

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שלח

שלח לך אנשים ויתרו את ארץ כנען אשר אני נתן לבני ישראל איש אחד איש אחד
למטה אבתיו תשלחו כל נשיא בהם

“Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the Land of Caanan that I give to the Children of Israel; one man each from his father’s tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them” (13:2)

What is the connection between the story of Miriam's loshon hara at the end of Parshas Beha'alosecha and the episode of the spies at the beginning of Parshas Shelach? Rashi says that Miriam was punished because she spoke negatively about Moshe and the spies did not learn a lesson from what happened to her. Instead, they themselves spoke negatively about Eretz Yisrael.

The Midrash gives a similar explanation. Hashem foresaw that the spies would speak loshon hara. However, He did not want them to have an excuse and say that they did not know the punishment for loshon hara. Therefore, the story of Miriam preceded the story of the meraglim so that there was full disclosure. When the spies sinned, they knew exactly what they were doing wrong and what a terrible sin it was.

Hashem sent a message to them about something that would affect them in the future and they did not take the message. This is not something that Hashem only did in those days. He does this for us in our lives too. Hashem shows people things to prepare them and help them for future situations. A person often receives messages and opportunities from above. Certain things are brought to one's attention in life for a reason. A person has to ask himself why he is receiving a message or an opportunity and what he can do about it.

ועבדי כלב עקב היתה רוח אחרת עמו וימלא אחרי והביאתיו אל הארץ אשר בא שמה
וזרעו יורשנה

“But My servant, Calev, because a different spirit was with him and he followed Me wholeheartedly, I shall bring him to the land to which he came and his offspring shall possess it” (14:24)

What does it mean that Calev had "a different spirit"? Rashi says that even though he told his fellow spies that he would follow their evil plan, in his mind he knew that he would not go along with them. His inner spirit always remained true to Hashem and he never was guilty of any wrongdoing in this affair.

The Vilna Gaon answers that doing a mitzvah creates a certain drive to do good deeds within a person. It creates a spirit of good and a magnetism that draws opportunities for other mitzvos to him and the desire to perform them. This explains the concept of "mitzvah goreres mitzvah," that one mitzvah leads to another. Throughout his life, Calev had created such a ruach, a drive to do the right thing. Because of this, he was able to resist the scheme of the spies and remain loyal to Hashem. We should recognize that the best way to get ourselves on the right path is to do mitzvos. This will create a magnetism that will pull us toward other mitzvos.

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אלהם ועשו להם ציצת על כנפי בגדיהם לדרתם ונתנו על
ציצת הכנף פתיל תכלת

“Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them that they shall make themselves tzitzis on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations, and they shall place upon the

tzitzis of each corner a thread of turquoise wool” (15:38)

Most opinions hold that we do not put techeles, a blue string, on our tzitzis today. Although part of the mitzvah is to have the blue string among the white strings, techeles fell out of use around the turn of the last millenium. One reason is because we do not know how to make the blue dye properly. However, the gemara says that one still fulfills the mitzvah without the blue string. The Vilna Gaon says that the posuk itself hints to the fact that there will be a time when the mitzvah will not be fulfilled. The posuk inserts the phrase "throughout their generations" after the commandment to place tzitzis on the corners of garments but before the commandment to include a blue string among them. Thus, this clause only refers to the tzitzis itself but not to the techeles, hinting that the techeles will not necessarily be present in all generations. The Aruch Hashulchan writes that, in his time, someone claimed to have found the correct fish to use for techeles but many of the rabbis did not accept his opinion. Unfortunately, we are still unable to fulfill this mitzvah and it has not performed for many years. We hope to merit to fulfill this mitzvah with certainty with the arrival of Moshiach very soon.

Techeles is a color of royalty and was an expensive dye because, as the Rambam writes, it was a strong color that never faded. Every Jew has to recognize that he is royalty and he is unique and special. The blue string is a mark of distinction that helps people recognize who they are. Today we do not have this reminder. Nevertheless, we should retain this message that we are a special nation and each one of us has special talents and abilities that we can use to serve Hashem.

והיה לכם לציצת וראיתם אתו וזכרתם את כל מצות ה' ועשיתם אתם ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זנים אחריהם

“It shall constitute tzitzis for you and you shall see it and you shall remember all of the commandments of Hashem and you shall perform them; and you shall not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray” (15:39)

When the posuk says that "you shall see it," what is it referring to? There are two answers to this question. Rashi writes that it refers to the tzitzis as a whole. The tzitzis remind one of the mitzvos because the numerical value of the word tzitzis is 600 and there are 8 strings and 5 knots, adding up to a total of 613. When one sees the tzitzis, he is reminded of his obligation to do all the mitzvos. This serves as an important protection during a person's daily life. It constantly reminds him of how he is supposed to be acting.

Ramban questions that explanation. He writes that in order to obtain a numerical value of 600, tzitzis has to be spelled with two "yuds" and in reality it only has one. Rather, he says, seeing it refers to the techeles, the blue-dyed string on the tzitzis, which not everyone has today because the identity of the dye is debated. How does the blue string remind us of the mitzvos? The gemara in Chullin 89 writes that the blue is reminiscent of the seas, the seas look like the heavens and looking at the heavens reminds us of the kisei hakavod, Hashem's Throne of Glory in the heavens. In this manner, looking at the blue string of tzitzis reminds one of Hashem's presence and the obligation to fulfill His commandments.

R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why does the gemara include so many steps? Why not just say that the blue reminds us of the heavens? The answer is that Judaism works by steps. One cannot leap many levels in a single bound or it will not last. One should grow gradually and then he will retain those levels as he continues to climb the ladder of Torah and mitzvos.

Eyes come before heart, why heart first? R' Berel Feinstein says that often a person sees what is on his mind. If a person has the right mindset, then he will not notice anything around

him. However, if his heart is in the right place, then his eyes will take note of everything around him and the inappropriate things will make an impression on him. If we strengthen our hearts and our fear of heaven, it will protect us so that we will not notice anything and we will not be drawn to them.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann