

Parshat Sh’lach

The Fruits of the Land

Parshat Sh’lach deals with the unfortunate episode of the spies that were sent to scout out the land of Israel. Though the spies brought back the fruits of the land, Yehoshua and Calev refrained from participating in this effort. This Sicha analyzes Rashi’s explanation as to why they abstained, and the significance in one’s service to G-d.

This week’s *parsha* discusses the sojourn of the spies in the Land of Canaan and their depiction of the land as unconquerable. The Torah expresses the way in which they carried back the enormous fruits of the land in the following depiction:

Text 1

They came to the Valley of Eshkol and they cut a branch with a cluster of grapes. They carried it on a pole between two [people] and [they also took] some pomegranates and figs.

Bamidbar 13:23

Rashi’s commentary on the verse gives detail as to the curious way that these enormous fruits were carried:

Text 2

Eight of them took a cluster [of grapes], one took a fig and one took a pomegranate. Yehoshua and Calev did not take anything, for the intention of the others was to present a slanderous report, [namely,] just as its fruit is extraordinary, so its people are extraordinary.

Rashi, ibid

Though Moshe had commanded the spies to bring back fruit, Yehoshua and Calev refrained from doing so because of the evil intentions of the other spies.

This abstention of Yehoshua and Calev is perplexing though. Moshe had specifically commanded the spies¹, “You shall be courageous and take from the fruit of the land.” If so, being that they were specifically directed to bring back fruit, how were they able to abstain and ignore a direct command from Moshe?

While Rashi explains that they did not participate due to the fact that the other spies had ill intentions in bringing the fruit, this too is not understood.

Why should the *other* spies’ intentions effect their *own* actions? They should have taken the fruit with the proper intention of showing the beauty of the land and fulfill the directive given to them by Moshe.

Send for yourself

This question can possibly be answered through understanding the background behind the mission to scout out the Land of Israel (then known as Canaan).

When G-d allowed Moshe to send spies to the Land of Israel, the Torah uses the expression, “Send out for yourself men who will scout the

¹ Bamidbar 13:20.

Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel.”

Rashi comments that the reason for this language of “send out *for yourself*” is because G-d Himself did not actually command Moshe to send spies.

Text 3

According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send.

Rashi, Bamidbar 13:2

Accordingly, one possibly could explain that because it was not *G-d's* command, Yehoshua and Calev felt that it was in their right to abstain from bringing back fruit, as the particulars of the mission were unimportant. Being that it was a not a command from G-d but from Moshe, they felt that when there were malicious intentions tied to the fruit, they had the right to refrain from participating.

This, though, obviously cannot be the case, as it is inconceivable that Yehoshua and Calev would ignore a direct command from Moshe.

Being that Moshe did indeed send them and *command* them to bring back fruit, this detail of bringing back the produce was obviously important to their mission.

If so, it must be understood how they could ignore a clear directive of Moshe and refrain from carrying back the fruits of the land?

The mission was annulled

This answer that Rashi presents concerning Yehoshua and Calev's nonparticipation (Text 2) is brought in the Talmud as well, but with variations:

Text 4

If you wish I can say [that they did not carry anything] because they were the most distinguished of them, or alternatively that they did not have a share in the plan.

Talmud, Sotah 34a

It seems that the difference between the two answers is whether or not Yehoshua and Calev were still technically bound to the mission or not, at the point when the spies concocted their plot to speak ill of the land.

According to the first reason that is brought in the Talmud, namely, that “they were the most distinguished,” it is understood that technically Yehoshua and Calev should have brought fruit, but they were absolved from their duty because of their stature.

However, they were still *bound* to fulfill the mission, notwithstanding the evil intent of their fellow spies. The only reason that they were permitted to remove themselves from the mission was not because the *mission* was *not* important but because they *were* important.

According to the second reason brought by the Talmud though, that Yehoshua and Calev did not bring the fruits because “they did not share in the plan,” it would seem that once the spies came up with an evil plan, the mission was no

longer, and they were therefore not bound to the specific instructions of the mission².

It would seem that Rashi—who explains that the reason that Yehoshua and Calev did not take fruit was because “the intention of the others was to present a slanderous report,” and does *not* explain that the reason that they abstained was because of their stature—believes that the mission was nullified and they therefore did not need to bring the fruit³.

Problem

Yet, this explanation of the mission being nullified due to the evil intentions of the spies seems highly unlikely according to a simple understanding of the Torah.

For, we see that when Yehoshuah and Calev returned from the land of Canaan they indeed reported regarding the land, and seemed to have therefore fulfilled the mission they had received from Moshe.

Text 5

Calev silenced the people to [hear about] Moshe, and he said, "We can surely go up and take possession of it, for we can indeed overcome it."... They spoke to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, saying, "The land we passed through to scout is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord desires us, He will bring us to this land and give it to us, a land flowing with milk

² This itself is dependent on whether or not all of the spies are to be viewed as one entity. If this is so, when part of the entity becomes nullified, the whole entity is dissolved. Conversely, if each of the spies were considered to have had their own specific mission, although some of them acted improperly, the others were still bound to their respective missions.

³ The reason why the first explanation of the Talmud seems improbable according to the simple understanding of the Torah (and therefore Rashi

and honey. But you shall not rebel against the Lord, and you will not fear the people of that land for they are [as] our bread. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them."

Bamidbar 13:30; Bamidbar 14:7-9

Indeed, as Rashi explains, Yehoshua and Calev were the only ones of the spies who fulfilled the mission and they therefore took the place of the others in the land⁴ after the Almighty punished the spies who had sinned.

Text 6

They took the spies' portion in the land, and replaced them in life, as it were.

Rashi, Bamidbar 14:38

It is therefore improbable to say that Yehoshua and Calev did not take fruit due to their belief that the mission had been canceled, as we see that they continued to do all in their power to fulfill the mission.

Between Rashi and the Talmud

This reasoning behind Yehoshua's and Calev's abstention can be understood through prefacing

does not choose this explanation), is due to the fact that since this was a direct command of Moshe, it seems unlikely that they would abstain because of their personal standing.

⁴ It is as well unlikely according to the simple explanation to say that if part of the mission was breached, then the entirety is dissolved. This is expressed in the fact that although Yehoshua and Calev saw their evil intent, they nevertheless continued to travel with them.

the difference between Rashi's explanation and the Talmud's.

While the Talmud said very tersely "that they did not have a share in the plan," Rashi was more lengthy with his words and stated, "for the intention of the others was to present a slanderous report, [namely,] just as its fruit is extraordinary, so its people are extraordinary."

The simple difference between the two versions is as follows:

According to the Talmud, one can explain that the reason that they did not partake in carrying the fruit was in order not to be involved with an action that could have been *interpreted* as participating in the others' scheme, even though the *actual act* of carrying the fruit was not *inherently* negative.

According to Rashi though, the *actual* carrying of the fruit was a *part* of their evil plan. Therefore, it is understood that the reason that they did not wish to participate was because the intent of *this very action* was to libel the land.

This however, does not seem to absolve them of their directive from Moshe.

Another aspect that must be understood is how did Rashi come to the conclusion that according to the simple understanding of the Torah, the spies were ill intentioned with the bringing of the fruit? On the contrary, it seems that the opposite was their intent.

When the spies returned from the Land of Israel and came back to Moshe, they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit." On this verse Rashi comments as follows:

Text 7

Any lie in which a little truth is not stated in the beginning cannot be maintained in the end.

Rashi, Bamidbar 13:27

This means to say, that this statement of the spies regarding the truly positive qualities of the land was *indeed* genuine, and it was therefore stated in order to make their other negative statements of the land believable to the rest of the Israelites as well.

If so, how can Rashi be so sure that their actual taking of the fruit was with malicious intent? It seems that this act was specifically one of the only positive reports that they brought back!

The explanation

Amongst the *mitzvos* of the Torah, there are those whose main intent are the *action itself* and there are those *mitzvos* whose intent is the *result* of an action.

Similarly with Moshe's command, "You shall be courageous and take from the fruit of the land," there are two ways to understand the directive:

A) The primary intent was that the Israelites *see* the fruit, but the *actual act* of bringing it back with them was unimportant.

B) Since Moshe said "be courageous and *take*," it is understood that there was an importance given to the *act* of taking the fruit as well.

It can be explained, that according to the **Talmud's** understanding, the main aspect of taking the fruit was the *result*—that the Israelites see the fruit—and therefore the *actual act* was not important. There wasn't an actual command to *carry* the fruit, but rather that the fruit *be brought* to Moshe and to the Israelites.

Accordingly can be understood the two reasons that the Talmud offers for the fact that Yehoshua and Calev did not carry the fruit.

Being that the mission of bringing back the fruit was accomplished without them actually participating, Yehoshua and Calev did not go out of their way to carry the fruit, either because of their important stature, or in order not to be part of the scheme. There was no reason that they specifically needed to bring back the fruit.

Rashi

Rashi's opinion though, is that when Moshe said to "be courageous and take from the fruit of the land," this was a commandment that each of the spies should personally carry back fruit.

It is for this reason that Rashi is unable to explain that the reason that Yehoshua and Calev did not bring back fruit was because "they were distinguished," as their individual importance could not dissolve them of their personal obligation to bring back the fruit of the land.

For this reason as well, Rashi does not employ the same language that the Talmud does when explaining why Yehoshua and Calev did not bring back the produce of the land.

Rashi does not say "that they did not have a share in the plan," as this use of words can be explained to mean (as seen above) that the reason they did not bring back the fruit was so that *others* would not have *mistaken* them to have been part of the scheme.

Being though, that Rashi is of the opinion that they had a personal responsibility to bring back the fruit, the way that they would have been perceived is not a valid cause to absolve them of their obligation.

It is for this reason that Rashi wrote that Yehoshua and Calev did not carry any fruit because "the intention of the others was to present a slanderous report, [namely,] just as its fruit is extraordinary, so its people are extraordinary."

Rashi's intent in these words was not to say that the other spies declared this plan outright, for as previously mentioned, this was the "little truth" that solidified their lie. Rather, Rashi is saying that although the other spies outwardly announced that the fruits and the land were good, their "intention" was that through this they would have the ability to *slander the land*.

With this understanding, Yehoshua and Calev's nonparticipation in bringing back the fruit can be appreciated as well:

Were there to have been no malicious intent in the other spies' act of bringing back the produce of the land, it is obvious that Yehoshua and Calev would have joined in with them in fulfilling Moshe's request.

However, since this good act was accompanied with an evil intent, they were unable to take part in this effort. For, if would they have brought back the fruit, they would be assisting in a sinful act, and refraining from helping the spies accomplish something sinful overrides even the direct command of Moshe⁵.

The lesson

The lesson from this in one's service of G-d is as follows:

The mistake of the spies was that they desired to serve G-d in thought and speech but not in action. This idea is explained in Chassidic thought as follows:

intent. If there was no positive intent, then there was as well no directive to bring back the fruit.

⁵ One can say that it did not actually override the directive of Moshe, but that Moshe's thought to begin with was to bring the fruit with a positive

Text 8

The spies were on a tremendously high level and did not wish to lower themselves to do physical commandments, which is a drawing of G-d's infinite light into the lowest (of worlds).

Likutei Torah 36d-37a

A person not wishing to make the same mistake is likely to swing to the other side of the pendulum and focus on the action of the *mitzvos*, while ignoring their emotions or intellectual intent.

Rashi therefore teaches us that it was their *intent* of libel that eventually brought about the calamity of not listening to Moshe and to their libel regarding the land.

From this we can understand the positive aspect of thought as well:

Text 9

Nevertheless, it has been said that "prayer or other benediction [recited] without *kavanah* (intent) is like a body without a *neshamah* (soul)."

Tanya, Ch. 38

The soul's effect on the body is not unimportant or secondary. The soul transforms a lifeless body into a living one. So too, the intent of *mitzvos* breathes life into them and transforms the *mitzvos* into actions that are permeated with vitality.

This is especially accomplished through the study of *Chassidus*, where the reasons for *mitzvos* are imparted in the deepest of ways.

So too, when we await for Moshiach with the depth of our *hearts*, this in turn hastens the time of future redemption. May it be speedily in our days!

(Based on Likutei Sichos 38, Sh'lach, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: www.Neirot.com.)