

PARSHAS SHLACH

תשפ"ו

We described the situation of Klal Yisroel last week. The stories told in these parshiyos are teaching us vital lessons that we have to integrate into our lives.

Klal Yisroel are cruising on a high, elevated level. They were forgiven for the cheit ho'egel, they built a Mishkon and there is constant hashro'as haShechinoh. The pillar of cloud and fire are always guiding them through the desert to reach Eretz Yisroel with Moshe at the helm. But they took their situation for granted and things begin to unravel.

They want to send spies. These are great men. One of them was Yehoshua Bin Nun – Moshe Rabbeinu's right-hand man! Moshe gets a bad feeling about this mission and he is worried that Yehoshua will be pulled into their scheme. He adds a letter to Yehoshua's name to save him from the influence of the spies.

What was the mistake of the meraglim and how do we learn from it?

When the mon fell, Moshe instructed Aharon to take a flask and fill it with mon and put it in the Mishkon to preserve it. Why? It was to show Klal Yisroel for all future generations where their parnossoh really comes from. Bitachon is a very challenging mitzvah. It is an absolute mitzvah to keep at the forefront of your mind that Hashem is running this world and is making everything in the natural world work according to His will.

Hashem is the source of healing. So even though you are supposed to take the anti-biotic as proper hishtadlus, you need to have full kavonoh that Hashem is the only power that can make this drug work to heal my disease.

Hashem is the source of parnossoh. So when a business man gets an idea of how much to invest or where to invest, and his profits start zooming up, he needs to believe with total conviction that Hashem planted that idea in his head and made the value of his investment go up.

We daven to Hashem and constantly declare that He is guiding everything in our life. It is not so easy to live in a world of nature and still really give up your power over your life.

Klal Yisroel are living in an uninhabitable desert. They realize this is not a natural state of existence. They are getting food and water supernaturally on a daily basis. Hashem is trying to prepare them to enter Eretz Yisroel with the mindset that Hashem will still be in control of everything that happens. Don't think entering the natural world will change anything – Hashem is still exerting the same amount of total control, only that it is more hidden and less apparent to everyone.

The Ramban at the end of Parshas Bo says we have to have the same attitude to hidden miracles as we have to open miracles. There is no fundamental difference in how directly Hashem is guiding events.

But Klal Yisroel don't want to accept that message. They think they are entering natural life without Hashem's intense presence. So they start to get nervous about the great giants and powerful armies and fortified cities.

But they only have to fear their enemies when they think it is up to them and their own power. Their success or failure depends entirely on how aware they are of Hashem in their lives. Hashem has been trying to teach them this lesson throughout their travels. This is what happened when they encountered Amolek, as the mishna in Rosh Hashono describes.

The problem is that Hashem raised the level of Klal Yisroel very rapidly, and these lessons need time to really sink in. But Klal Yisroel weren't able to integrate it – they got nervous about entering a state of natural law and demanded from Moshe Rabbeinu to send spies first.

Moshe was perplexed – this is a very desirous land! As we say in birkas hamazon, Eretz Yisroel is an eretz chemdoh. So why do they need to check it out? What are they doubting?

Klal Yisroel realize they won't have open miracles doing the fighting for them. They need to fight for themselves – but with Hashem behind them. So they lose confidence.

The spies come back on Tisha B'Av – a year and a half after leaving Egypt.

On a superficial level, it seems that Klal Yisroel lacked bitachon, so they were punished for forty years – corresponding to the forty days they spent spying.

But Chazal see something deeper. There is a very key statement of the Mechilto which gives us a very deep insight into the human condition. It asks: why did Klal Yisroel spend 40 years in the desert? We see that these 40 years are not just a punishment. It was a way to prepare them for the next stage of living with Hashem in normal, everyday life.

Hashem sees from the cheit of the meraglim that in this state, Klal Yisroel are not ready for bringing Hashem into their natural lives. They are going to go to their orchard and their vineyard, to their businesses, and they will forget all about Hashem. The Torah will be neglected immediately. So Hashem has to deal with this problem that the generation which left Egypt is simply not ready to settle Eretz Yisroel. They were lifted up too quickly and they can't hold on to their high madreigoh.

So instead, Hashem will keep them in the desert for another 37 years till a new generation emerges who was trained day and night to have Torah go into them – deep into their blood. And after this long-term training, they can go into a natural existence of Eretz Yisroel and stay with Torah.

This is what Klal Yisroel had to go through before becoming ready to settle Eretz Yisroel and live a life of teva. Seeing all the incredible miraculous things day in day out won't do it. Those things fade very quickly when faced with a nisayon. It is only consistent limud Torah for years and years until it seeps into their bones.

This is the lesson that every generation can learn from the cheit of the meraglim.

So Klal Yisroel came in to Eretz Yisroel, and it started strong, but then slowly but surely things begin to fall apart. Finally, there is churbon and golus, and after 70 years, they come back. But they aren't coming back to the same level. There is no nevuoh, no ruach hakodesh, and no Urim V'Tumim. So the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah are very nervous – what's going to prevent Klal Yisroel from falling apart again and bringing another churbon?

One strategy was to daven to Hashem to get rid of the yetzer for avodo zoro. Hashem answered their tefillos and today we have no clue what that yetzer was. We take it on faith.

But then they need something positive to hold on to. There is no nevuoh, no ruach hakodesh. How are the masses going to make a

deep connection with Hashem? So they asked for the secrets of Torah Shebaal Peh to be revealed and be made accessible to everyone. Hashem answered their request and that is why only with Bayis Sheni do we find this tremendous explosion of limud haTorah. It became a part of the general culture.

When the second Beis Hamikdash was about to be destroyed, Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai was asked what he wanted to save. He could have saved anything. But he said in order to preserve Klal Yisroel, you have to save Torah. He asked for Yavneh and its chachomim to be spared because that is what will preserve Klal Yisroel through everything.

This parsha is teaching all of us a vital lesson. People leave yeshiva and go on all kinds of paths in life. But there are two major groups. There are those who hold on to Torah and make serious limud haTorah a central part of their life, and they can confront all kinds of situations and remain anchored in Torah. And there are those who don't keep up a consistent seder limud, and slowly drift away from a life of a ben Torah.

It is vitally important during these formative years when you are young and are developing basic habits in your life, that they be imbued with Torah values and Torah ideals. Shabbos is one area that we need to work on, to ingrain the right habits of kedushoh with menuchoh with serious sedorim, week-in, week-out – and not seeing it as a day for eating and getting drunk. It doesn't matter what field you will be going

into. Those habits will stay with you for years to come and make you the type of person you are.

We live in a world with unbelievable nisyonos the minute you step outside the yeshiva.

I moved my family from Chicago to Los Angeles and we drove all the way across the Midwest – through the Mojave Desert. There was a sign at the entrance to the desert saying you have to fill up with gas here because there are no gas stations for hundreds of miles. And sure enough, as we drove through, we saw car after car which broke down on the road because they didn't fill up.

After you leave yeshiva, you are going to enter a big desert and you don't want to run out of gas halfway through. You have to take the opportunity you are given to fill up now during your years in yeshiva to put you on a path where it is natural to be learning and thinking about Torah through your life in whatever you do.

The tragedy of the dor hamidbor was that they couldn't integrate the idea that Hashem will be managing everything in their lives even through teva. They couldn't transition from one stage to another while keeping Hashem in the forefront and they needed to stay in the desert learning Torah until it was absorbed into their being.

This is the lesson we need to learn for ourselves as well.