

(1) The centrality of Eretz Yisroel

After having dwelt at the foot of Har Sinai, and drawn inspiration from its holiness for nearly a year, the Yidden were now ready to enter Eretz Yisroel.

As an introduction to the subject of the meraglim - spies, it is worthwhile to bring some examples to show how Eretz Yisroel has always been very central to our entire spiritual existence.

[A] Hashem had promised to give the land to the Yidden 431 years before, at the covenant of the Bris Bein Habesorim; "To your children **I give this Land** …"

[B] They themselves had been preparing for this since the day they left Mitzrayim, when Moshe taught them how to observe the mitzvos of Pesach in the future years: "…when **you will come to the Land** …"

[C] They were then given the two pillars – one of fire and one of clouds - to guard them and to lead them. Moshe described them as, the pillars leading them to Eretz Yisroel. As Moshe admonished them for (this week's) sin of the meraglim, he reminds the Yidden how Yehoshua and Koleiv "… said 'it is good; **the land which Hashem our G-d is giving to us**!' But you didn't want to go… not believing in Hashem, your **G-d, Who goes before you on the way, to prepare for you a place to dwell, with a fire at night to show you the way, and with a cloud by day**. (Devorim 1:25,33)

[D] Then crossing the Yam-Suf they praised Hashem for "This Nation that You redeemed, and that with your might, **You are leading to your Holy Dwelling** …"

[E] Then, they had prepared for fifty days and received the Torah on Shovu'os. And (although, obviously the Torah is relevant and obligatory in every place in the world, nevertheless) Moshe connects the Torah with Eretz Yisroel, saying; "… He commanded you to observe the Ten Commandments, and He wrote them on two stone tablets. And at that time, Hashem commanded me to teach you the laws and commandments to **observe them in the Land** that you are going there…" (Devorim 4:13)

[F] After the sin of the eigel, Moshe beseeched forgiveness with the words "**Remember… the covenant… the Land that I will give…**"



[G] Then, on Yom Kippur, Hashem gave the second luchois and revealed the "thirteen attributes of His mercy", immediately adding how to remain pure of idol worship "… **in the Land that you are coming to**…"

[H] Then with this forgiveness, they were pure and ready to begin to build the mishkon and receive the shechinoh – the revelation of Hashem's Presence. After commanding them to build the mishkon and its vessels, Hashem added the words "… ve'chein ta'asu – and like this you should do." Chazal teach this to mean that with these words they were commanded **to make the Holy vessels, in this same way in the future mishkons and in the Beis Hamikdosh in Eretz Yisroel**.

[I] Then, on Rosh Chodesh Iyar, the shevotim – tribes – and the Leviyim merited to be grouped and formed into a formation, mirroring the heavenly formation of the angels of the Chariot, surrounding the mishkon. So now, ready to travel, they were taught how communal messages would be broadcast with shofars and trumpets; one of the uses for trumpets was, "If you will come in to war **in your Land… You should blow the trumpets** to be remembered before Hashem... to be saved..."

(2) What is the essence of Eretz Yisroel?

(Question 1) After reading all these examples, if indeed "Eretz Yisroel" is so much a part of every step of Yiddishkeit, let us understand: what IS this power or energy that Eretz Yisroel gives that makes it so essential for really observing the Torah?

(3) Any good in spying?

(Question 2) Getting ready to enter the land, the Yidden thought it was a natural thing to send spies to check it out. Hashem even gave Moshe permission. But, knowing what the unfortunate outcome was going to be, Hashem added "… I am not sending them. If you want to, then send…"

What was Moshe's reason for sending the spies? What did he want them to check out?

(4) How did the great fall?

(Question 3) The spies came back with the negative report.

What was their intention? They were initially great people. So, what was their mistake?

(5) Did they lose their minds?

(Question 4) Then, even after hearing the positive arguments of Yehoshua and Koleiv they stubbornly proclaimed "we cannot go up to this nation for it is stronger than us - mimenu". Chazal explain that they had another intention when saying "mimenu". "Mimenu" also means "than Him". This means that they were implying that the kena'anim were stronger than Hashem, kevayochol. This is extremely difficult to understand. Even if they had become heretics... but this is

simply foolish! Fools, they were definitely not. To imagine that a creature could be stronger than its creator?!

(6) Do we rely on miracles?

(Question 5) Then, speaking about the giants, the spies said "… and we felt in our own eyes as (weak as) locusts and the same were we in their (the giant's) eyes." The Medrash brings an interesting and surprising note. As part of what Hashem held against them for the general sin of their negative report, about his statement He said, "… and how could you (spies) have known what you appeared in the eyes of the giants? Maybe I made it seem in their eyes as if you were giants!?" Why would Hashem expect them to imagine something so unnatural, indeed so miraculous? And how does this complaint against them fit into their general sin of the negative report?

(7) Why this punishment?

(Question 6) Sadly, the Yidden did not strengthen themselves with Yehoshua's and Koleiv's inspirational words against the fear instigated by the spies. They broke down and cried that whole night. This brought their punishment upon them: they were not to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisroel. And in addition, that night would be destined as the annual night of "crying" for the destruction of both Temples. How is this to be understood? What is the underlying connection between their sin and their punishment?

(8) Are Ma'apilim connected to Meraglim?

(Question 7) Then the meraglim died an unnatural, bitter death, and Hashem commanded the Yidden to turn around and travel away from the direction of Eretz Yisroel. But a new group, known as the ma'apilim, get together, seemingly with an opposite agenda. They proclaim that they are repenting for that sin of the meraglim and they say, "… we are ready and we are going up to the place that Hashem has said, for we have sinned, (with the meraglim and we are now repenting)". But Moshe tells them "… do not ascend because now Hashem is not with you." They also get punished and die in the hands of the Amoleikim and Kena'anim.

That they were punished for disobeying is understandable. But, why was their punishment as severe as that of the Meraglim? Furthermore, placing the two incidents in the same parsha implies a connection, as if both sins are similar. But this sin seems to be the exact opposite. Indeed, they proclaimed that they were doing Teshuva for the sin of the Meraglim!

(9) Shelo Osaniy Goy!

(Answer #1) Many seforim speak about the essential difference between the message of our Torah as opposed to the message of the teachings of spirituality which the other believing nations teach about Hashem. The teachings of the believing nations are crystallized in the Posuk, "Rom al kol goyim, Hashem, al ha'shomayim kevodo", Hashem is high over all the nations, His honor is on the heavens". This is in stark contrast to our Torah's teachings which are crystalized in the next posuk, "Mi ka'Hashem Elokeinu hamagbihi lo'shoves, ha'mashpili lirois ba'shomayim u'vo'oretz, - who is like Hashem, our G-d, Who raises His dwelling on high, BUT descends, looking into the heavens and into the earth."

This means: the nations imagine that Hashem is confined to the heavens of spirituality. I.e. "His Honor is on the heavens." Before receiving the Torah our perception of Hashem was like that of the nations.

But then Hashem gave us the Torah to teach us how Hashem is to be experienced through each and every single thing in this world, for there are teachings, Halochos and Mitzvos concerning everything in this world. I.e. "Hashem our G-d ... descends, looking into ... the earth."

If there would be a movement (the meraglim, as we shall soon explain,) who have opinions against this idea, one shouldn't think this is a minor issue, a minor mistake. As explained above, this undermines the whole message we received at Kabolas HaTorah.

This message of finding Hashem within physicality was not of much immediate relevance to the day-to-day existence of the Yidden in the Midbor, because they didn't have much of a physical existence. As the Medrash describes, new clothing was never needed; the clothes were miraculously kept clean and fresh, and grew in size with the wearer. No physical work was needed for food as they received the heavenly food of the angels, the mon, daily. So, they spent their time steeped in spirituality, learning Torah, surrounded with the clouds of Hashem's Glory. But this experience was not meant to remain in this way as a goal in itself. Instead it was only meant as a boost of spirituality, to utilize later in normal down-to-earth existence.

But this was not to be in a land where it would be difficult to experience spirituality within physicality. Indeed, they were to receive Eretz Yisroel - the most conducive land to practice the Torah and internalize its inner message, which is to connect spirituality with physicality, and to find and experience Hashem within all mundane matters. Eretz Yisroel is made of the letters eretz-yoshor-keil, where keil, Hashem, can be found yoshor, directly within the Eretz – earthliness.

(10) Strategic plans

(Answer #2) But, at the moment it was still under the power and impure spirit of the kena'anim; it was Eretz Ha'kena'any, which is made of the letters "Kaan Aaniy," here is poverty. This refers to poverty of the mind. In the Land, the negative energies of the kena'anim were concealing the spiritual energy which would reveal Hashem in the minds of its inhabitants.

So Klal Yisroel needed a plan. Just as when one needs to go to a place where there might be impure sights, one needs to plan how to go about it, while keeping one's eyes guarded and pure. So too, if Eretz Kena'an was, as yet, a spiritual challenge, they needed a plan. So, Moshe sent spies to look around there and come back to describe the way Hashem might be hidden there, in order to prepare the Yidden and provide them with the suitable spiritual tools with which to be able to find Hashem within the hiddenness. They were to find out how to combine spirituality with physicality in the Land. And he sent men who were most suitable for this. They were not warriors, trained in physical combat, but spiritual leaders, roshei Bnei Yisroel, experts in knowledge of Hashem.

(11) Is spiritual addiction ok?

(Answer #3) But, these men were too addicted to this spiritual "high" that they were experiencing in the Midbor. So as soon as they were challenged by the impurity that they felt in Eretz Kena'an, they despaired of succeeding in finding Hashem's holiness within this impurity. They didn't make enough of an effort to find Hashem's existence within His hiddenness. So, Hashem actually removed from them the shechinoh that usually rests on such great men.

(12) Does Hashem test us with challenges too difficult to overcome?

(Answer #4) After such an experience they said, "We cannot go up to this nation for it is stronger than Him". This means that they were implying that the impurity of the Kena'anim that overcame them was stronger than their power and ability to remain connected to Hashem." "Hashem," the meraglim reported to the Yidden, "cannot be found within such thick clouds of impurity".

(13) Middoh keneged Middoh

(Answer #6) With this we can understand the reason for their punishment. It is a natural consequence that if you only want the "highs" of spirituality then you cannot receive Eretz Yisroel, which is especially given to be able to find Hashem within the "lows" of physicality.

(14) Why don't you let us "repent"?

(Answer #7) The sin of the ma'apilim is also connected to this theme. They heard from Moshe that "… Hashem will not be with you…" when going up to the Land. So, why would they want to go, if they were not to be with Hashem? Isn't being close to Hashem the reason for being in Eretz Yisroel? If they still wanted to go, this shows us their mistake. They wanted this land for its physical qualities. They viewed Eretz Yisroel as a physical place to conquer, and did not care that Hashem would not yet let Himself be revealed there, as *"... Hashem said to me 'tell them: do not go up, do not fight, because I am not in your midst' ..."* meaning that Eretz Yisroel will not yet give you any of its spirituality, it will not have its essential effect of showing you that *"... I am in your midst"*. This is because it is still Eretz Ha'kena'ani – "Kaan Aaniy," here is poverty, i.e., poverty of the mind, the lack of the ability to experience spirituality. It is not yet the time for it to be known as Eretz Yisroel, a land where you can immediately tune into its spirituality. Yisroel is made up of the letters "yoshor keil," direct awareness of Hashem. If you want Eretz Yisroel, which is connection to Hashem, then know that, at the moment, "Eretz Yisroel" and the shechinoh are still in the desert.

It is as the Baal Shem Tov once told his Talmid who wanted to move from his Rebbe's court in Medzibuz in the Ukraine, to Eretz Yisroel, "… Don't travel. For at the moment the Oron, the Ark with the Luchois - tablets', is in Medzibuz."

So, this sin of the ma'apilim is connected to the sin of the meraglim, because it shows that they do not realize that the whole point of the Torah and Eretz Yisroel is to find Hashem in this world.

(15) In Eretz Yisroel miracles are natural!

(Answer #5) This subject of looking for Hashem inside the physical, has even deeper levels. When they saw great giants, the natural tendency would be to see themselves as small, and imagine that the giants also see them as small and weak. But, if they would have gotten themselves accustomed to looking for Hashem and His miraculous ways within the natural order, then they would have felt His presence and His mercy. They would have realized that, "… surely Hashem wouldn't have let these giants feel stronger than us! Surely something miraculous happened." This is what Hashem meant by saying about the meraglim *"...and how could you (spies) have known how you appeared, in the eyes of the giants? Maybe I made it seem in their eyes as if you were giants!?"* Why look at things through the eyes of nature? Look deeper, with eyes of emunoh and of the miraculous. This is what the Torah and Eretz Yisroel are all about.

(16) Nesochim. Physical Offerings

The above themes continue throughout the rest of the sedra. After the parsha of the meraglim, Hashem taught Moshe about the mitzvoh of nesochim. "When you come to the land…" you should offer wine, oil and flour offerings together with animal korbonois." This was to stress the point, again, that Eretz Yisroel is about finding Hashem, particularly through physicality, through produce of the earth and through animals.

(17) A small piece of Challoh

Then, Hashem teaches Moshe the parsha of Challoh – to separate and donate a piece of the dough to a kohein. *"When you come to the land... when you eat from the bread of the oretz – land, earth"*. Why does the Torah need to point out that the bread comes from the oretz - earth? This, again, was to point out that the essence of Eretz Yisroel is about serving Hashem through earth, not Heaven. Doing Mitzvos through eating bread from the "earth". No need to fast. There's no need to give away most of your belongings to tzedoko. Eat bread and give a small piece of dough to the kohein, and through that, you're connected to Hashem.

(18) One small Korbon to atone for communal idol worship

There's no need to fast or perform painful acts of repentance, even if one has inadvertently worshiped idols, and even if ALL Klal Yisroel have inadvertently worshiped idols. Bring one Korbon. Serve Hashem and return to Him through an animal - offering, and *"All will be forgiven - Ve'nislach le'chol adass Bnei Yisroel..."*

(19) The Mekoisheish Eitzim and Shabbos Oneness

This whole mistake of the meraglim started off much earlier. Much, much earlier. When Hashem created the world, and placed Odom Ho'rishon in Gan Eden, He commanded Odom and Chavoh *"...do not eat from the Tree - of - Knowledge - Between - Good - and - Bad. But you can eat from the Tree - of - Life..."* The Tree of Life shines into a person how everything is part of the oneness of Hashem's life force. But, the Tree - of - Knowledge - Between - Good - and - Bad injects into a person the knowledge of how to separate the bad from the good in his mind, to such an extent as to find no good within the bad. Now, Shabbos, is a special time when Hashem's Oneness is more easily perceptible than in the weekdays. The sifrei Chassidus bring down the deeper sin of the mekosheish eitzim. He was mekosheish – choosing - between the eitzim - trees. On Shabbos, when he was supposed to be trying to tune in to the special Shabbos feeling of Hashem's Oneness, this man chose the Tree of Knowledge from the choice of both eitzim - trees. So, instead of using the ideas from the Tree of Life, he used the ideas from the Tree of Knowledge. He was separating, in his mind, the bad from the good. He was maintaining that the bad has no connection to Hashem. This was the essence of his chillul Shabbos - the desecration of the Shabbos revelation of Hashem's Oneness.

(20) Tzitzits. Only a small thread!

This week's sedra ends with the parsha of tzitzis. This, too, is connected to this theme. A garment is the outermost part of a person's entity. This symbolizes the physical part of the world, in which Hashem is "clothed" and covered up. One might think that to be able to reveal Hashem's light from within this darkness, one would need great spiritual exertion. But, no; all Hashem asks for is one thread of techeiles colored wool. This, Chazal explain, reminds you of the sea color, which in turn reminds you of the color of the Heavens. The Heavens then remind you of Hashem and His Throne of Glory. As the posuk here says *"Ure'iysem oso,"* and you shall see it, i.e., the tzitzis. But, the Yerushalmi takes the word, *"oso - Him"*, to refer to Hashem Himself. This teaches us that through the mitzvoh of tzitzis *"Ure'iysem Oso",* you will see Him!" You will see Hashem Himself. All of these reminders might not always be conscious reminders; for some people it might be subconscious reminders. But in Hashem eyes, even this is enough. He does not need us to perform difficult or elevated devotions in order to connect to Him.

(21) The Revelation

The sedra then finishes by saying that, through this mitzvoh, we will remember all Hashem's mitzvos. Then it will be revealed that *"Ani Hashem Elokeichem"*, I am Hashem, your G-d." May Hashem make this happen soon *Bevias Moshiach Tzidkeinu Bimheiroh Beyomeinu Omein!*

(Adapted from Toch Hanachal Shelach)



26 SIVAN

On this day in 5408 the Yidden of Ostrowa used to say a tefilloh composed by r Dovid Halevi - the taz – turei zohov, to commemorate the anniversary of this fateful date when they were miraculously saved from the bloodthirsty Cossacks.

The wicked Cossacks reached the city of Ostrowa, the city of r Dovid Halevi. Warned of their imminent arrival, r Dovid assembled his kehilloh. He instructed them to seek refuge in the olik fortress nearby and barricade themselves within its high stone walls and battlements.

The Yidden fled to the fortress, but the Cossacks surrounded it and laid siege to it, hoping to starve those within to death or into surrender. In their impatience to lay their hands upon their victims, they began constructing battering rams to enable them to enforce their way in.

The Yidden inside the fortress were unarmed and defenseless. They watched helplessly from the window openings as the Cossacks prepared to batter down the wall. And then, the wall was breached.

The beleaguered Yidden gathered in one of the halls and wept to Hashem. "Save us, Hashem! Have mercy on us and on our children!"

The rov led the davening. He davened and cried with all his heart until he became so exhausted that he fainted and was overcome be a deep sleep, a coma-like trance.

He envisioned a Hand writing the following Posuk: "I shall protect... this city for My sake and for the sake of My servant **Dovid**" (Melochim 2:19)

He awoke suddenly, with a pounding heart and told his terrified kehilloh what he had just been shown. "Let us search our deeds and do Teshuvoh, so that we will be worthy of Hashem's miracles!" he urged them.

The Yidden's spirits rose. They all search their hearts and davened for a miracle.

And it came! There were ancient cannons still in position, but rusty with disuse. The embattled Yidden in their desperation load them. To their amazement, the cannon sprung to life, as it were, and rained fire and destruction upon the advancing Cossacks.

The Cossacks, thrown into confusion at the unexpected onslaught, turned and ran.

The Yidden of Ostrowa were able to leave the fortress and return to their homes.

ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך - HASHEM SAID: I HAVE FORGIVEN – JUST AS YOU HAVE SPOKEN



QUESTION

Dear Rabbi Lesser,

I am extremely grateful for the wonderful guidance and advice that you gave us, to improve our Sholom bayis. Thank G-d, I can already see a big difference in the atmosphere of our home. Boruch Hashem for that!

I really want to put the past behind us and move on, but I have this huge barrier that is stopping me from getting over it and developing a proper relationship; I just can't bring myself to forgive her for all the bad stuff that happened between us.

I recently started a therapy called "Forgiveness Process". This helps me to understand exactly why she acted in a particular way – and to forgive her for it. This approach has had a good effect on me, helping me to get rid of all my subconscious anger.

Right now, I can't see myself getting any further than this. I would like to hear some pointers from the Rav – just how should I behave how much is expected of me?

ANSWER

Dear….

On receiving your letter, I was very happy to hear about the positive changes in your home – and, particularly, that you have noticed them! May it be His will that they become even bigger and better – and endure for ever!

Now, about this "huge barrier" that you still feel in your heart:

You say you are trying to deal with it by means of a "Forgiveness Process". This actually seems to me like a very good idea and a productive, successful approach – and perhaps I can help you along with it….

Let us take a good look at ourselves; let us consider how Hashem puts up with us and forgives us, no matter how much we continue to sin against Him. Not for nothing is He referred to as "Chanun hamarbeh Lis'loach" – "Gracious and abundant in forgiveness". It is noteworthy that the only time we find this expression "hamarbeh" is in connection with forgiveness. Hashem forgives us time after time. He never says to us "I just forgave you for this – and you're doing it *again*?!" No, each and every time, whenever we regret our misdeeds and beg Him for forgiveness, He graciously pardons us anew.

Let us try to implement the directive of the possuk: "mib'sori echzeh Elokah". Our behaviour should reflect His. We are all too aware of the countless number of times that we have rebelliously sinned against Hashem Yisborach – and yet, despite it all, He grants us complete forgiveness. In the same way, we must find it within ourselves to forgive our friends and family members, to believe that, whatever occurred in the past, people really do change and are capable of making amends. Once we realise this, we can truly forgive them, wholeheartedly.

Hoping to hear good news….

Rabbi Yitzchok Lesser

Questions are answered by
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