

פ' שלה תשפ"ד

Based on droshos by Maran HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita, Gaavad of Yerushalayim. To receive these weekly divrei Torah email ravsternbuchtorah@gmail.com

COUNTRY OF EXTREMES

“And all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature (*anshei midos*)” (13:32)

Targum Yonoson translates *anshei midos* as men with bad character traits. *Eretz Yisroel* is a country of extremes. The righteous who live there acquire the greatest degree of righteousness and sanctity, whereas evil and *tumoh* are more prominent there than anywhere else. For this reason, the seven nations living in *Eretz Yisroel* at the time were the most sinful and depraved, and the *meraglim* in this *possuk* are saying that the people they encountered had terrible character traits, and the *bnei yisroel* would have great difficulty living among them.

Unfortunately, in our day too, anti-religious elements amongst our wayward brethren are the most prominent in *Eretz Yisroel*. This is due to the powers of *tumoh* in this country, and our task is to utilize the corresponding powers of *kedusho*, which are simultaneously part and parcel of its very atmosphere in all periods, to negate the influence of the powers of *tumoh*.

TO'EIVA PARADE

A *to'eiva* parade recently took place in Yerushalayim. The following are highlights of Rav Sternbuch's speeches at gatherings protesting these (annual) parades 14 and 16 years ago:

It is a fundamental principle that when the Divine name is being publicly desecrated, we are obligated to protest. If we do not protest, we are held accountable for the sins of our coreligionists, since all Jews are responsible for each other. (Thus, Rav Moshe Schneider suggested in the middle of the Holocaust that righteous people were being killed because they had not sufficiently protested the iniquities of the wicked). On the other hand, if we do protest the desecration of Hashem's name and the sanctity of His country and of Yerushalayim *Ir Hakodseh*, we silence the prosecutors in Heaven.

Some say that one should not talk about these matters, but we have a tradition that nothing harmful can result from performing a mitzvah (in this case the mitzvah of protesting Hashem's honor), only good. In fact, protesting only serves to protect us.

Others say that we are a small, insignificant group. However, the tribe of Levi was also the smallest in number, and a small amount of light dispels a lot of darkness.

Yet others argue that this issue is no concern of ours, and we should rather be concentrating on our own *avodas Hashem* and that of our children, but they are terribly mistaken. The public actions of these sinners in the Palace of the King create vast quantities of *tumah*, and if we simply ignore them, they will affect our thought, speech and actions, whether we like it or not. After all, the immoral actions of the *dor hamabul* affected even the behaviour of animals. By protesting their actions with dedication, we have the ability to not only counter the *tumah* created by their actions, but even to reduce the power of *tumah* in the world as a whole. After the righteous convert Potozky was burnt at the stake sanctifying the Divine name, the Vilna Gaon said that one could feel how the powers of *tumah* in our world no longer possess the same potency as they did before his act of *mesirus nefesh* (Ed.: for the possible *halachic* ramifications of this see *Teshuvos Vehanhogos* V: 256 and *Ishei Yisroel*, Ch. 2, end of footnote 17).

The *Soton* has a special interest in *tumah* increasing in Yerushalayim. Hashem is waiting to see how we react. We are obligated to participate in the sorrow of the *Shechinah* and to dissociate ourselves from these sinners who publicly and proudly make a mockery of Hashem and His Torah.

These sinners' behaviour is utterly Amalekite. Amalek obtain its power when our Torah learning becomes attenuated; not when we do not learn, but when we do not learn with sufficient intensity and enthusiasm. We should therefore be concentrating on the quality and quantity of our Torah learning. In addition, we should also be focussing on issues of modesty, such as long wigs, which pollute Yerushalayim and *Eretz Yisroel*.

People are worried about Iran and atom bombs (*Ed.*: Rav Sternbuch is saying this already back in 2010), but what we should really be worried about is Hashem's anger and His potential removal of the *Shechina*, so that it will not protect us *chas vesholom*.

We possess the power of speech, the power to pray and to protest. We are all the agents of the Jewish nation. May Hashem hearken to the *rabbonim* and all the people gathered here, and not hold the nation responsible for the sins of those who seek to contaminate themselves, the entire nation, and everything holy, and may we welcome Moshiach easily and speedily.

Postscript: Before the outbreak of the current war, Rav Sternbuch warned about the possible dire consequences of our failure to sufficiently protest the actions of anti-religious militant elements, and after the outbreak of the war he could be heard beseeching the Creator not to listen to the accusations of the *Soton*, who argues that the whole nation should be held responsible for the actions of a small minority: see Part 1, Chapter 1 of the recently-published book "War and Redemption".

If we do our bit by protesting what needs to be protested, for example the current feverish attempts to recruit Yeshiva students to the army, the *Soton's* claims will have no ground to stand on.

IMPERVIOUS AS A STONE

Send men that they may spy out the land (13:2) Rashi: *Why is the section dealing with the spies juxtaposed with the section dealing with Miriam? Because she was punished for matters of slander, for speaking against her brother, and these wicked people witnessed it, but did not learn their lesson.*

The *medrash* quoted by Rashi seems difficult to understand, since the spies spoke slanderously about an inanimate entity, namely *Eretz Yisroel*, not about a person, why were they expected to realize from the episode of Miriam that not only someone who speaks against a person, but even he who speaks slanderously about inanimate objects, against "sticks and stones" is punished?

Moshe *Rabbenu* was the humblest person who ever lived, and was therefore not personally hurt when Miriam spoke against him. Hence, she was only speaking against "sticks and stones", and the spies should therefore have understood that just like Miriam was punished, even though the person she was slandering was completely impervious to her words, so too would they be worthy of punishment for speaking against *Eretz Yisroel*, even though "sticks and stones" do not feel personally offended.

This quality of inner strength and being impervious to the statements and views of others which Moshe possessed, manifests itself not only in the trait of modesty, but also in the case of positive pride, whereby a person has to make himself impervious to the false views and attitudes of those he comes into contact with.

LEARNING LESSONS

Rav Yerucham Levovitz noted that the claim against the spies was not only because of the slander against *Eretz Yisroel*, but also because they did not learn the lesson of previous events. The same goes for any sin. In addition to being held responsible for rebelling against Hashem, we are also held responsible for not having considered the lifestyle of the wicked, and drawing the necessary lessons from it, how their actions make them shed the divine image, the *zelem Elokim*. Such thoughts should be enough to create a desire to detach ourselves from their way of life, and to rejoice in the great merit of being able to serve the Creator and to invest greater efforts into fulfilling His commandments properly.

DAAS TORAH

All of them were men of distinction. (13:3)

Rashi says that at that time the spies were virtuous, and yet on *possuk* 13:26 he says that "just as their return was with evil intent, so was their departure with evil intent." The Steipler explains this seeming discrepancy: When the spies were appointed, they were still virtuous, but as soon as they set off on their way, the corruption already set in. By nature they were righteous, but following their appointment they became personally biased, telling themselves that it was beneath their dignity to be appointed to the simple task of spies, which any plain soldier could do just as well.

Hence, they reasoned that their mission must be to be “judges” with authority to determine whether they could vanquish the Canaanites through natural means. These thoughts of honor gave them a personal bias and convinced them that they were to decide on their own whether the nation should enter *Eretz Yisroel*. The bias set in as soon as they went off on their mission, and it was responsible for their downfall.

When people in public positions come to *Rabbanim* to hear their *daas Torah*, they should not decide in advance what the appropriate action is, and merely seek Rabbinic approval for their actions. They should rather be aware that they do not have any authority at all to decide any matter requiring *daas Torah*, and their task is only to state the facts and be ready to hear and accept unadulterated *daas Torah*.

FIGHTING FOR OUR PRINCIPLES

And Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun, Yehoshua. (13:16)

He prayed on his behalf, “May Hashem save you from the counsel of the spies” (Rashi, ibid.)

Unlike Yehoshua, Kolev did not merit Moshe’s prayer, but had to go on his own to prostrate himself in prayer on the graves of the patriarchs that he should not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel (see *Rashi* on 13:22). Why did Moshe not pray for his nephew, Kolev, too?

Some answer this question by referring to the Targum Yonoson on this *posuk*: “And when Moses saw his humbleness, Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun Yehoshua”. Since the spies’ argument was that the nation had not attained the appropriate superior levels needed to enter *Eretz Yisroel* Moshe was worried that Yehoshua, due to his modesty, would agree with this argument, and so he was in special need of Moshe’s prayer.

Moshe realized that someone with excessive modesty is likely to reach a compromise with those who seek to go against the will of Hashem. He therefore changed Hoshea’s name to Yehoshua in the hope that this would grant him the required fortitude to fight the majority view of the *meraglim*.

Even though we must be aware that the results of our actions depend on Hashem, it is His desire that we do whatever is within our power to stand up for Torah principles, and when we have to fight for such principles, we should shed any inappropriate modesty.

HISHTADLUS FOR RUCHNIYUS

Alternatively, the Chofetz Chaim writes that there are two methods that can be adopted when fighting the wicked. One is to publicly declare our position and fight them at all costs, whereas the other approach is to remain silent for a certain period and pretend outwardly that we agree with them, so that we can subsequently influence them and declare our real views to the entire nation.

Yehoshua followed the approach adopted by his teacher, Moshe, and was openly opposed to the conduct of the *meraglim*, whereas Kolev pretended to side with them, so that he could attempt to change their minds, or at least minimize their influence on the nation (see *Rashi* on 13:30). This being so, Yehoshua faced the danger of being physically harmed by the *meraglim*, since due to his open opposition they might injure or kill him. Hence, Yehoshua needed Moshe’s prayer to be saved from the counsel of the spies, lest they consult between themselves and decide to harm him.

Kolev, on the other hand, faced no obvious physical danger, because he pretended to be allied with them, and he was rather exposed to the spiritual danger that **he** would be influenced by **them**. Hence, he prayed that he not be *enticed* by his colleagues to be part of their counsel. Moshe, on the other hand, prayed, *May Hashem save you from the counsel of the spies*, which implies that Moshe was worried about the physical danger to Yehoshua when the spies would consult between themselves to harm Yehoshua, since he openly opposed their path.

Moshe prayed only for Yehoshua because the prayer of a righteous person is only effective for avoiding physical misfortunes and not spiritual ones. In order to avoid the danger of a spiritual pitfall, the person himself must exercise his own spiritual endeavors. In the case of Kolev, he prostrated himself on the graves of the *ovos hakedoshim*, undertaking to do *teshuvah*, perhaps adopting various resolutions, and beseeching Hashem to save him from the spiritual dangers of the *meraglim* in the merit of the holy forefathers.

Rav Sternbuch recalls the time when he was a child, and Rav Elchonon Wasserman came on one of his visits to his family. Rav Sternbuch's mother had already been widowed, and asked Rav Elchonon to bless her sons that they should grow up to be *talmidei chachomim* and *gedolei Torah v'yirah* and her daughters *bnos Torah*. Rav Elchonon responded that he had a tradition from the Chofetz Chaim that blessings for *ruchniyus* should not be given, because a person is then likely to rely on the blessing of a *tzaddik*, and not toil on his own with all his might in his learning and *mitzvos*, and if a person is slack in his own endeavors, the blessings of a *tzaddik* will be of no avail to him. Only if a person toils in Torah and prays will he be blessed by Hashem. However, Rav Elchonon encouraged Rav Sternbuch's mother to invest a lot of efforts in her children's *ruchniyus*, and then she would be successful with the help of Hashem.

CHOOSING YESHIVOS AND SEMINARIES

Kolev went to Chevron alone to prostrate himself on the graves of the patriarchs and beseech that he not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel. The *gemoro* (*Soto* 12a) adds says that Kolev's face became black due to the many fasts he undertook in order to be saved from the counsel of the spies. Clearly, if Kolev took all these measures, the potential influence of negative friends must be no small matter.

Every day at the end of the *birkos hashachar* we pray to Hashem that He "keep us far from a bad friend", and almost immediately in the next paragraph we again ask to be to be "saved from a.... bad friend". Why this repetition?

Rav Sternbuch heard an explanation from Rav Elimelech Rumpler in the name of the Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon Rokeach. The first prayer refers to a friend who is obviously a bad friend, and we therefore pray that Hashem should keep us far from him. The second prayer, on the other hand, refers to someone who outwardly displays no negative signs. He may look like a regular *bochur*, and even come from an excellent family, but he might have become corrupt inside, and not yet display any outward signs of his dramatic change. This may happen nowadays, through exposure to the Internet, for example. The person uttering the second prayer may not even be aware of the identity of this more dangerous type of "friend", and so he asks Hashem to be saved from a bad friend of this kind, whoever he or she may be.

Unfortunately, many young people diverge from the proper path because they associate with bad company, boys and girls who may initially show no signs of anything untoward to friends and their parents, who suspect nothing, especially if they come from good families. Every father has to *daven* that Hashem should save his children from clandestine bad friends, and of course to find out who his sons' and daughters' friends are, and to endeavor to keep them away from anyone who may be a bad influence over them.

When parents are deliberating about which educational institutions to send their children to, the first thing to check is the nature of friends in that institution. If two institutions are equal in this respect, a parent should then check in which institution the management has the best degree of supervision to ensure that their students are not given license to behave any way they want.

Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm said that since the Rambam writes (*De'os* 6:1) that if we want to keep a distance from bad friends we have to move to the wilderness, in our times *bonei Torah* have to take refuge in yeshivas which act as "wildernesses" keeping them away from the street, and our conduct in this spiritual wilderness should mirror people's behavior in the physical wilderness. No one walks alone in the wilderness, and in *yeshivos* too we have to associate with good friends who are *bonei Aliya*. If we do so, that is a recipe for success and for continuing to follow the path of the Torah.

UNSWAYED BY PUBLIC OPINION

"Are there any trees in it or not?" (13:20) Rashi: *Does it have a worthy man who will protect them with his merit?*

Why is a worthy man termed a "tree"? A tree symbolizes relentlessness, and a worthy person is someone who stands up for *da'as Torah* and leads public opinion instead of being led by it. He does not subject his views to those of others. Such a person is worthy of protecting the entire public, because since he really leads the public his merit accrues to them. However, if he is not strong and relentless like a tree, but rather subject to the influence of others and to public opinion, then even if he is a *talmid chochom* and a *yerei shomayim* he does not have the merit. and therefore the ability. to protect the public.

Furthermore, a tree bears fruit, and fruit symbolize the deeds of a person. In order for a *talmid chochom* to be able to save a town he must make an impression on it and bear "fruit". He must disseminate Torah and good

deeds. If he lives only for himself without influencing his fellow inhabitants, he is not capable of protecting the town in which he lives.

FAITH AND HERESY

But the men who went up with him said, "We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than us [mimenu]. (13:31).

Rashi quotes the *gemoro* in Sotah (35a) that *chazak mimenu*, which may also be interpreted as they are stronger than *He*, refers to Hashem [Sotah 35a]. After witnessing Hashem's miracles in Egypt, at *matan Torah* and in the desert, how could the *meraglim* have argued that the Canaanites were stronger than Hashem?

According to the plain *peshat* "*chazak mimenu*" should indeed be translated as "stronger than us", but this very statement also implied that the Canaanites were stronger than Hashem, because if they would have truly believed that Hashem runs the world and stands by us to defeat the Canaanites they would not even have begun to compare our power - which is based on Hashem's power - with their power, which is an imaginary power based on flesh and blood. Hence, the spies' statement, even according to its plain meaning, actually amounted to the heretical assertion that the Canaanites were stronger than Hashem.

Rav Sternbuch heard several times from Rav Dessler that with *zadikim* there is a very fine line between faith and heresy, and if they forget that Hashem runs the world, that is deemed to be complete heresy on their part.

POSITIVE PRIDE

"We seemed like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes" (13:33)

If we belittle our own worth, others will correspondingly treat us with contempt. A person must recognize his own worth and potential for greatness. Both the Baal Shem Tov and the *Chido* comment on the *possuk*, "For you shall not cause to go up in smoke any leavening or any honey, as a fire offering to Hashem; However, you shall bring them as a first [fruit] offering to Hashem" (*Vayikro* 2:11-12) as follows: Leaven, which rises, and honey, which is a sweetener, both symbolize pride. In principle, pride is forbidden, but when one is first setting off on the path of *avodas Hashem* (the "first offering"), those same components are essential, because if a person is not aware of his inherent greatness and the possibility of his becoming a great *talmid chachom*, and instead belittles his own qualities and capabilities, then he will indeed remain as insignificant as his own warped self-image.

FAVORABLE JUDGEMENTS

Say to them, 'As I live,' says Hashem, 'if not as you have spoken in My ears, so will I do to you, in this desert, your corpses shall fall (14:28-29)

They themselves pronounced their own judgement. Since they stated that they did not wish to enter *Eretz Yisroel*, Hashem accepted their wish, and so they died in the wilderness. A person must be very careful not to pronounce his own judgement. By judging others favorably, Hashem also judges us favorably. Conversely, if a person judges someone unfavorably, then when it comes to his own Day of Judgement, when his own actions are replayed, he is also shown how he judged that other person unfavorably, and, in particular, when he stated the punishment due to the other person for his actions, he thereby also pronounces the punishment due to himself, *Hashem yishmerenu*. "Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue, keeps his soul from troubles" (*Mishlei* 21:7).

MISTAKE OF THE MA'APILIM

"They defiantly ascended to the mountain top... The Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived on the mountain came down and smote them and crushed them" (14:44-45).

On the face of it, the *ma'apilim* who tried to forcibly enter *Eretz Yisroel* merely intended to rectify the sin of the *meraglim*. Why, then, were they killed by the *Amoleikim* and the Canaanites who came down and smote them? Their mistake lay in thinking that just by entering *Eretz Yisroel* they would be rectifying the *meraglim's* sin, whereas in reality they had to first correct the root cause: a lack of faith and fear of transgressing Hashem's Word. Moshe knew this, and therefore warned them, "Do not go up, for Hashem is not among you" (14:42). However, they did not listen, and so they were killed.

EYES OF THE NATION

"The eyes of the congregation" (15:24)

A *Godol hador* possesses foresight and an uncanny ability to predict future events.

The Brisker Rov told Rav Sternbuch that when Herzl founded the Zionist movement with its aim of establishing a Jewish state, people thought that no one would listen to this assimilated Jew, because everyone would understand that there was no connection between him and religion, and he would not be able to have a negative influence on Torah Jewry and the Jewish nation.

By contrast, the Brisker Rov's father, Rav Chaim Brisker, had a very different view. He felt that Herzl was an extremely dangerous person, because he had adopted the platform of *Eretz Yisroel*, which was so dear to the Jews, and used the holy feelings burning within them for *Eretz Yisroel* in order to advance his goal of detaching them from Torah and faith. He foresaw that a state would indeed eventually be established, and that it would be successful in achieving at least some of its anti-religious goals. A State with the aim of eradicating anything to do with the Torah, and assimilating the religious to the non-religious majority, and the Jewish nation to the family of nations. The Brisker Rov told Rav Sternbuch: "My father predicted decades ago exactly what would take place, whereas I can't even interpret what is taking place right now!"

It is the task of Jewish leaders to serve as the "eyes of the congregation" and discern what we cannot see.

BITUL TORAH

"For he has scorned the word of Hashem and violated His commandment; that soul shall be utterly cut off for its iniquity is upon it" (15:31)

Chazal (Sanhedrin 99a) tell us that these words also apply to someone who is able to learn Torah, but does not do so. This is because if someone is remiss in performing the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* by means of which he can accumulate numerous *mitzvos* every moment, he scorns the Torah and does not recognize its value and importance. Such a person is considered an *epikores* and is liable to *kores*.

On the first day of *Selichos* Rav Chaim Volozhiner cited this Chazal. He said that we all assume that we will have a portion of the World to Come, but who knows if that is true. It is related that some of the listeners burst into tears upon hearing about how a person could be severely punished even for the sin of *bitul Torah*, and even Rav Chaim himself almost fainted, until he was forced to stop the speech in the middle.

However, if someone refrains from learning Torah because of difficulties he encounters, even though this is still considered *bitul Torah*, he is not considered an *epikores*, since he is not acting in a disparaging way, but rather because of the difficulties he is encountering.

Furthermore, whatever a person does in order to be successful in his learning comes within "*esek haTorah*". As the Chofetz Chaim noted, we say "*la'asok bedivrei Torah*", because the Torah is like a business. Just like there are many aspects to a business which are not directly connected with business matters, such as an office, secretary, advertising and so on, all of which contribute to the success of the business, so too in Torah any activity necessary to be successful in the "business" of Torah, is not considered to be *bitul Torah*, but, on the contrary, part and parcel of Torah learning.

HOLINESS NOT A PREREQUISITE FOR COMMENCING OBSERVANCE

You shall remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them, and you shall not go after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray... and you shall be holy to Hashem (15:39-40)

On the personal level, the *possuk* tells us not to go after our hearts and eyes, and only then to be "holy to Hashem". Holiness cannot be attained unless one first divests oneself of heretical thoughts and immoral behavior and thoughts. Parents are obligated to warn their children about these matters, thereby guaranteeing their future.

On the other hand, for those engaging in outreach, the correct approach is to first encourage the not-yet-observant to observe practical *mitzvos*, even if they still suffer from a lack of *emuno* and *kedusho*, and then instruct them to improve in those areas until they eventually become "holy". For this reason, the Torah first says "and you shall remember the commandments of Hashem, and perform them", and only then "and you shall not go after your hearts and your eyes", and finally: "and you shall be holy to Hashem".