

In this week's *Parashah*, we read of the Spies' failure to appreciate the goodness and beauty of *Eretz Yisrael*. R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1810) relates that when he visited the Holy Land -- millennia later, of course -- some of the greatest people he met there told him of their disappointment upon seeing *Eretz Yisrael*. Before they arrived there, they said, they did not imagine that the Holy Land was part of this world. Rather, because of the descriptions in the *Zohar* and other works of the Land's incredible *Kedushah*, they assumed *Eretz Yisrael* was a "different world" entirely. The Torah even goes to the "trouble" of describing the Land's borders in detail due to its great and awesome holiness; therefore, they reasoned, *Eretz Yisrael* could not be of this world. Thus, when they arrived in the Holy Land, they were disappointed to find that it is a land like any other, and that the soil of *Eretz Yisrael* looks no different than the soil anywhere else.

Notwithstanding these great people's observations, continues R' Nachman, the holiness of the Land is, in fact, immense and awesome, as our Sages and many *Sefarim* teach. But, one can only perceive that holiness if he believes it exists. There is a practical lesson in this, R' Nachman continues. Some people think, for example, that they cannot learn from a rabbi or *Tzaddik* who looks just like them. No, they think, both his appearance and his mannerisms must stand out from everyone else's. In reality, though, a *Tzaddik* can look just like anyone else, and, nevertheless, be very different from everyone else--just as *Eretz Yisrael* looks like many other countries, yet it is unique. One must believe in the greatness of the Land and the *Tzaddik*, respectively, in order to perceive them. (*Likkutei Moharan* 2:116)

Shabbat

"Bnei Yisrael were in the Wilderness and they found an *Ish* / a man *Mekoshesh* / gathering wood on the Sabbath day." (15:32)

R' Zalman Sorotzkin z"l (1881-1966; the *Lutzker Rav*, later in Yerushalayim) writes: The *Midrash* states that the *Mekoshesh* sinned for the sake of Heaven. *Bnei Yisrael* thought that once G-d had decreed that they would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*, they were no longer obligated to observe *Mitzvot*. To dispel this notion, the *Mekoshesh* transgressed *Shabbat* so that he would be put to death and others would see and take heed. Indeed, the overall righteousness of this man is hinted to by the Torah's use of the word "*Ish*" / "a man [of distinction]," R' Sorotzkin writes. (The verse could just as well have omitted that word and said, "They found a *Mekoshesh* / wood-gatherer on the Sabbath day.")

R' Sorotzkin elaborates: The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 118b) teaches, "If one observes *Shabbat* according to the law, even if he worships *Avodah Zarah* like the generation of Enosh [grandson of Adam Ha'rishon], he will be forgiven." Of course, R' Sorotzkin writes, this does not mean that he literally worships idols, for what good is observing *Shabbat* if one denies that G-d created the world?! Rather, the *Gemara* singles out the form of worship of the generation of Enosh, when mankind first believed that G-d is too lofty to be worshiped directly and therefore conceived of intermediate forces to be worshiped, as *Rambam* z"l explains. While that too is sinful, so long as one retains a belief in the all-powerful Creator and he observes *Shabbat*, which testifies to Creation, he is guaranteed to return to true *Emunah*.

After *Hashem* decreed that the generation of the Exodus would die in the desert, the people felt that being under the direct providence of G-d was too difficult, and they wanted to put distance between themselves and *Hashem*. The *Mekoshesh* wanted to ensure that at least they observed *Shabbat*.

R' Sorotzkin adds: Why does the Torah say, "they found," rather than "they saw"? This indicates that there were people on the lookout for *Shabbat* violators, for a community is obligated to appoint guardians to enforce the laws of *Shabbat*. This obligation derives from the verse (*Shmot* 31:16), "*Bnei Yisrael* shall observe the *Shabbat*, to make the *Shabbat* . . ." "To observe the *Shabbat*" refers to the individual's observance, while "to make the *Shabbat*" refers to the community's enforcement. Why is there such an obligation? Because any individual's transgression of *Shabbat* weakens the atmosphere of the *Shabbat* experienced by the entire community. (*Oznayim La'Torah*)

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10815 Meadowhill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901 / 301-593-2272

Send e-mail to: TheTorahSpring@gmail.com

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“It shall constitute *Tzitzit* for you, that you may see it and remember all the commandments of *Hashem* and you shall perform them . . . So that you may remember and perform all My commandments and be holy to your *Elokim*.” (15:39-40)

Midrash Rabbah teaches: “So that you may remember and perform all My commandments” -- this may be explained by a parable: Someone was thrown into the sea. The captain of a ship threw him a rope and said, “Hold this rope in your hand, and do not let go, for, if you let go, you have no chance of living.”

The *Midrash* continues: Similarly, *Hashem* says to *Bnei Yisrael*, “As long as you cling to the *Mitzvot*, and (*Devarim* 4:4), ‘You cling to *Hashem*, your *Elokim* -- you are all alive today.’ Likewise, it is written (*Mishlei* 4:13), ‘Hold fast to *Mussar* / discipline; do not let go. Guard it, for it is your life.’ [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Binyamin Yehoshua Zilber z”l (1916-2008; Bnei Brak, Israel) explains: The *Midrash* is responding to the appearance that the quoted verses are redundant -- the first says, “that you may see it and remember all the commandments of *Hashem* and you shall perform them,” and the second immediately repeats (or so it seems), “So that you may remember and perform all My commandments . . .” In reality, teaches the *Midrash*, the second verse is speaking about an entirely different level of performance than the first.

How so? R’ Zilber writes: The earlier verse refers to physical performance of the *Mitzvot*. The primary challenge that man is meant to overcome using his *Bechirah* / Free Will is his natural reluctance to perform *Mitzvot*. Therefore, the first verse is stated as a commandment (“you shall perform them”). The latter verse, in contrast, speaks of clinging to the *Mitzvot* -- performing them with joy -- so much so, that they seem effortless. Such feelings cannot be commanded, only cultivated and developed (therefore it says, “So that . . .”). Nevertheless, teaches the *Midrash*, that clinging, that joy, is what life is truly about.

(*Az Nidberu*, Vol. 14, No. 24)

R’ Yisroel Elya Weintraub z”l (1932-2010; Bnei Brak, Israel) wrote to someone who had moved from *Eretz Yisrael* to the *Diaspora*:

“I ask of you--*Eretz Yisrael* is the place of [*Bnei*] *Yisrael*, and the expression that a place finds favor in the eyes of its inhabitants was said primarily about it. (Thus, every Jew is entitled to four square *Amot* of land in *Eretz Yisrael*; that is a *Halachah*.) Therefore, *Le’ma’an Hashem* [literally, ‘for G-d’s sake’], do not speak ill about *Eretz Yisrael* after leaving it, while you are there [in the *Diaspora*] (see *Tehilim* 106, verse 24, and the frightful aftermath thereof).” (*Igrot Da’at* p.287)

“They reported to him and said, ‘We arrived at the Land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.’” (13:27)

The first time *Hashem* appeared to Moshe, He described *Eretz Yisrael* as, “A good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (*Shmot* 3:8). Thereafter, the phrase, “A land flowing with milk and honey,” is used several times in the Torah and Prophets to describe the Holy Land. It is surprising, therefore, that the phrase is not used in the second *Berachah* of *Birkat Ha’mazon*, which is known as “*Birkat Ha’aretz*” / “The Blessing of the Land,” and which speaks the praises of *Eretz Yisrael*. Instead, we refer to *Eretz Yisrael* in that blessing as “a desirable, good, and spacious land.”

R’ David Abudarham z”l (Spain; late 13th-early 14th centuries; one of the most influential commentators and *Halachic* authorities in matters relating to the *Siddur*) explains: We do not mention, “A land flowing with milk and honey,” because not all places in *Eretz Yisrael* have that quality; only some locations.

Alternatively, the phrase is not used because *Eretz Yisrael* does not “flow with milk and honey” after the destruction of the Temple, when the Land’s full glory is missing; instead, we prefer a praise that remains relevant -- *i.e.*, “a desirable, good, and spacious land.”

R’ Yitzchak Arieli z”l (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of *Enayim La’mishpat*) suggests a different explanation: The *Gemara* teaches that the second *Berachah* of *Birkat Ha’mazon* was composed by Yehoshua bin Nun, Moshe Rabbeinu’s successor. Yehoshua was one of the Spies -- one of only two who dissented from the negative report the other spies brought back. Having seen the damage that his colleagues caused using the phrase (in our verse), “Indeed it flows with milk and honey,” he did not want to memorialize that phrase in the “Blessing of the Land.”

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha’eulah* p.79)

“They shall make themselves *Tzitzit* on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations, and they shall place upon the *Tzitzit* of each corner a thread of *Techelet* / turquoise wool. It shall constitute *Tzitzit* for you, that you may see *Oto* / it . . .” (15:38-39)

R’ Chaim of Valozhyn z”l (Belarus; 1749-1821) writes: The three times the word “*Tzitzit*” is mentioned in these verses parallel the three things on which Akavyah ben Mahalalel says a person should reflect so that he will not sin, as taught in *Pirkei Avot* (3:1). The parallels are as follows:

“From where you came” -- “*Tzitzit* . . . throughout their generations,” reminiscent of the verse (*Kohelet* 1:4), “A generation comes . . .”

“Where you are going” -- “*Tzitzit* of each corner a thread of *Techelet*,” reminiscent of “*Tachlit*” / the end.

“Before Whom you will give an accounting” -- “You may see ‘*Oto*,’” which can be translated “Him.” (*Ruach Chaim* 3:1)