

Parshas Shelach

This week's Parsha, Shelach, recounts the pressure on Israel to send inspectors to the land of Israel ahead of their arrival. Unfortunately, this episode resulted in additional spending in the wilderness, totalling 40 from the time of the Exodus from Egypt.

The Gemara in Sotah 34 and 35 discusses the Miraglim, and it teaches that upon the spies' return, as mentioned in our Parsha 13:25-26, they went returned wicked because they went out wicked, based on the words "Vayelchu, Vayavou" (and they went and came). Even though the spies acknowledged that the land "flowed with milk and honey", the Gemara says, "Kol Lashon Hara She'ein bo dvar emes betchilaso, ein miskayem besof" any slander that begins with a lie ultimately does not stand. Because they lied, so their ending message was not true either.

This is an essential lesson in the current state of the world, which is often characterized by deception. This edict applies not just to the scenario of the spies, but rather to all things that are lies. Meaning, if there is some idea circulating in the world that sounds truthful but is baseless and based on incorrect or misleading information, then in the end, it will not stand. We know this to be true, in part, because of the spies, but more so because we know the Torah is true; therefore, anything in it is true, and it only stands the actual test of time.

The Gemara further expounds that to calm the people and get their attention, Caleb and Yehoshua began their rebuttal

by stating something that would seem to be a criticism of Moshe, which silenced the people, and they listened to Caleb and Yehoshua's rebuttal of the spies' claims.

The Gemara then elaborates on the punishments before returning to its discussion of the splitting of the sea—a few points to note. The Gemara discusses the Jews' travelogue and provides proof for the sizes of the fruits and other points regarding their travels. I think this shows that even with miracles upon miracles, people can be distrusting, and so quickly turn on a dime, especially with crowd think. It doesn't make the information accurate; it highlights a symptom of an unhealthy society that follows bad information. Which is why the Gemara must explain that a lie begets a lie, and bad information means that in the end, what is untrue will not stand the test of time. This lesson is taught about the Jews who saw all the miracles, and were still (as explained in the Gemara) willing to throw stones at Hashem, and cry out, for which we were punished (9 of Av) for a long day of mourning.

Daf Yomi began Maseches Avoda Zara, which is profoundly relevant to our time. Which is that through Torah, which is true, we will conquer Edom, and Poras (and other kingdoms) and we will usher a world where "Vehaya Hashem Lemelech Al Kol Haaretz, Bayom Hahu, Yihyeh Hashem Echad Ushemo Echad". The two are connected. The Torah teaches us that falsehoods and misinformation will not last. The counter is similar to how Maseches Avoda Zara begins, suggesting that learning Torah will overturn our enemies. Meaning, the counter to bad

untrue information is Torah, and knowing it, and spreading its light. The alternative is long, unnecessary sojourns in the wilderness. The antidote brings us closer to redemption.

Furthermore, the Gemara in Avoda Zara 2b explains that when Mashiach comes, all the nations will be given a chance to explain themselves, and they will say they did all their “good deed” (road building, marketplace building, etc.) to give way for Jews to learn Torah. But Hashem will say that is not true, and slowly render all the nations’ explanations ineffective. Much the same, they may even have a “truthful”- looking hook, and you may come to believe it, but don’t.

One more point from Maseches Avoda Zara 2b in any war, even ones where there seems to be a clear size difference, and logic would dictate that one side is more powerful than the other, should not think that a war cannot be won; rather, Hashem is directly involved. This is Hashem’s rebuttal to the Persians who would claim that they fought wars to make way for the Jews to study Torah. “Hashem Ish Milchama” (Shemos 15:3) Hashem shows the strength and or weakness in war, not some lie disguised as a truth.

When Mashiach inevitably arrives, as is clear from the Gemara and even the episode of the spies, the truth will remain and shine through, making it clear who Hashem is and how the world is intended to be as an abode for Him.

Good Shabbos