

# PARSHAS SHLACH

תש"פ

In Chutz Lo'oretz, the parsha being read this week is Parshas Shlach. In Eretz Yisroel, the parsha this week is Korach. But there is a question: Which came first? The events of Shlach or Korach? We know that from the moment of the cheit hameraglim, Moshe Rabbeinu lost communication with Hashem until the end of the gezeirah – 38 years later. So it would stand to reason that Parshas Korach took place before Parshas Shlach – as many meforshim say. Other say that Korach was a necessary exception to the rule.

Parshas Shlach is a continuation of the collapse of the level of Klal Yisroel that we saw in last week's parsha. Parshas Behaaloscha starts with Klal Yisroel on a high note. They recovered from the cheit ho'eigel, built the mishkan and brought hashroas haShechinoh. They set up their camp in formation with degolim as Hashem's army ready to march triumphantly into Eretz Yisroel in a three days' journey. They are on an unbelievably high level and if they maintain it, Moshe will bring them to Eretz Yisroel and built the Beis Hamikdosh and there will be a final geuloh. But Klal Yisroel mess all this up for themselves. They don't want to live on that high level. They prefer hefkeirus. It is the biggest yetzer horo in the world.

If a person wants to see the consequences of a life of hefkeirus, look around the various cities of the United States – Seattle Washington, Atlanta, Minneapolis. They want to abolish the police and the result is total chaos – total insanity. This is the yetzer horo of hefkeirus – to live without any restraints.

Eventually, Klal Yisroel do teshuvoh, but they can't get back to that level they were on before. Once they have gotten the taste of living without restrictions, it is a constant struggle to accept restrictions, to not succumb again to the desire to be free. A slave is someone who is totally dependent on his master – physically and psychologically. He has no independent will and desires. All he knows in life is serving his master and carrying out his wishes without question. He is under absolute control of his master. Hashem gave us a Torah – a system of how to live a disciplined life. It is a different type of freedom. You can make your own decisions about your life, but you need to live within the constraints of the Torah. You can't just do whatever you want.

There is a very interesting gemara in Chullin which says for every food that is forbidden by the Torah, there is another permitted food which tastes just like it. The message is that Hashem isn't out to deprive us of any form of enjoyment in life. He doesn't sadistically create pleasures just for the sake of forbidding them. But we should enjoy the world the way He tells you – in a measured and disciplined way. Don't just run after pleasure just because you want it. Freedom means you aren't enslaved by your yetzer. A person who learns Torah is truly free because the Torah trains him how not to be swayed and pushed around by his taivos and bad middos.

There are two types of freedom. There is a freedom of hefkeirus – run after whatever you want whenever you want it. Freedom from all restrictions of action and freedom of thought.

In Parshas Behaaloscha, Klal Yisroel had moved from avdus – total control over every detail of their lives, and came to freedom with kabbolas haTorah. It was freedom from their taivos through the discipline of Torah. This created a real ben chorin. Rabbeinu Yonah says that true bechirah chofshis is a mitzvah – to take your life in your hands and make conscious decisions – not just following the trends and the pressures around you.

At that level, where they were forgiven on Yom Kippur and given the second luchos, they built the mishkon and had hashroas haShechinoh. They formed a military camp with Hashem in their midst and they were ready to move to Eretz Yisroel.

But then the yetzer of hefkeirus came in and they want watermelon and then it snowballs into arayos. Once hefker creeps in, it takes over everything – from watermelon and eventually to arayos. Although Klal Yisroel are still moving towards Eretz Yisroel, it won't take three days anymore. It won't be completely above nature like it was before. When they were living with Hashem in their midst with total discipline, Hashem responded by dealing with them completely above derech hatevah. Once they start to struggle with hefkeirus, they are working within tevah. So Klal Yisroel starts to think in natural terms only. Now they are going to need meraglim. It is total derech hatevah. We can't just march into Eretz Yisroel without some kind of battle plan and strategy.

But they made a mistake. They thought it is either/or. They thought it was either total tevah or total above tevah with nothing in-between. But the reality was that Hashem works in degrees. To the degree they are with Hashem and are in control of their taivos, Hashem is still with them and He was still going to fight their battles for them. But it will be on a different, lower level. They are struggling with drives for hefkeirus. It will be a different way of entering Eretz Yisroel.

Moshe picked meraglim and Hashem agreed to send them. These people who were sent were tzaddikim – fully capable of succeeding in their mission. But they made this mistake. They thought we now have to survive only through derech hatevah and they came back and said we can't conquer the Cana'anim. They are too powerful.

There was a double mistake – the meraglim spied out the land and saw all these funerals and all the things Hashem arranged behind the scenes for their benefit. But the meraglim couldn't see this level of Hashem's hashgocho – where He works within tevah to fight our battles. They thought once Hashem will not operate above tevah, Hashem will abandon them completely. They interpreted everything they saw in the worst light possible and that going to Eretz Yisroel will only lead to disaster. People are dying all over the place, and they are giants – we are puny and weak.

But they didn't pick up what Rochov Hazonah told the two spies sent by Yehoshua 38 years later. The population was trembling from hearing about kriyas yam suf! The meraglim and Klal Yisroel didn't have the self-confidence to accept that Hashem will still be with them even in their lower level. They will have to fight a war, but Hashem will help them. But the meraglim didn't think there was an in-between.

Yehoshua and Colev tried to explain this to them. "Hashem will still be with us, we have nothing to fear! Keep up your level and Hashem will fight our battles in a different way. It is a beautiful land. Hashem is giving us a wonderful gift. But we have to maintain our level." Hashem's hashgocho reflects our attitudes. But they responded that there is no use. They are not going to survive on their own. They aren't on the level of super-nissim anymore.

Yehoshua and Colev give strong mussar to Klal Yisroel. Don't give up and say we aren't on the level to have any hashgocho. If you feel this way, it is a rebellion against Hashem. He can operate in any way He wants! With tevah, without tevah, half in tevah, half above tevah. It doesn't matter. But Klal Yisroel are not willing to reason with logic.

They gave up hope and felt powerless against the Cana'anim.

There is a powerful principle that we learn from a posuk in Mishlei. If you feel that some other human being has independent power over you and Hashem cannot protect you, then Hashem responds and gives that person full power over you. But if you know that people are just puppets and Hashem is pulling all the strings, then He will protect you from people's free choice and their designs. You are in Hashem's hands.

Yehoshua and Colev are saying something very unpopular. On this current level you have to work to maintain Hashem's protection. You have to earn His special hashgocho for every battle. You can go up or down. It is not going to be automatic success all the way through like it was before we struggled with hefkeirus. The people didn't take this too well. They were about to pelt them with stones! People don't like listening to unpopular ideas. They will not respond with logic or reason – they will simply shut you down. This is what we see is happening with the intellectual leftists of our time. There is no discussion of ideas – only bully tactics and intimidation if you dare say something they disagree with. They will simply shut you up.

Hashem stops the stoning with a gilui Shechinoh. Klal Yisroel should have immediately given up and regretted what they were doing. But it is too hard to stop when you are caught up in the middle of a powerful emotion.

Hashem wants to wipe out all Klal Yisroel but Moshe Rabbeinu once again davens to spare them. Hashem responds that He won't kill them all at once, but none of them will live to go into Eretz Yisroel. If they didn't want this gift, they don't deserve to get it. Only Yehoshua and Colev survive the Wilderness to enter Eretz Yisroel. Only they realized that if we work to keep up our level, Hashem will fight the battles for us and we will win. Which is exactly what happened.

Then Klal Yisroel realize what they have lost and try to fight against it – they try to go up and take Eretz Yisroel by force. But Hashem is not with them and they are decimated in battle. There is no way they can win the war with only tevah – they were right on that account. It is no use to try to win without Hashem with them. Now they are stuck in the Wilderness for 38 years. Ruach Hakodesh is taken away from Moshe Rabbeinu.

So how will they be zoche to the special merits of living in Eretz Yisroel after they lost it? Hashem now gives them the halachos of mitzvos hateluyos bo'oretz. You can mentally immerse your mind in the Torah of Eretz Yisroel and live there on that level.

Korach cannot become a Kohen, but here too, one can learn the Torah of matnas kehunoh and mentally experience what it means to be a kohen. This is what follows the story of Korach. There are different ways of experiencing reality.

This is the challenge of the mitzvah of bitochon in Hashem. He is there for us, He is working behind the scenes and pulling the strings, but we don't see it. If you don't think He is there and you think that people have independent power over you, Hashem will respond and give people that power.

But Klal Yisroel at this point can't fathom this in-between situation where they are still Hashem's nation, but it is not as openly manifest with miracles and no effort. We need to live in the world of tevah and still understand that Hashem is with us fighting our battles.

Next week with Parshas Korach, we will explore in greater detail the taivoh of hefker and living without limitations. Two weeks ago, a black man was unjustly killed by a policeman. What was their reaction? No more police – we will do whatever we want. Autonomous zone – no laws, no government, no-one can tell us what to do.