

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shelach

23 Sivan, 5777 – June 17, 2017

Compiled from the works of
Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson
The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn
North Miami Beach, FL

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Shelach**

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר י"ג, ב': שְׁלַח לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיְתַרְוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר-אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ אֶחָד מֵאֵשׁ לְמִטָּה אַבְתִּירוּ תִשְׁלְחוּ כָל
נְשִׂיא בָהֶם:

רש"י ד"ה שלח לך: לדעתך, אני איני מצוה לך, אם תרצה שלח. לפי שבאו ישראל ואמרו (דברים א', כ"ב) נשלחה אנשים לפנינו, כמה שנאמר (שם) ותקרבון אלי כלכם וגו', ומשה נמלך בשכינה. אמר אני אמרתי להם שהיא טובה, שנאמר (שמות ג', י"ז) אעלה אתכם מעני מצרים וגו'. חיייהם שאני נותן להם מקום לטעות בדברי המרגלים למען לא יירשוה:

Bamidbar 13:2: "Send out for yourself men who will scout the Land of Israel which I am giving to the Jews. You shall send one man each for his father's tribe. Each one shall be a prince among them."

Rashi Heading: Send for yourself: According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you (to do so), but if you wish you may send (them). Since the Jews had come (to Moshe) and said¹ "Let us send men ahead of us," as it says², "All of you approached me..." Moses consulted with the Shechinah. Hashem said, "I told them that it is good, as it says³, 'I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt...' By their lives⁴! Now I will give them the opportunity to err through the words of the spies in order that they not inherit it."

Synopsis

This week we read in our Torah portion of Shelach of the ill-fated 12 spies which Moshe sent to scout out the land of Israel. Their mission was to go into the land and see what it was like prior to the conquest of the land by the Jews. The Torah tells us that Hashem told Moshe to send the men "for yourself." Rashi explains that G-d did not command Moshe to send them; it was left to his discretion. It seems obvious that this is the reason that the story had a tragic ending.

However we need to understand what the problem was with Moshe's actions. This is especially so in light of the fact that the Torah said that Moshe sent the spies "by the word of Hashem." Furthermore, Rashi says that at the time that Moshe sent the spies they were virtuous. Why did they suddenly become derelict in their mission? What caused the rapid change in these emissaries of Moshe?

We must first understand that there were two parts to the spies' mission. They had to find out what was needed in order to conquer Israel. They also had to find out the nature of the land itself. It was

1. Devorim 1:22.

2. *ibid.*

3. Shemos 3:17.

4. This is an expression which connotes an oath.

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in order to fulfill this second part of their mission that Moshe told them to bring fruit from the land upon their return. This seems difficult to understand. Carrying fruit of the land back to the wilderness could have made it obvious that they were spies? Didn't the Jews believe Hashem that the fruit of the land was good? What need was there to endanger them?

The explanation is that when we received the Torah we first said “נעשה - Na'aseh – We will do” and then “נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand.” We had to subjugate ourselves to G-d by first accepting upon ourselves to do as He commands. But then we had to understand with our own minds.

The same was true of the land of Israel. Of course we believed Hashem that we would succeed in our conquest and that the land was good. However we also needed to be involved. Moshe had to send the scouts according to his own understanding. They had to bring the land's produce for the nation to see. They also had to use their own faculties to determine *how* to conquer the land. The mistake they made was taking it one step too far and deciding that they would be incapable of conquering Israel from the Canaanites.

Rashi's Explanation

This week we read Parshas Shelach. It tells of Moshe sending 12 spies into Israel, and the tragic result which this action had. It begins, as is the case with so many stories and laws in the Torah by telling us that⁵ “Hashem spoke to Moshe saying.” However, when it follows that up by telling us what it was that Hashem said to Moshe we are in for a surprise. Hashem did not tell Moshe to “send men who would scout the land.” Rather He told him to “send men *for yourself* men who will scout the land.”

What is the meaning of Moshe sending these spies “*for himself*?” Rashi quotes the Sages⁶ and explains that Hashem told Moshe to send them “according to your own (Moshe's) understanding. I am not commanding you (to do so), but if you wish you may send (them).”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The Torah tells us that Hashem Himself calls Moshe His trusted servant⁷. This makes it clear that if Moshe wanted to send spies, his Master agreed! Furthermore we find that the Torah say explicitly that⁸ “Moshe sent them ... *by the word of Hashem.*” It is clear that sending the scouts in and of itself was something positive.

5. Bamidbar 13:1.

6. See the Talmud Sotah 34, Side b. Similarly see the Midrash Tanchumah on our Parshah at the end of Section 5. See also Bamidbar Rabbah Chapter 16, Section 8.

7. Bamidbar 12:7.

8. Bamidbar 13:3.

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Furthermore Rashi explains that⁹ “at the time that Moshe sent them they were virtuous.” This ought to be obvious; Moshe himself chose them. Not only were they virtuous Jews but they were those who were best suited for the job. How is it possible that they changed in such a short time? When they left on their mission they were righteous people. Yet they were unsuccessful in carrying out their mission. Not only that, but their negative report caused the entire Jewish Nation to “cry for all generations¹⁰.”

The Explanation

We will understand this after a brief preface. There were actually two parts to the spies’ mission. First of all they had to check the details which concern how they would triumph over the land¹¹; “You shall see ... what sort of people live there. Are they strong or weak? Are there few or many? In what sort of land do they live? Is it good or bad? Are the cities in which they live open or are they walled fortresses?”

The second part of their mission was to see the nature of the land itself¹²; “Is the land good or bad? What is the soil like? Is it fat or lean? Are there any trees in it or not?” This was true to the extent that they were told that¹³ “... *you shall be courageous* and take from the fruit of the land ...”

Why was it that taking of the fruit of the land required courage? Simply because carrying fruit back with them could make it obvious that they were spies. Nevertheless it was necessary to do so. They had to bring back the fruit of the land in order to show their fellow Jews its quality. They had to see it with their own eyes.

This seems difficult to understand. G-d already told them that the land is¹⁴ “...a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ...” The Jews have an inborn trust of G-d. The Talmud teaches us¹⁵ that Jews are by their very nature “believers the children of believers.” Why was there a need to endanger their lives?

One explanation is as follows. When Hashem asked us to accept the Jews to accept the Torah, we first said “נעשה - Na’aseh – We will do” and then “נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand¹⁶.” We had to subject ourselves to Hashem. We needed to first say that we would obey whatever the Torah says sight unseen. However that did not suffice. After accepting it we had to study it with our own faculties. We needed the “נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand.”

9 See Rashi’s comments to Bamidbar 13:3.

10. See Talmud Taanis 29, Side a.

11. Bamidbar 13:18-19.

12. *ibid.* 19-20.

13. *ibid.* 20.

14. Shemos 3:8.

15. See Talmud Shabbos 97, Side a.

16. See Talmud Shabbos 88, Side a.

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The same was true of our entering and inhabiting Israel. We certainly had to have faith in Hashem. However He also wanted us to appreciate the greatness of the Holy Land with our own minds. That is the reason that Hashem commanded the twelve scouts to bring back the fruit of the land. We should not just accept Hashem's word that it is a good and expansive land (“נעשה - Na'aseh – We will do”). We should also appreciate it on our own (“נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand”).

This also explains the first part of their mission. They had to see with their own eyes that we could conquer the land¹⁷, “We can surely go up and take possession of it, for we can indeed overcome it.”

That also explains why Hashem told Moshe to “send men for yourself,” meaning “according to your own understanding.” That was the point of sending the spies. It had to come about according to the understanding of the Jews, “נעשה - Na'aseh – We will do” and not solely because of G-d's command.

This also clarifies something else. As stated earlier when Moshe sent the spies they were virtuous. How was it possible for them to descend so low in such a short time? They actually said that¹⁸ “We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we” despite Hashem's promise!

They had to *understand* how we would go about overcoming the Canaanites. It was their conclusion which was incorrect. The facts which they stated were all true. The truth is that based on the laws of nature it would have been impossible for the Jews to have conquered Israel. In the spies' minds they actually successfully carried out their mission. The mistake they made was in offering their conclusion. Moshe never asked them to report whether or not we could successfully conquer the land. He only asked them to report the easiest way to go about the conquest.

A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

The name by which our Parshah is called is Shelach, meaning send. It is from the same root as the Hebrew word “שליח – Shliach – Emissary.” We must all learn from here how to avoid making the same mistake which the spies did. The way to do this is by always keeping in mind that we are Moshe's emissaries. Hashem does not want us to be robots. He does not want us to stop at “נעשה - Na'aseh – We will do.” We also need to use our own understanding in carrying out our mission; “נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand.” However we must make sure not to allow our personal motives to get in the way. No matter how much one understands, no matter how intelligent one is, mixing in one's feelings can very easily cause him to come to a false conclusion. It is only by remaining connected to Moshe, the one who sent us on our mission that we can be sure to remain on a straight path.

17. Bamidbar 13:30.

18. *ibid.* 31.

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By so doing we will certainly merit the complete and true redemption. At that time we will achieve the conquest of the complete land of Israel.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Shelach 5733)

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in spreading forth the wellsprings!

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