

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe Eisner, Moshe ben Michael. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS SHELACH

This Land is My Land...

This week's *parsha* contains the terrible sin of the "spies" who went to explore Eretz Yisroel and the resulting tragic punishment; forty years of banishment to the desert and the entire generation of men (with two notable exceptions) being banned from entering Eretz Yisroel. This story is followed by the story of the *Ma'apilim* – those who disobeyed Moshe and sought to conquer Eretz Yisroel on their own, but were utterly decimated.

Perhaps the most perplexing question relating to this story is: How could Bnei Yisroel actually be led to believe that Eretz Yisroel was too dangerous for them? In other words, when the spies returned with a misleading narrative on the land relating how powerful and dangerous the inhabitants of Eretz Yisroel were and how Bnei Yisroel would be unable to defeat them, why did Bnei Yisroel actually believe them?

Had they not all witnessed the incredible plagues that Hashem inflicted upon the Egyptians, the many miracles at the Red Sea, and the absolute revelation of Hashem at Mount Sinai? Had they not already soundly defeated the nation of Amalek, which attacked them when they left Egypt? They were receiving miraculous bread and water daily; did they really think that there was anything Hashem couldn't do?

To properly understand this tragic chapter, one must first ask: Why did Bnei Yisroel wish to send spies into Eretz Yisroel in the first place?

The answer is that Bnei Yisroel made a fundamental error in understanding what Eretz Yisroel was supposed to be. The men

of that generation desperately wanted it to be their land, one that they would conquer in a conventional war campaign, similar to a war that a typical sovereign nation would seek to wage.

However, this is not what Hashem had intended. Hashem had wanted them to come and live in His land, as His permanent guests. Living in Eretz Yisroel was supposed to be a transcendent experience, similar to being in the Garden of Eden, an experience that would draw us ever nearer to Hashem and His relationship to our world.

Bnei Yisroel rejected this offer and relationship; they wanted to conquer the land and proclaim it their own. They didn't want a miraculous entrance to the land of Eretz Yisroel achieved through the hand of Hashem; they wanted to feel like owners of their own space, not that they were living in His space.

Thus, they sent spies to determine the proper way to mount a successful war campaign. They wanted to do it on their own; they weren't interested in Hashem's largesse. It was to this very intent that the spies leveled their narrative that the inhabitants were too strong for them to defeat. Not wanting Hashem's miraculous involvement also comes with the potential downside that without His help they might be easily defeated.

Hashem had intended that we move into His land with His help. Bnei Yisroel wanted to be able to feel that they were in control their own destiny. When they became convinced that they would not be able to do it on their own, Bnei Yisroel no longer wanted to enter Eretz Yisroel. The spies



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then denigrated the land in a sour grapes like manner; convincing Bnei Yisroel that they wouldn't want to live there anyway.

The generation of the desert was punished not so much for not trusting Hashem, but rather for rejecting the relationship that Hashem was offering them through living in His land.



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Sour Dough

And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying; “Speak to Bnei Yisroel, and say to them ‘When you come into the land where I bring you, then it shall be, that, when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall offer up an offering to Hashem’” (15:17-19).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem is introducing to Bnei Yisroel the *mitzvah* of challah. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4) on the first *possuk* in the Torah ... בראשית ברא explains that it alludes to the purpose of creation: For the sake of something that is called “ראשית”, a beginning. The Midrash records the opinions that identify the “ראשית” that is the specific purpose of creation. The first opinion is that the world was created for the sake of the Torah; the second, for the sake of Moshe Rabbeinu; and the third opinion is for the sake of the *mitzvos* of *ma’aser*, *bikkurim*, and challah. The Midrash goes on to give scriptural sources for all three of these being called “ראשית” including the one in our *parsha* “the beginnings of your kneadings” (15:20).

The paramount importance of the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu are obvious. But how does the *mitzvah* of challah come to be included in the same category as the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu? In addition, the Gemara (*Kiddushin* 40a) states that Torah is greater than challah for the Torah was given forty years before challah. This is difficult to comprehend. What is the basis for making any comparison at all between the Torah and the *mitzvah* of challah?

Lastly, the *halacha* is that the obligation to separate challah takes effect during the kneading of the dough. This is puzzling because the obligation depends on the nature of the finished product. If one kneads dough with the intent to feed it to animals there is no requirement to separate challah. In addition, according to the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yorah Deah* 329:3) if one

intended to fry the dough or just dry it in the sun (as opposed to baking it) there is no obligation of separating challah. Considering that the obligation varies depending on the finished product, why does the obligation begin with the kneading process before the dough has even become bread?

Historically, bread was always seen as a staple of life, a basic need without which a human cannot survive. Every person needs to feel capable of providing for his own basic needs. If one cannot do so he lives in constant shame, only surviving on the largesse of others. This is known as “*nahama dekisufa*” – the bread of shame.

If we took challah after the bread was already baked it could be seen merely as a means of giving thanks to Hashem for providing us with bread. By requiring us to separate challah during the kneading process, we become cognizant of the fact that we are thanking Hashem for giving us the ability to make bread and support ourselves.

An integral aspect of creation was for us to avoid the sense of shame of “*nahama dekisufa*.” It is for this reason that Hashem set up a system of earning all the incredible gifts that He wanted to bestow upon us. In order to feel good about what we have, we need to feel like we earned it. The *mitzvah* of challah reinforces that we are thankful to Hashem that we can provide for ourselves and that we have earned what we have.

This is why the Gemara compares Torah to the *mitzvah* of challah. The Torah is the system of how we can earn the gifts

Hashem wants to bestow upon us and challah is how we thank Hashem for the ability to take care of our physical needs; without this ability we would be forced to rely on others for handouts that we hadn’t earned. This is also why the *mitzvah* of challah is called “ראשית” – it represents a key element of creation.



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