

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)

The Targum Yonasan writes that Moshe saw the humility of Hoshea and he therefore called him Yehoshua, adding the "yud" from Hashem's name to Hoshea. Because he was a humble man, he needed to be blessed with extra strength from Hashem in order to be able to withstand the evil scheme of the other spies.

By doing so, Moshe explained to Yehoshua that humility is usually good, but it would not be helpful in the situation that he was about to face. A humble person usually agrees with others because he feels that he is not as knowledgeable as the others and they must be right. Now, however, Yehoshua could not allow his humility to let him to feel that the other spies were right. He had to be able to stand tall and hold his ground. He could not give in to the wrongdoers.

Humility is a wonderful character trait. Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest man who ever lived, was singled out at the end of last week's parsha for that trait. We see that Moshe's student, Yehoshua, learned that trait from him. This teaches us the importance of having a teacher and becoming close to him. When one becomes attached to Torah scholars, he picks up good character traits from them, in addition to the Torah and mitzvos that he learns from them. A rebbi can be a living sefer Torah, a living example of how to live the Torah way of life. Yehoshua attached himself to Moshe and never left his side, constantly absorbing his teachings and the way that he acted. This is how humility became Yehoshua's special character trait.

R' Moshe Sternbach of Johannesburg asks in his sefer Taam Vadaas: What were the spies thinking? They were righteous men who feared Hashem. They knew that Hashem had been repeatedly promising their forefathers that they would inherit Eretz Yisrael. They saw the miracles in Egypt. Why did they decide to scare the people about Eretz Yisrael? Why did they feel the need to bring about such an outcry?

R' Sternbach writes that it was clear to them that when fighting giants, one cannot be victorious under normal circumstances. They understood that Eretz Yisrael could only be conquered if Hashem was with them and aided them with miracles. They felt that they did not have the merit to deserve these miracles. After all the complaining that they had done and all the problems that they had caused in their two years in the wilderness, they felt that there was no way that Hashem would bring about a miraculous salvation on their behalf. They thought that the Jews were not ready to enter Eretz Yisrael and they made up their story in order to delay their entrance into the land until another, more propitious time.

What they failed to realize was that Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish people do not

operate under natural circumstances. They are always above nature. If nature governed the Jewish people, we would have ceased to exist ages ago. Even if they were not deserving of it, miracles would occur and the Jews would survive and flourish. This was the flaw in the logic of the spies.

This idea explains a puzzling midrash. The Yalkut Shimoni asks why the posuk said that they explored the Land of Canaan, rather than calling the land Eretz Yisrael. The Yalkut says that Hashem knew that the Jews had no merit but he remembered Yitzchak. Avraham and Sarah were 100 and 90 years old respectively at the time of Yitzchak's birth. The numerical value of the word Canaan is 190. Thus, the use of the word Canaan is a hint that the Jews conquered the land in the merit of Yitzchak. What does this mean? Why was it only in the merit of Yitzchak and nobody else? R' Sternbach answers that Yitzchak represents the Jews' ability to supersede nature. The name Yitzchak means to laugh. Yitzchak's birth to such old parents was so out of the ordinary and so obviously miraculous that it caused people to laugh when they heard about it. R' Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that this meaning of Yitzchak's name is true of the entire history of the Jewish people. The Jewish people cause one to laugh because their existence is literally unbelievable. The merit to conquer Canaan was because of Yitzchak, it was unnatural and miraculous. That is indeed the nature of the Jewish people and Eretz Yisrael.

Yehoshua was a very humble person but a humble person will tend to say that he deserves nothing. He feels unfit to have Hashem intervene on his behalf. Moshe added the "yud" from Hashem's name to symbolize that Hashem would save him, whether deserved or not. He should not think that miracles cannot happen. Similarly, we should never despair of Hashem's help in our own lives, mistakenly thinking that we have not proven ourselves worthy of Hashem's help. Hashem is always there for us whether we have warranted it or not and no situation is ever beyond hope.

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.

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 techeiles, 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.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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