

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שלח

אלה שמות האנשים אשר שלח משה לתור את הארץ ויקרא משה להושע בן נון
יהושע

“These are the names of the men whom Moshe sent to spy out the land. Moshe called Hoshea son of Nun Yehoshua” (13:16)

Why did Moshe daven specially for Yehoshua before the spies left? The Meshech Chochma explains that the Jewish people were more afraid of Amalek than anything else. Since one of the largest ethnic groups living in Eretz Yisrael was Amalek, Moshe was afraid that the spies would use their presence to scare the people. Later on, we find that the spies indeed did report that "Amalek lives in the southern lands" in order to frighten the people. Yehoshua had led the initial war against Amalek and had defeated them. If the people would see that Yehoshua, who had led the Jews in their victory over Amalek, was now afraid of them, they would sink into total despair. Knowing this, Moshe felt that, out of all the spies, it was most important that Yehoshua remain unafraid of Amalek and not bring back an evil report of the land.

ויהס כלב את העם אל משה ויאמר עלה נעלה וירשנו אתה כי יכול נוכל לה
“Calev silenced the people toward Moshe and said: We shall surely ascend and conquer it, for we can surely do it!” (13:30)

Rashi explains what Calev meant that they would ascend: "Even to heaven and even if he tells us to build ladders and go up there, we will succeed at whatever he says!" Why would one get ladders to reach the heavens? They will not help accomplish this impossible task?! R' Moshe Feinstein answers that when a person wants to grow and become closer to Hashem, he just has to try and do whatever he can do. When one shows Hashem that he has a strong desire to grow, Hashem will assist him so that he becomes successful. This is the idea of the ladders. It is not that we expect Hashem to perform a miracle for us. We must show Hashem how much we really want to listen to his commands. We can grow and succeed, but we must first do our part in order to earn Hashem's assistance. Whether the goal is a mitzvah, a communal endeavor or Torah study, we have to try our best. Even if learning Torah sometimes seems difficult, we must keep on trying. If one puts in the effort, he will eventually reap the benefits of his hard work. As Chazal tell us, "If one says, 'I toiled and did not succeed,' do not believe him." But without the preliminary efforts, he will never attain his goals. This is what Chazal mean when they teach, "If one says, 'I did not toil and succeeded,' do not believe him." (Megilah 6b)

R' Meir Yechiel of Ostrov has a different interpretation of the ladders. He writes that the main concern of the spies was that the people were not ready to maintain the high standard of holiness that is required to live in Eretz Yisrael. It is a land that does not tolerate impurity and expels inhabitants who cannot live in sanctity. However, Calev dissented and said that they did not have to be on the highest level upon entering the land.

They could start on the bottom of the ladder and work their way up slowly as they grew spiritually until they reached the level needed to reside in Eretz Yisrael. Calev stressed that spiritual growth requires small steps. When a person climbs a ladder, he must step up one rung at a time. If he goes too fast and tries to skip rungs along the way, he will tumble down. This is why he used the symbolism of the ladder to portray how the people would enter Eretz Yisrael. He wanted to reassure them that there was no need to be concerned because of their spiritual level. The level of living in Eretz Yisrael was within reach and with steady progress, they could attain that level in due time. This is an important lesson for us. A person should never feel that any goal is impossible, but at the same time, he must take a slow and measured approach to accomplishing that goal. When a person tries to go too fast, he can stumble and undo all the good things that he has already achieved. One should not take on too many new things at once. Slowly but surely, he will accomplish his goal if he advances a little bit at a time.

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Why did only Calev speak up against the malevolent spies and not Yehoshua? The Meshech Chochma answers that the spies were concerned because of the prophesy of Eldad and Meidad from last week's parsha. These two elders had foretold that Moshe would die in the wilderness and that Yehoshua would lead the people into Eretz Yisrael. If, as they had seen, the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael were so strong, how would they be able to vanquish them without Moshe? However, Calev tried to show them that the strength of a leader comes from the people that he represents. This is why Calev silenced the people "toward Moshe." He said that they were mistaken and that Moshe's success as a leader had nothing to do with him personally. Whoever led the nation would only succeed if the people were worthy. Calev went on to say that "we shall surely ascend," even without Moshe, we ourselves can inherit. Since this was the subject of the debate, only Calev could speak up against his counterparts. Yehoshua could not comment on his own future leadership.

ויהיו בני ישראל במדבר וימצאו איש מקשש עצים ביום השבת
“The Children of Israel were in the Wilderness and they found a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day” (15:32)

Mayana Shel Torah notes that the posuk says that "they found" the man who was gathering wood, rather than saying that "he was found." This would seem to indicate that they were actively looking for someone who was desecrating the Shabbos and that they did not merely happen to find him. Based on this, he suggests that Moshe had a group of people whose job it was to be on the watch for and prevent desecration of Shabbos. They would actively encourage people to keep Shabbos even though it was difficult to refrain from work. This teaches us the extent of our responsibility for our fellow Jews. We cannot have an indifferent attitude about the transgressions of others. We should

encourage them in a pleasant way and try to spread the beauty of Torah and mitzvos to all Jews. It is most certainly our responsibility to try and ensure that everyone observes the mitzvos properly, just as Moshe Rabbeinu tried to do in the wilderness.

אני ה' אלקיכם אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים להיות לכם לאלקים אני ה' אלקיכם

“I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has removed you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; I am Hashem, your G-d” (15:41)

Why is the statement "I am Hashem" repeated at the end of the posuk? Rashi explains: "So that the Jews should not say: 'Why did Hashem command? Was it not so that we should perform the mitzvos and be rewarded? Let us not perform and not be rewarded!' Even against your will, I am your King." Regardless of whether one wants the promised reward for mitzvos or not, one is bound to follow the directives of the Torah because Hashem is our Master. The reward is not necessarily an incentive to persuade us to choose to do mitzvos. We effectively do not have a choice whether to follow Hashem's command because he is our King. However, there is a reward granted to one who is faithful to the Torah.

R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why would a person think that he opt not do mitzvos if he does not want a reward? Even if there is no reward, there is still a punishment given to those who do not fulfill mitzvos. Such logic makes no sense! R' Feinstein provides a different way to understand Rashi. We are all bound to keep the mitzvos because our forefathers accepted the Torah at Har Sinai. Even if one were to say that he does not wish to have the Torah and wants to dispense the responsibility of mitzvos, thereby forfeiting the reward and punishment that come along with it, he could not do so. He is bound to keep the Torah against his will because of the commitment that his ancestors made for all future generations. At the end of the day, we must all keep the Torah. But we can do it of our own volition or in a forced manner.

Every person can renew his commitment to mitzvos by personally accepting the Torah and reinforcing the bond between himself and the Torah which was initially made at Har Sinai. This is, in effect, the purpose of the Yom Tov of Shavuot. We commemorate the day when Hashem gave us the Torah and reaffirm our commitment to it. When one's connection to Torah takes on a personal dimension, he serves Hashem on a much higher level. If a person develops his own personal thoughts in his learning, his Torah study rises to a new level. When Jews are asked why they are Jewish, the most common answer is that their parents are Jewish and they were born into their religion. This is an incorrect answer because it implies that he is forced into following Torah and mitzvos and would not do so if given the choice. The correct answer would be that we are Jews because we know that Hashem exists and He gave us the Torah which teaches us the best possible way to live our lives. Hashem wants us to willingly follow his Torah and not merely be resigned to our Jewishness. When a person does mitzvos because he truly wants to, not only does he gain a lot more from his mitzvah observance, he also serves Hashem on a higher level.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann
parshashiur.googlepages.com