

Parshas Shelach

June 4-5, 2021
24-25 Sivan 5781

Parshas Shelach is the 33 reading this year but is the 37th parsha in the Torah. This parsha always fascinated me, because although there seems to have been a negative event that took place (the sending of the spies to Israel) and the subsequent 40-year sojourn in the desert, the Rebbe using Chassidus turns the events on their head, finds the positive in the narrative, and teaches us a valuable lesson.

The Rebbe explains in a sicha and asks in a manner of the Divrei Hamaschil of Shelach Lecha Anashim, what was the difference between the spies Moshe sent, and the spies Yehoshua sent. (The haftora is the story of the spies Yehoshua sent, just as the Jews were entering the land of Israel, some 40 years after the events of this week's parsha.)

Three key differences are noted:

- 1) The meraglim Moshe sent, were "for yourself" and on your own volition (i.e., asked by the Jews) as opposed to the meraglim Yehoshua sent, which were commanded.
- 2) The second noted difference is that the meraglim Moshe sent were 12, in number Yehoshua only sent 2.
- 3) The meraglim Moshe sent went through the entire land width and breadth – and they saw the "7 nations" whereas the meraglim Yehoshua sent only went to Jericho (the future site of the tabernacle prior to the conquering the Jerusalem, where the Beis Hamikdash would be built.)

The Rebbe explains, each one of these characteristics is how the Moshe meraglim were negatively affected by heading into the land. The 7 nations representing 7 evil manifestations of midos, are incredibly difficult if even possible to change, whereas the Yehoshua meraglim went only to Jericho- a name explained in Kabbala as the Yerach (smell) of Hashem (because that is where the sacrifices were offered). Smell is a loose, and context specific experience. Some smells are good, others aren't. These are like the levushim, "clothes" which a person can change on a whim, and for specific contexts even if the underlying midos aren't in line. The levushim of Kabbala are Machshava, Dibur, and Maisheh (thought speech and action) which are the method through which one manifests all activities, and intellectual faculties. Just as character traits are harder to change than clothing, so too the spies were negatively affected by the 7 nations, and it was far more difficult to change their minds from this, than the spies that Yehoshua sent¹.

Further analysis is still required. Chassidus, (The Alter Rebbe and the Rebbe) explain as well, that the Jews who were taken out of Egypt, ascended the highest spiritual planes, saw Hashem perform miracles, saw Hashem give them the Torah, saw the splitting of the sea, received manna, and had their clothes grow with them. This all meant that these Jews were not able to come back to earth so to speak, to continue the mission of "La'asos Lo Dira Bitchtonim". Their neshamos had to go back to their creator. Although they had all the laws pertaining to the Torah, it was removed

¹ Ari Friedman pointed out in my shiur that this is the 37th parsha, which is comprised of the number 3 and

7, just a cute play on the 3 levushim versus the 7 middos.

from them in an esoteric manner, impractically, and having to go to Israel would mean jumping back into the mundane. This they were not prepared to do.

Furthermore, the intentionality of the event is revealed when we think about this. The fact that it was 40 years, due to 40 days of travel, which Rashi explains was intended by Hashem (on the wording Miketz) due to the fact that Hashem didn't want them to spend the full time (as it should have taken for them to traverse the land- based on the distances, and the speed at which the average person walks per day².) Hashem shortened the length of time, know that the punishment for the days traversed would translate into a year (yom leshana yom leshana). The number 40 is not happenstance either. 40 is connected to the number of days of the mabul, of the time Moshe spent on har sinai (among other references).

The Jews needed to be prepared to get involved and be proper vessels to enact the ability to purify the world and find the sparks of holiness that exists in the mundane. While the Jews who left Egypt may have been living on a higher spiritual plane, than what would allow them to connect to the mundane, the next generation needed to be amply prepared for the true activity of "lasos lo dira bitachtonim".

One can look at the negative, but the Rebbe helps us ascertain the positive, and the

lessons. Torah is "lo bashamyim hi". Furthermore, just like the angels that Yakov saw in his dream who ascended and descended, as the mepharshim explain, due to the inability for angels to extend beyond their job. That is the angels of Israel could not accompany Yakov to diaspora, in a similar vein, Yitzchak was not able to leave his homeland (unlike his father or son) due to the level he was one from being a literal sacrifice to Hashem.

We may be able to see reference to the intentionality with the following. The last 3 letters of the first three words of the parsha spell "Chochom", "koach Mem". The first, chochom, reflect on the intellectual/thought process of the Shelach Lecha Anashim³. Koach Mem would be that with the power of 40, and as pirkei avos says, 40 is the age of intellect. So, what went wrong?

The Jews intentions were right, but their method was wrong. The purpose of creation wasn't to be on a messianic level as they felt in the desert, rather it is to go into the land and purify this world and draw Godliness into this realm, and to be challenged.

Also, the intellectual faculties, are devoid of emotion, and the Gemara and Yoma says, that what is worse is if a person plans to do something bad rather than just do the bad thing. One can learn from here that this is due to the fact that through the planning, a person can pervert the action and justify it, even if it is completely wrong. (Rashi on

than the normal time it should have, such that the time spent in the desert was 40 years. Also, based on Rashi the miraglim were all upstanding.

² They were called Miraglim, from the word regel, meaning they were on foot. Rashi explains this.

³ Hashem didn't kibosh their plans. Hashem even made a miracle that the scouting process was less

“tenuosi” Chapter 14 verse 34 explains that their heart – emotions were removed, they intellectualized their actions, and this caused them to “sin”. Rashi also supports this notion, as he explains on chapter 13 verse 3 “kulam anashim” following “al pi Hashem”. Hashem gave them permission, and they were honorable men, in that they didn’t intend on sinning⁴. Only once they had a chance to pervert their thinking (by being influenced by the 7 nations- they realized how distant they were from being able to be Oivdey Hashem. Furthermore, Hashem’s frustration with the matter was known, and Rashi explains, on Chapter 14 verses 12-13, that the Jews cannot be annihilated, otherwise the nations, and Egypt will hear the devastation. Who cares if they hear this or not? Rather, to reflect on the intentionality of it all, this can be misinterpreted as the course of history required since creation until this point, and until when Mashiach arrives. (Over the course of history, the Beis Hamikdashes had to be built destroyed, and there had to be exiles, and this current exile that we are in.)

The parallels between wording from this parsha and others would substantiate my position further in the following ways:

- 1) The Shelach, and Vayishlach – where Yakov sent messengers/scouts ahead of his meeting Esav are connected, in that in both instances the spies were kind of unneccasry to the event that would follow. (In Yakov’s case, meeting Esav, and here the entering the land of Israel- as Hashem promised)⁵. The parallels

⁴ They were called “Anashim”, which cross references to the angels that came to visit Avraham in Bereishis, they were also called anashim, Rashi explains (Ber: 19:1 when the shechina was with them they were called anashim.)

between the intentionality of what Yakov did, with his brother and sons is ever apparent to the theme of Mashiach.

- 2) The attributes of mercy are the same as used previously in Ki Sisa, where the Jews sins were also seemingly out of place (the egel) relative to what was required of them at the time.
- 3) The 10 meraglim who spoke ill of the land, could be gilgulim of the brothers (10 of them) who came to Yosef to “spy” on the land of Mitzraim- Binyamin remained at home, and Yosef was already in Egypt. But we know that there was intent and purposefulness of the brothers’ actions to get Yosef to Egypt and beyond, as part of the narrative of the coming of Mashiach.

The final point of the parsha, is its placement relative to the story in the last Parsha (behaloscha) of Miriam who spoke ill of Moshe. This is to relate the fact that speech is so important to be monitored, that is how you say things, about what you talk about and why you say the things you do. The rabbis in maseches pesachim tell us the importance of wording. The story of Miriam and the story of the miraglim, tell us the same thing. Even speaking about things which matter to some people, or are holy, one has to be careful about how they speak of them. (Just like Yakov went back for his small jugs, as Rashi explains there, tzadikim value even small vessels- so to here, small

⁵

https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/2497644/jewish/Shabbos-Parshas-Vayishlach-14th-Day-of-Kislev-5751-1990.htm

words which seem benign out to be taken seriously.)

Good Shabbos