

Parshas Shelach

This week's Parsha, Shelach, recounts the primary reason the Jews were stuck in the desert for 40 years, namely their belief in the 10 spies' report that the land wasn't inhabitable. The Lubavitcher Rebbe's twist on this is that it can't be that the Jews didn't want to go into the land; after all, it was the realization of the dream and the promise to Avraham that the future generation of Jews would go out of Egypt and into the land of Israel. Since going into the land meant becoming mundane and physical, it was easier to remain under the protection of Hashem, i.e., in the desert, where their clothes grew on them, they were fed Manna, and they could be consumed by Torah. Therefore, the generation that left Egypt and received the Torah wasn't, so to speak, prepared to become mundane; that generation passed on, and a new generation entered the land, a generation that knew that, notwithstanding the greatness of learning Torah all day and night, they were prepared to be involved in Mitzvos. If this were the case, why then didn't the Torah say that the Jews' intentions were right, but the method was wrong? That is, though they wanted to remain under the cloak of Hashem (specifically the Ananei Hakavod), this

wasn't the point; they had to be involved in Mitzvos, enter the land, and use the Torah to imbue every part of their existence¹.

The answer, I think, is that the Torah tells us things as they are. That is, the Jews' surface intentions were not to go into the land. Specifically, they were negative even though the truth was laid out before them. This is because the Torah tells us something about human psychology and how to overcome it. That means it is known how the majority will act; this is part of the human condition. The question is: do we push ourselves to be among the under 20% (i.e., the minority) who fight for the truth? To bring Mashiach, knowing what we know, we must do the opposite of the norm. That is, when it is comfortable and safe, we push the limits of the message to spread light and be proud Jews. The Rebbe's vision and explanation, therefore, teach us something further about the human condition. This same human condition applies to the world around us. That is, the world around us is increasingly telling us, Jews, how evil we are, and all the tropes are found in the human condition and in the Torah's script. But we know what the other side looks like, that is, we will go out of this golus "B'rchush Gadol". Based on the first Rashi on the Parsha, we

¹ Rashi on 13:3 "Kulam Anashim" would suggest that these men were all upstanding, so it stands to reason that their intentions were in fact good. It would also add support that Hashem doesn't want this type of behavior to be the norm, that is,

in the wrong hands, people could ChVSh pervert the Torah and the righteous path. So Hashem recorded it in the Torah as a wrongdoing, and the Rebbe guided us on how it can be used in our lives to bring Mashiach closer.

can derive (especially Rashi in 13:3) that Hashem didn't stop them from being sent, because we humans have agency.

One of the Meraglim's complaints was that the land eats its inhabitants (13:32). Rashi explains that Hashem made it so there were many burials so they wouldn't notice the spies. But there is also a metaphorical component, that is, a land that consumes its inhabitants, that is, an existence which consumes a person to the mundane. That was a worry of the leaders, that they would no longer be guided and enclothed by Hashem's presence as they were in the desert. They didn't want to get out of their comfort zone and had to perform the Mitzvos; they were worried about the land consuming the people and about no longer being connected to Hashem (Chas Vishalom). So, although it is framed as a complete sin (and the punishment of remaining in the desert for 38 more years), the Rebbe's explanation has a basis in the Pesukim.

Now, in our times, it can be easy to forget that we are at the end of Golus, and our Golus lenses, so to speak, may keep us from believing that Mashiach will come. But we have a singular purpose: to make this abode a dwelling place. In doing so, at every moment, we allow our Neshama to cling to its source and bring more light into this world. Moshe had to pray for Yehoshua to have the fortitude to stay on the right path. This means that even Yehoshua had a chance to align himself with the majority. This takes a

tremendous amount of strength and even a prayer (by Moshe) to ensure the outcome. That means this mission is neither easy nor obvious. The majority will make it seem like it is the right way to be. The Parsha comes to tell us, no, there is a minority line that is the right one.

Good Shabbos