tone, "this blessing is not a reason for celebration. On the contrary, it's frustrating for us. For all this abundance is so close, yet inaccessible." A tense silence overtook the nation as they waited for the spies to continue. "Not only are the people living in the land powerful warriors and eager for battle, but the cities they built have gigantic, impenetrable walls. Whichever way we approach the land, we will encounter nations that have a strategic advantage over us. The south is protected by a vicious enemy who dwells in a region where the terrain consists of boulders and rocks making it nearly impossible to capture. From the west..."

Suddenly a loud voice thundered out interrupting the report, "Is this all the son of Amram did for us?" Calev, hoping to contradict the spies' reports tried to encourage the Jewish nation, who were beginning to lose hope. An argument ensued between the spies, on the one hand, and Moshe, Yehoshua and Calev, on the other. Realizing that whenever they tried to speak they would be interrupted, the spies darted to their tents, where they threw themselves on the ground shaking and writhing as if overcome by seizures. Their families quickly gathered around them and pleaded with the spies to tell them what had happened. But the spies refused even to acknowledge their families as they lay trembling and groaning.

"Woe is to me," each one cried, pretending that they were unable even to stand, "Woe is to my sons and daughters. What hope do they have? If they even approach the borders of the land we must conquer, the nations will easily overcome them. Oh what will be? Once they have fallen into the hands of the nations, my children will be at their mercy. Have they seen the nations' might? Have they seen the nations' strength? Woe, woe! And even if we accept the propaganda of Calev and we are able to settle in the land, what will be gained? Its air is lethal; even its inhabitants who are used to the air are poisoned by it. What hope do we have? All is lost."

(based on the Yalkut Shemoni)

"We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so were we in their eyes." (Shelach 13, 36) If in our own eyes we regard ourselves as non-entities, certainly our adversaries will view us as such and trample us. (Admur M'Kotzk)

HALACHA

BY R'ELI KOHANANOO

Hilchos K'riyas HaTorah

The Rambam (Yad Hilchos Tefilla chap. 12) writes that Moshe Rabbeinu instituted that the Torah should be read publicly on the mornings of Shabbos, Monday and Thursday each week in order to ensure that three days wouldn't go by without Torah learning. Later Ezra HaSofer enacted that, besides these three readings, the Torah should be read during Mincha on Shabbos as well. The Shabbos afternoon reading would include the same three Aliyos that are read during the weekday readings.

The nature of this Takana is debated amongst the Poskim. The Ramban (Milchamos, Megilla 5a) understands that this enactment is a communal decree and not an obligation on each and every individual, similar to the obligation to hear the Megilla. This was also the P'sak of the Nodeh B'Yehuda (Tinyana O.C.15). However, the Shlah Hakodesh (Haghos Yesh Nochlin) writes that if a person misses even one word of the K'riyas HaTorah he isn't Yotzei. Implicit in this ruling is that the obligation is indeed on each individual. This was

also the opinion of Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zatzal (Igros Moshe IV O.C., 40). Rav Moshe explains that each individual is obliged to complete the Torah every year as a means of knowing how the Torah expects him to act. According to his reasoning, because we read the entire Parsha over again on Shabbos, it would seem that as long as a person made sure to hear it then, the readings on Monday and Thursday wouldn't be obligatory for him. However, it doesn't appear that Rav Moshe makes this distinction. One of the ramifications of this Machlokes is what a person must do if he misses a word during the reading. According to Rav Moshe it would seem he would have to hear the portion again, while according to the Nodeh B'Yehuda, as long as a Tzibur read the portion publicly, he would not be required to hear it again. The Biur Halacha seems to contradict himself regarding this matter: in Siman 135, 14 (s.v. Ayn Mayviin) he writes that the obligation to read the Torah does not apply to each individual, whereas in Siman 141, 2 (s.v. VeYesh) he writes that it does. Some commentaries explain that the obligation to read the Torah is a communal one, but after a person joined a Tzibur he, as a member of the community, is personally obliged to read the Torah. In summary, if a person misses a word, he does not need to hear K'riyas HaTorah again as we rely, post facto, on the opinions that the obligation is a communal one (Halichos Shlomo chap. 12, 1 footnote 5). L'Chatchila though, one should make every effort to hear K'riyas HaTorah. Indeed, in some instances it takes precedence over Tefilla B'Tzibur (Minchas Yitzchak VII, 6).

(continued from story column)

When the Rabbi suggested ending the discussion, young Pototzky pleaded for another meeting. The Rabbi had no choice but to agree to see him again.

The second discussion inevitably led to a third and then a fourth. Pototzky kept his word and told no one about his conversations with the Rabbi. Finally the decision, which he had contemplated for some time, ripened in Pototzky's mind. More than anything in the world he wanted to become a Jew. He told the Rabbi about it and begged him to help him become a Jew.

The Rabbi tried hard to dissuade him from this idea. He told the young Count that, according to the Torah, a gentile can find true spiritual fulfillment and eternal life by living up to the Seven Laws given to the children of Noach, but Pototzky wasn't satisfied with this option. The Rabbi tried another tactic. He described to Pototzky the danger that he may well bring upon himself if he were to carry out his decision, as well as on those who helped him to do so. To all these arguments, the young Count had one answer: "I feel my soul will not rest until I become a Jew, and live as a Jew, to my last breath."

Seeing that it was useless to try to make the young Count change his mind, the Rabbi finally agreed to help him realize his ambition. He told Valentin that the only place where he could become a Jew was the city of Amsterdam, in Holland,

where Jews lived in greater freedom. But even there the utmost secrecy was necessary. However, it would be up to Valentin to

work out a plan as to how to make his way to Amsterdam without arousing his parents' suspicion.

"But how can I be sure that the Rabbi of Amsterdam will accept me?" Valentin asked anxiously. "I will send him a letter of recommendation and I

believe that my colleague in Amsterdam will help you become a Ger Tzedek."

Young Pototzky confided in his friend Zrodny about his determination to become a Jew. He told his friend that he had at last found answers to all his doubts and questions, and he shared his newly acquired knowledge with him. Zrodny eagerly replied that he, too, wished to become a Jew, and the two friends embraced each other affectionately, their bond of friendship now strengthened more than ever by their mutual resolve. All that was now necessary was to think of a good and safe plan. After much deliberation they decided that Valentin would beg his parents to let him go to Paris, Berlin and Rome to study as well as to see the world. And since they would no doubt be reluctant to let him go alone, he would suggest to them that Zrodny be invited to accompany him. Then, after completing their travels, they would "disappear" somewhere on their way home, and secretly make their way to Amsterdam.

(to be continued)

"I feel my soul will not rest until I become a Jew, and live as a Jew, to my last breath."

Shabbos table discussions

- Why did Moshe only daven for Yehoshua and not for any of the other spies? And why did Yehoshua not daven for himself?
- A person should have a fixed place for Tefilla (cf Brachos 6b). If a person davens Shacharis in one place, Mincha in a second place and Ma'ariv in a third place every day, is he considered to have a fixed place for davening?

Shabbos STORY

By R' Yossi Bergman

The family of Count Pototzky was one of the richest and most powerful families in Poland, a little more than 200 years ago. Count Pototzky owned vast estates, which included the city of Vilna. He and his wife were devout Catholics. They raised their only son Valentin in the same spirit, and their ambition was to educate him for the priesthood.

When Valentin reached the age of 16, the Count enrolled him in the Catholic academy in Vilna. During his studies there he met another student, who came from a family of humble circumstances. His name was Zrodny. The two became great friends. In Vilna, too, Valentin came in contact with Jews for the first time, for a large Jewish community flourished there. It was related that, as he was walking one day in the street, he saw a group of boys attacking a few younger children. He went to their defence and saved them from further blows. Afterwards he asked them what they had done to provoke the attack. They replied, "Nothing! They wanted to beat us up because we are Jews."

Studying for the priesthood meant, of course, studying the Five Books of Moses, the Books of the Prophets and Holy Writings as well. In them he learned about the origin and history of the Jewish people, from the days of the Patriarchs to the Babylonian Exile. He was a serious, deep-thinking student, and he spent much time reflecting on all that he was taught. One of the basic things he was taught was that the Jewish people were forsaken by Hashem, because they refused to accept the Christian faith. This explanation seemed rather strange to him, since he distinctly learned that Hashem assured the Jewish people that He would never break His Covenant with His people, and Hashem does not break His word! He came to the realization that all he had been taught about the Jews simply could not be true.

These questions troubled Valentin's young and searching mind, and he confided his doubts to his friend Zrodny. They talked about these questions frequently, but they did not dare discuss them with their teachers.

One day, having no other option, Young Pototzky decided to discuss these matters with a knowledgeable Jew in order to understand the Jewish viewpoint on their questions. But who should he talk to? One day he met a Jew in the park and engaged him in conversation. He told the Jew that he would like to discuss with him some religious questions.

"What is there to discuss?" the Jew answered. "You will not convince me to give up my religion, and I would not even attempt to persuade you to change yours..."

"That's not the point. I just want to clear up some questions in my mind," Pototzky said earnestly. "I'm sorry, we have nothing to talk about," the Jew cut him short, and moved on. "I mean no harm. I just have to talk to someone," Potosky pleaded. Seeing how persistent he was, the Jew finally suggested he see the Rabbi, to whose home in the Jewish Quarter he directed him.

The following evening, young Pototzky made his way to the Rabbi's house. He was somewhat surprised by the humble circumstances in which the Rabbi lived, but he was immediately impressed by the wisdom and kindness reflected in his venerable face and penetrating eyes. Pototzky politely introduced himself, and told him frankly that he was studying for the priesthood, and wrestling with some serious questions. He said he would be very grateful to the Rabbi if he would help him clear up the doubts and questions that give him no peace.

The Rabbi was obviously reluctant to discuss religious matters with him. However, seeing his persistence and sincerity, and thinking that it would do no good to disappoint or, perhaps, even anger the young Count, he finally agreed to listen to him, provided their meeting was kept in confidence. This, the young Count readily assured him on his word of honour.

The questions and answers took longer than the Rabbi had expected. The more the young man listened to the Rabbi's answers, the more excited he became. (continued on inside column)

RIDDLE

By R' Naftali Spiegel

The spies mentioned that they encountered the towering sons of the giants (cf 13, 36). In which city of Eretz Yisroel did this occur?

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Did you know...

- Among the fruits that the spies brought back with them was a cluster of grapes. Our sages estimated that the weight of these grapes was over 16000 pounds. The method by which they arrived at this conclusion is based on the weight of the stones that were set up at the Jordan crossing. In Sefer Yehoshua, Hashem commanded that each tribe appoint someone to carry a stone on his shoulder. Each of these stones weighed the equivalent of 40 Seah. A Seah is equal to 17 pounds, which means that each person carried 680 pounds. A person is able to carry alone one third of what he could carry if he shared the load with another person. Because there were eight people carrying the cluster together, and each person carried around 120 Seah, or 2040 pounds, the cluster that they brought back weighed over 16000 pounds.
- Moshe attempted to defend the person who had desecrated Shabbos. He told Hashem that the Jewish nation had only recently left Egypt and they had not yet become accustomed to keeping any of the commandments. "Indeed," Moshe told Hashem, "throughout the week they wear Tefillin, which serves as a constant reminder of their faith and obligations. But on Shabbos they have no obligation to do so and therefore they forget their need to keep the Torah."

- When combined with the five knots and eight strings, the numerical value of the word ציצית totals 613. Although the word ציצת that appears in the Torah is missing a second Yud so that ten has to be deducted from this total, on one occasion where the word ציצת is written in the Parsha it has a prefix ל, whose numerical value is 30. Because the word ציצת appears three times, if we divide 30 by 3 we get back the ten missing from each word.

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riddle

By R' Naftali Spiegel

How many pomegranates did the spies bring back with them to show the Jewish nation?

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