

# PARSHAS SHLACH

תשפ"ד

This is a very confusing parsha. The Ramban is bothered – what exactly was the sin of the spies? They were sent to spy out the land and report back what they saw – and this is exactly what they did, they reported what they saw!

These people were the heads of the shevotim – they were great people. But Moshe was already concerned with them before he sent them, and he gave a brocho to Yehoshua to protect him from being influenced by the meraglim. Let's appreciate what is happening. Yehoshua is Moshe Rabbeinu's talmid muvhak. He never left Moshe's tent. He received all of Moshe's Torah. Still, Moshe was afraid that Yehoshua would be swept up with the plans of the meraglim.

Moshe instructed the meraglim to check whether there are trees or not. Rashi explains that it refers to the protection of tzaddikim. Colev comes back and says their shade has been removed – Iyov had died and they have no zechuyos of tzaddikim to protect them from our conquest.

So what was the failure here?

They come to Chevron and see gigantic people, and they cut off a gigantic cluster of grapes and other fruit to show Klal Yisroel. They start off saying how wonderfully fruitful the land is – ארץ זבת חלב ודבש – but it produces gigantic people – too strong for us to conquer! Not only too strong for us but also too strong for Hashem – תמונו – Rashi says it refers to Hashem.

But let's understand – how could the meraglim really think Hashem couldn't defeat these nations after all that they had seen? The Egyptians were defeated by Hashem with no problem. They had a complete understanding that Hashem is in total control of the natural world and no force in the world can exist without Hashem. So how did the meraglim convince Klal Yisroel that Hashem couldn't help them conquer these nations?

They reported that Amoleik is there in order to instill fear! But why was this a threat? Didn't they defeat Amoleik? Yes, but maybe that was only because of their high level. They are saying that maybe Klal Yisroel are no longer on the requisite madreigoh to defeat their enemies.

The meraglim spoke loshon horo against Eretz Yisroel. They felt like they were grasshoppers in the eyes of the inhabitants. Rashi explains that Hashem did them a favor by making them small and virtually invisible, but the meraglim interpreted it as something negative.

They suggest turning around and going back to Egypt. As if the Egyptians will welcome them with open arms? After all that happened to them?

Yehoshua tries to encourage them and convince them that if they just have bitachon, Hashem will fight their battles and there is nothing to fear. It doesn't work. Hashem gets angry and threatens to destroy Klal Yisroel. Moshe Rabbeinu davens to spare them and Hashem takes a vow that this generation will die out in the midbor and their children will enter 40 years later.

Klal Yisroel severely regret losing the chance to enter Eretz Yisroel and they decide they are going to charge in, right now, despite what just happened. Moshe warns them that Hashem is not going to be with them to fight for them and they will be destroyed. They don't listen and go up themselves and are wiped out by the Amoleikim and Cana'anim who live in the Negev.

Then we are told about all the מצוות התלויות בארץ.

What is this story all about?

It is about being able to make a transition from living an exalted, supernatural existence to living regular life and still maintaining a high awareness of Hashem in your mundane life. It is knowing that Hashem runs everything, whether or not we see it. This was Yisro's challenge. He did not want to go to Eretz Yisroel and feel that his life was out of his control and totally in Hashem's hands. Moshe had to bribe him to convince him to stay with them. Klal Yisroel are surrounded by ananei kovod, with mon and water, and all their needs are taken care of supernaturally, so it's easy to see Hashem controlling everything. It is impossible not to see it! But now when they enter Eretz Yisroel, they have to do all their hishtadlus of planting and raising crops and building towns and living regular life, and still believe that Hashem is behind everything they do. This is much more difficult. We need to remember Hashem is going to help us win battles that we will be fighting by ourselves with soldiers and weapons and strategy. This is the challenge.

We are living in dangerous times – all over the world. Israel is not the only place Jews are being targeted. Jews are being targeted all over the world. If you didn't believe in Hashem's hashgocho over the world, you would lose your mind from all the anxiety that comes from seeing what's going on. Putin is making existential threats to the U.K., Hezbollah is threatening Cyprus and the E.U. is threatening Lebanon. The world is on a very dangerous path. Hashem is demanding of us that we have bitachon that He is running everything.

So Klal Yisroel are facing a tremendous test of bitachon by going into Eretz Yisroel. They are afraid of the challenge to still believe that Hashem is running the world according to our mitzvos and aveiros and at the same time we are fighting our enemies and working for our parnossoh. Klal Yisroel are afraid they will fail.

Sometimes it is obvious that things are happening above the rules of nature. But when we are not living in those times, Hashem sends us messages every now and then that He is with us and He hasn't abandoned us. This is what Hashem did for Yosef after he was sold to the Yishmoelim as a slave. Yosef thought his life was over – after being rejected by his brothers and sent down to Egypt to probably never see his family again. He was about to lose all hope. But the caravan that transported Yosef was filled with all kinds of pleasant-smelling spices and fragrances – not the typical merchandise you would expect from Arabs who traded in foul-smelling petroleum products! Why does the Torah tell us this detail? Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explained that this was a subtle message from Hashem to Yosef to let him realize Hashem is still with him and protecting him from various discomforts – even as he is being sold as a slave!

Sometimes it is difficult to see that message and sometimes it is easier. There is a pasuk that says: וְאֶנְכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי בְיָוִם הַהוּא עַל כֹּל וְאֶנְכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתִּיר אֶנְשֵׁי עַשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים הַרְבֵּה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים. The Baal Shem Tov has a famous interpretation of the double hester. There is hester pomim, where it is still apparent that Hashem is behind what is happening, even though it is concealed by nature. But then there are times that are so bleak – where it is impossible to perceive that Hashem could still be behind it.

This was the challenge that the dor hamidbor would be facing, and the meraglim and those who followed them didn't want to accept that

challenge. But Shevet Levi did not follow the meraglim. They had a very clear perception of their role in the world and their connection to Hashem. In Egypt, Shevet Levi insisted on remaining in Goshen and not integrating into Egyptian society. They remain separate and totally focused on avodas Hashem. They are rewarded by evading slavery and being supported by Pharaoh the entire time. They experienced a deep encounter with Hashem's hashgocho over many years, and they drew on that experience to help them overcome all the nisyonos that they faced afterward in the midbor.

People say *עוד תלכדו אין* all the time as a kind of slogan, but few people really live with this as a reality. When you are sick and you go to a doctor for tests and treatment, when you enter a business deal and sign a contract, you daven first that Hashem will give you health and hatzlocho. You daven because you don't believe in your doctor's expertise to keep you healthy. It's not because of your great business acumen that will make your deals successful. It is all in Hashem's hands alone. But it is very hard to really believe that, when you are carefully making all these decisions and taking all these precautions – as if you are affecting the outcome. It is hard to believe both things at the same time.

This is where Klal Yisroel broke down in last week's parsha. When you complain about your situation and you make demands, it shows that you don't have the fact that Hashem is directing your life in the forefront of your mind. It shows that you take things for granted and you don't give Hashem credit for all that you have in life. They didn't believe that it was Hashem who was taking care of them, and Hashem wasn't an active part of how they functioned on a day-to-day basis.

When you develop a chronic medical condition, you can look at it in various ways. One way to look at it is that Hashem gave you a certain situation that you have to work with in your life. Hashem wants you to relate to Him on an ongoing basis – through this condition. Your health isn't a given that you can take for granted like you used to.

People have all kinds of plans and expectations of how they are going to make a parnossah. But after all the planning and worrying about the future, at some point you have to step back and ask yourself – how have I survived until today? How did I have food for breakfast this morning? When you realize that it's only been Hashem who has been taking care of you until now, you can draw on that realization and have bitachon that Hashem will continue to take care of you in the future. You still need to plan and make hishtadlus, but you don't have to panic and worry that you won't make it – even when things look bleak and things are on the verge of collapse.

It is a very scary thing living in Israel now under the real threat of a Hezbollah attack that could potentially wipe out all the vital infrastructure in this country, with their tens of thousands of missiles and drones. But a real baal bitachon shouldn't be scared. He knows Hashem is looking out for us. A person can remember the experience that we had before Pesach where Hashem showed us He is taking care of us and keeping us safe – even under these tremendous existential threats.

The Chofetz Chaim was known to predict a horrible churbon in Europe in his final years – he said rivers of blood would be flowing. Rav Moshe Landinsky, the Rosh Yeshiva of Radin, asked him: where will Jews be safe? The Chofetz Chaim responded with a posuk which says Eretz Yisroel will be a refuge. When the German general Rommel was going through Africa coming up through Egypt to reach Eretz Yisroel and

wipe out the Jewish Yishuv here, everyone was worried. Rav Herzog repeated that there was no need to worry. The Chofetz Chaim foretold that Eretz Yisroel will be spared from the churbon. As we know, the British Army halted the German advance and Eretz Yisroel was saved.

Hashem is running the world – even in dangerous times when the future seems so bleak and hopeless. Even while you are living your normal everyday life, and you are fully engaged in hishtadlus and fighting battles, you have to still be able to see Hashem behind everything that happens. The meraglim didn't think they could pass this test, they failed to have the necessary bitachon while functioning in a natural world.

I often tell the story of a so-called talmid of mine who was going through a crisis and he felt that he couldn't manage it. He got the news from the doctors that his child in utero developed brain hemorrhaging and it was likely that he would be born a complete vegetable. He lost his equilibrium and got so angry with Hashem for being put through this that he stopped davening and keeping mitzvos. His wife told me what was happening with him and I said he should call me. When I spoke with him, I promised him: "the baby will be all right, you don't have to worry. Don't be angry with Hashem. Get back to keeping Torah and mitzvos. When I get back to the States I will explain everything." By the time I came to visit him, the doctors changed their prognosis completely and said the baby will be perfectly healthy. When we met, this talmid asked me: "how did you know?" I told him that from seeing his reaction to this situation, I realized that this nisayon of having a child who is a vegetable is a nisayon that he could not handle. But we know that Hashem doesn't give people tests that they cannot pass. So I figured that the nisayon isn't that he will actually have such a child, but rather that he will think he will have such a child. Hashem was testing your reaction to the prospect – not the reality – and on this test you could have passed. But you failed it.

Hashem gives us nisyonos. He expects us to do our hishtadlus and at the same time have a deep bitachon that He is really running the world. All sorts of leaders of countries today are walking around thinking they are running the world, but in reality, they are Hashem's puppets.

This was the nisayon of the meraglim. Hashem was going to take care of everything and make sure they would win every battle – but without any ananei kovod and mon, etc. They are going to have to be on the proper level of bitachon in order to receive that kind of hashgocho within nature. Sometimes, like in Yericho, the hand of Hashem was apparent to all, and there were open miracles. Klal Yisroel didn't even have to knock down the walls – they came down on their own. Other times they will have to fight with natural means – but keeping in mind that Hashem is allowing them to conquer their enemies. The meraglim felt they couldn't have that level of bitachon and they failed. Shevet Levi had already integrated this reality of hashgocho throughout their history, so they passed this nisayon without difficulty.

Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to keep a container of mon to be a reminder years later. For times when we are doing hishtadlus, we need to remember from the mon that our parnossah and our success in any area of life is directed by Hashem at all times – even when we don't see it openly.

This is the great challenge in living a life of bitachon – to understand that anything and everything that happens in our lives comes directly from Hashem.