



PARSHAS SHELACH & THE SUMMER MONTHS

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The Connection Between the Meraglim of Yosef, Moshe and Yehoshua

Our Mission During the Summer Months

The Power of the Dispatcher is Vested in the Messenger

The first verse in this week's parsha tells of Hashem commanding Moshe Rabbeinu to send meraglim (spies) to explore Eretz Yisrael in advance of the Jewish people's entry into the land.

This is in contradiction to what Moshe relates in Sefer Devarim when he recounts the errors the Jewish people committed during their stay in the wilderness. There he accuses them of thronging to him as an unruly mob and demanding that meraglim be sent ahead of them to inspect the land¹.

The Sfas Emes resolves this contradiction and explains that, originally, the lowest element of the Jewish people - the 'Erev Rav,' which consisted of Egyptian converts - wanted to send meraglim to Eretz Yisrael with corrupt intentions. Therefore, Hashem commanded Moshe to send meraglim to investigate Eretz Yisrael.

Hashem did this because the energy and intentions of the dispatcher become vested within the messenger. As messengers of the lowest element of the Jewish people, the meraglim did not stand a chance against the difficulties they would face on their mission.

However, the power of Hashem could have saved the meraglim from the pitfalls of their journey had they viewed themselves as His emissaries. The failure of the meraglim was a result of their considering themselves representatives of the cause of the lowliest element of the Jewish people.

The Sfas Emes derives a crucial lesson from this episode. Each of us is an emissary of Hashem on a mission in this world. Our souls originate from the loftiest realms and were sent down to this lowly world in order to fulfill a critical mission: to create a dwelling place for G-dliness on earth.

Our success in this crucial assignment is conditioned on us remaining cognizant of our status as agents of Hashem. One who perceives himself as an agent of self-fulfillment is in danger of failing his mission on earth.

Yosef's Accused his Brothers: "You Are Meraglim!"

When Yosef met his brothers in Egypt, he accused them, "You are meraglim!" The Ari HaKadosh explains that Yosef was referring to a future role of theirs.

In this week's parsha, when the meraglim embarked on their journeys, the souls of the holy tribes attached themselves to them in order to assist them in their task of exploring Eretz Yisrael. When it became clear that the meraglim would rebel against their holy mission, the souls of the tribes left them. With the phrase, "You are meraglim!" Yosef informed them that in the future their task would be to assist the meraglim in their historic mission.

Each of the meraglim is introduced by his tribe - for the tribe of Reuven, for the tribe of Shimon etc. By the tribe of Menashe, the verse states - for the tribe of Yosef, for the tribe of Menashe. However, in introducing the tribe of Ephraim, the verse only informs us - for the tribe of Ephraim; without first saying, "for the tribe of Yosef."

This is because the soul of Yosef entered into the meragel from the tribe of Menashe only. The soul of Yosef did not attach itself to Yehoshua, the emissary of Ephraim. Instead, the soul of Levi did, and it helped Yehoshua withstand his terribly difficult ordeal.

Egypt is the Headquarters of Immorality

There exists an axiom in creation: Corresponding to every entity in holiness, exists an opposing entity in evil of equal power.

The Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme Court) consisted of seventy-one sages who ruled according to the merciful laws of the Torah. Opposing them is a ruthless heavenly court consisting of the angels which represent the seventy-one nations. However, we know that there are only seventy nations²; who is the seventy-first?

R' Shamshon of Ostropolle - a great mystic who was killed during the Chmielnitzki massacres - explains that there really *are* seventy-one nations. However, there are only seventy angels representing them. This is because at the splitting of the sea, the Egyptian angel was killed³.

However, the land of Egypt was not destroyed, and a nation lives there today. Who represents them in heaven? The angel of Yishmael does. This is why Egypt is a Muslim country today.

The angel of Yishmael is particularly suited to Egypt. Every nation has one area in which it is particularly corrupt. Yishmael was the son of Avraham, who was the epitome of the attribute of chesed, loving-kindness. Yishmael corrupted the chesed he inherited from his father Avraham.

Chesed is an attribute that, when used properly, is directed outward to bestow goodness onto others. However, corrupted chesed is inverted and is transformed into unbridled lust. Therefore, Yishmael is the least moral of all the nations.

(On the opposite side of the spectrum stands Eisav, son of Yitzchak - the paradigm of Gevurah, strength. Gevurah is an attribute that needs to be directed inward [for the most part] in exercising self-control. Eisav corrupts Gevurah and terrorizes others through the might of his sword.)

Each country corresponds to a different organ of the human body. Yerushalayim is the heart of the world, "דברו על לב ירושלים"⁴, 'Speak to the heart, Yerushalayim.' In scripture, we also find countries referred to as 'arms' of the earth, 'feet' of the earth etc.

Egypt is referred to as the nakedness of the land. Egypt is a country that promotes base immorality. The angel of Yishmael is a good match for Egypt – they are both corrupted in the same area. Therefore, Hagar found a wife for her son Yishmael from the *land* of Egypt. As the geographical source of immorality for the world, Egypt would indeed harbor the partner of Yishmael.

The atmosphere of Egypt is very conducive for depravity. Visitors to the country would have challenges maintaining their purity, more so than in any other land.

The Atmosphere of Egypt Affected Avraham

As Avraham entered Egypt he told his wife, "Behold, I now realize that you are a beautiful woman." The question is obvious; didn't Avraham know this until now? "No," Rashi answers, quoting the Midrash. Avraham and Sarah were such spiritual giants, that there was no physical element in their relationship. Avraham genuinely did not know what Sarah's physical features were. Only as they entered the territorial waters of Egypt, did Avraham inadvertently see her reflection in the water.

However, Rashi continues, we can understand the verse simply. What Avraham meant to say was, "Now is the time to be concerned about your beauty, because we are entering the territory of a depraved people."

Hashem assists a tzaddik who chooses to excel in a particular area of piety. Heretofore, Avraham had succeeded in maintaining an extremely lofty level of marital holiness; his relationship with Sarah was completely spiritual. Why was he not assisted in maintaining his supreme holiness, and had to be made aware of the physical beauty of Sarah?

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that whenever Rashi quotes a Midrash in addition to the simple explanation of the verse, the two are intimately connected. The simple explanation of the verse sheds light on the explanation of the Midrash.

As Avraham entered the territorial waters of Egypt, the overwhelming forces of wickedness touched even the holy Avraham Avinu and he fell a notch from his supreme greatness.

Until now, Avraham Avinu had taken measures to avoid even an inadvertent glance at Sarah. However, as he entered the axis of depravity, an extra measure of energy was required to maintain this

lofty level. Realizing that he had stumbled a bit from his pristine condition due to the nature of the environment he was entering, Avraham understood that he had to worry about the physical beauty of Sarah.

Yosef's Ordeal in Egypt

Yosef is the persona of pristine moral purity. In order to achieve his potential, he had to be submerged in a polluted atmosphere and emerge in his original spotless condition. By remaining pure, even in the most trying circumstances, he achieved perfection in his area of strength.

It is impossible for us to comprehend how a seventeen-year-old boy - who was brutally separated from his family with no hope of returning, and was all alone in a country which was the lion's den of promiscuity – survived his inhumane ordeal.

Daily, his mistress harassed, enticed and seduced him; yet he remained strong and refused to budge from the high standards of moral purity he had learned from his father, Yaakov. She put a sharp piece of iron beneath his chin to prevent him from gazing at the floor and to force him to look at her, yet he did not look. She threatened to confiscate all his possessions if he would not yield, yet he responded, "Hashem will attain justice for those who were robbed." She threatened, "I will make you go hungry!" Yosef responded, "Hashem provides bread for the hungry."

"I will tie you up!"

"Hashem unties those that are bound."

"I will bend your back."

"Hashem straightens the bent."

"I will blind your eyes."

"Hashem makes the blind see."

And so she continued her efforts every single day for a complete year⁵!

A person has limits, and the great holy Yosef had reached his. When a person genuinely tries to overcome the difficulties he faces but has reached the limit of his strength, he is assisted from Heaven.

Hashem - "מציץ מן החרכים"⁶ - 'peeks through the cracks.' Man does not see Hashem; He hides Himself behind the curtains of the world-stage. But the focus of Hashem and all the heavenly angels is directed toward puny man who garners all his strength against the mighty, fiery angel - the Satan - who attempts to seduce him to sin. The heavenly hosts marvel at the courage of the human being who overcomes his evil inclination.

When Hashem sees that a person has reached his limits, He reaches out to him and infuses him with strength in order that he achieve victory over evil. When Yosef reached the point where his own strength was depleted and he was compelled to give in, Hashem showed him the countenance of his holy father Yaakov Avinu, whose visage is engraved on the heavenly throne of G-d.

This infused him with a surge of spiritual fortitude and he was able to execute his supernatural act of courage and escape his mistress's clutches, despite the shame and trouble this would ultimately cause him.

Hashem carefully monitors each difficulty we are destined to endure to ensure that it is within our ability to withstand it. When He sees that the challenge is greater than we can bear, He gives us the strength to endure. However, we must turn to Him in prayer and beg Him to help us overcome our challenges.

The Task of Yosef and the Tribes in Egypt

Egypt was to be the home of the Jewish people for the duration of their two-hundred-ten-year exile. The atmosphere of Egypt was polluted with depravity. Along with oxygen, a man breathed promiscuity into his system. Being the land which corresponds to the organ of nakedness, it was a place

where people were encouraged to gratify their lowliest lusts. How were the Jewish people to maintain their high standards of purity? From where did they derive the fortitude to do so?

This was the accomplishment of Yosef in Egypt. When he withstood his terrible test, the immoral air of Egypt was infused with a scent of the purity of Yosef.

However, the task of purifying the atmosphere of Egypt was only partially accomplished by Yosef. It was to be completed by the holy presence of all of the sons of Yaakov. In unison, they would be able to purify Egypt sufficiently as a preparation for the exile.

Merely upon entry into Egyptian territory, they would be barraged with impure thoughts. By replacing these with holy thoughts, their progeny would be empowered to do so as well. The thick shell of impurity that permeated Egypt was thinned and cracked by the tribes.

This explains why Yosef insisted that Binyamin be brought down to Egypt, too. The combined holiness of all of the tribes of G-d was required to accomplish the purification of the atmosphere of Egypt.

The tribes, accused by Yosef to be meraglim intent on uncovering the weak points of Egypt, were indeed focused on destroying the evil forces which permeated the atmosphere.

The Power of an Environment

Being in a pure environment and near good people has an extremely powerful effect on a person. The Chasam Sofer advises that one should stand near a pious person when praying in order to be able to pray better.

The trusted wagon driver of the Ba'al Shem Tov once turned to his eminent passenger and announced, "Give me your money and then I will kill you." The Ba'al Shem Tov responded, "Sure, but please ride a bit further and then we'll see."

When they rode further, the wagon driver apologized profusely saying, "I don't know what got into me!"

The Baal Shem Tov later explained to his students that in that particular place, a gentile had once committed homicide. The place then became saturated with the urge to murder. Therefore, when they rode past it, the impulse to kill left the wagon driver.

In a place where people engage in sin, it requires extra energy to maintain one's standards of holiness because one will naturally be drawn down.

The True Task of the Meraglim

When the Torah wishes to admonish us not to engage in immoral behavior, the Torah commands, "Do not do as [the inhabitants of] Egypt and Canaan did⁷." The Canaanite people were the most debased of the nations in the legacy of their ancestors Cham and Canaan.

Eretz Yisrael is a very powerful country. Those who strive to be elevated benefit greatly from the atmosphere in Eretz Yisrael. Those who seek lives of physical gratification fall very deep there. The Canaanites had fallen deep into the pit of evil.

The children of Canaan had inhabited Eretz Yisrael for many centuries. Their sins had covered the land with a thick shell of impurity. Just as the shell of the nut has to be cracked in order to be able to enjoy the fruit, so too, the thick shell of evil covering Eretz Yisrael had to be thinned and cracked by a group of holy Jews who would overcome the spiritual challenges presented there.

"והתחזקתם!"

Before they embarked on their journey, Moshe told them, "והתחזקתם!", 'Strengthen yourselves!' Great fortitude would be required in order to overcome the formidable challenge of cracking the coating of contamination that covered the land where Hashem's blessing is vested.

When they returned, the spies reported that 'Nefilim', fallen ones, lived in the land. During the era of the generation of the deluge, there were angels who told Hashem, "Why did you create man? He sins!" Hashem responded by casting them down to the earth. These angelic beings sinned more grievously than all the other people of the time and ultimately were the cause of the deluge.

These beings had survived the deluge and had lived in Eretz Yisrael all along. Their sinfulness had also cloaked Eretz Yisrael with mighty barriers of impurity. The meraglim complained, 'We saw the Nefilim! Their power of impurity is too difficult for us to break!'

They had not sufficiently strengthened themselves for the ordeal facing them.

Seeking Spiritual Fortifications

Moshe commanded the meraglim to take from the fruit of the land. There are contradicting views in the Midrash. One states that Kalev forced his colleagues to take from the fruits of the land. The other view is that Kalev and Yehoshua refrained from taking fruit because the other meraglim took the fruit for slanderous purposes.

This contradiction can be resolved as follows. Moshe commanded them to *eat* from the fruits of Eretz Yisrael - because the fruit of the holy land is holy and can be of spiritual assistance. However, he did not command them to bring it back. The other meraglim did not wish to eat the fruit – they did not seek outside spiritual fortifications - and Kalev had to force them to. However, Kalev and Yehoshua did not join them in bringing back the fruit, because that was done with ill intention.

Extra measures of spiritual reinforcement were necessary in order to overcome the awesome opposition the meraglim would face on their mission. Yehoshua was reinforced through the blessing of Moshe. But Kalev knew that he would need to import outside assistance himself, so he went to pray at the gravesite of Avraham.

Kalev was a reincarnation of the soul of Eliezer the servant of Avraham. He begged his master of his previous incarnation - "Moshe fortified *his* servant, Yehoshua, to withstand the awesome tests we are facing. You infuse me, *your* former servant, with the strength required to overcome the difficulty I am facing."⁸

Tactics were necessary in order to break the awesome shell that covered the land of Eretz Yisrael.

Digging Beneath the Surface

The Jewish people requested meraglim in order that they should - "ויחפרו לנו את הארץ"⁹, 'Dig the land up for us.' The Midrash explains that the Canaanites, upon hearing of the Jewish people's imminent conquest, buried their valuables, so that the Jewish people should be unable to find them. The task of the meraglim was to dig up these treasures. Would the Canaanites sit by the side and allow the meraglim to dig up the treasures they had hidden from them?!

The meaning of digging up the land is as follows. The Canaanites had buried the great treasure of the holiness of Eretz Yisrael under mounds of impurity generated by their sins. The task of the meraglim was to uncover the holiness of Eretz Yisrael by diffusing the impurity through strenuous efforts in serving Hashem.

Upon ascending to Eretz Yisrael, the Bas Ayin closeted himself for three months in intense spiritual efforts. Afterwards he exited his quarters and made a feast. He explained the reason for his self-confinement.

“Before ascending to Eretz Yisrael, I had been told by residents of Yerushalayim that Eretz Yisrael is covered in diamonds. When I arrived I saw only ordinary dust and stones.

Only after three months of intense spiritual efforts did I merit seeing that Eretz Yisrael is indeed coated with diamonds, and that is why I’m making a feast to celebrate.”

The task of the meraglim was to dig underneath the stones and dust and reveal that Eretz Yisrael is covered with diamonds.

The thickness and size of the shell is in proportion to the size of the nut. In a place of tremendous spiritual greatness there will be bigger forces of impurity operating that will need to be destroyed. The great holy land of Eretz Yisrael had a thick shell obscuring it.

The Meraglim of the Haftarah

In the Haftarah we read of a third group of meraglim. These were Kalev and Pinchos whom Yehoshua sent to scout the land forty years later before the entrance of the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael. Yehoshua chose people who were experienced in overcoming challenges in morality.

Kalev had successfully overcome the challenges he had faced forty years earlier, during the original mission of the meraglim. Pinchos had shown his zeal for the moral purity of the Jewish people when he risked his life to slay Zimri for sullyng the holiness of the nation.

These two holy sages had to endure the most depraved moral challenges in the center of harlotry of Canaan. This time the meraglim were successful; they had cracked the shell upon Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish people were able to enter the land.

A Mission in Time

The days that the meraglim embarked on their fateful journey were, "ימי בכורי ענבים"¹⁰, ‘the days when the grapes begin to become ripe.’ This alludes to the spiritual nature of the time. בכורי can mean before. בכורי ענבים can be understood to mean, before the letters of the word ענבם. Before the ע comes ו; before the ו comes מ; before the ב and מ come א and ל. These four letters spell the name of the Satan. The task of the meraglim was terribly difficult and it had to be executed in a time when the Satan was very strong.

Just as there are places of extremely strong forces of immorality, so are there times in the year where tests to maintain holiness are very strong. These are the two months of Tamuz and Av. Because of sins of immorality the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed. Those that remain pure during these months rebuild it.

The Bais HaMikdash was the light, i.e. the eyes, of the world. As a reward for refraining from looking at the immodest sights so prevalent in these months, the eyes of the world will be restored.

Appropriately, the meraglim who succeeded in their mission were the progenitors of the two Mashiachs the Jewish people have; the Mashiach of Yehuda descends from Kalev and the Mashiach of Yosef descends from Yehoshua.

Our generation at the end of time corresponds to Tamuz and Av, which are at the end of the Jewish year. We are forced to live in an era in which promiscuity is protected and encouraged by law and yet maintain the pure morality demanded of us by Hashem.

The Key to Success

The meraglim traversed Eretz Yisrael throughout the entire month of Tamuz and the first few days of Av. Therefore, the Shabbos in which we bless the upcoming month of Tamuz is the one in which

we read Parshas Shelach. As a preparation for the challenges we face in our mission during the summer months, we read of two sets of meraglim; unsuccessful ones in the parsha and successful ones in the haftorah.

The key to succeeding at maintaining holiness lies in the conclusion of the parsha, the commandment of wearing tzitzis. The essence of the mitzvah of tzitzis is to maintain the holiness of the eyes. Each person has two meraglim who explore the world for him: his eyes. If the eyes look at holy things and avoid forbidden sights, the person will succeed on the mission his soul was sent to earth for - maintaining purity in a contaminated world.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai states that the one who is careful with the mitzvah of tzitzis will merit seeing the Divine Presence. The tzitzis will aid him in maintaining holy eyes and they will therefore be worthy of gazing at the Divine Presence.

Gazing at the tzitzis are an aid to achieving purity of thought.

Souls on a Mission

Living in a society that is so corrupt in areas of morality persuades many to lower their standards of modesty and separation of genders below the requirements of halacha (Torah law). Many rationalize that what is in essence strictly forbidden, is permitted, and that those that do keep these halachos are being stringent.

Some homiletically interpret a verse in Tehillim to express frustration with this type of thinking. "11 וְרִיבָה לִי מִגּוֹי לֹא חֲסִיד", 'Fight my battles from a gentile that is not a chassid.' These are people who act like non-Jews - in complete defiance of halacha - but when confronted say, "Well what do you want? I'm not a chassid! I'm not obligated to be overly stringent!"

Today there are sources in English where one can familiarize oneself with these halachos as relevant to common modern-day situations. There is no excuse for claiming ignorance.

In a society whose standards get shockingly lower by the day, we have to exercise extra strength to maintain the standards demanded of us by Hashem, so that when we return, after our mission on earth is finalized, we will be able to greet our Dispatcher with the phrase – "Mission Accomplished."

¹ דברים א:כב רש"י שם

² רש"י פ' האזינו

³ רש"י פ' בשלח

⁴ ישע"י מ:ב

⁵ מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה פז סימן י

⁶ שה"ש ב:ט

⁷ ויקרא יח:ג

⁸ ארי הק'

⁹ דברים א:כב

¹⁰ במדבר יג:כ

¹¹ מג:א