

Dvar Torah for Parshat Shelach

Based on *Likutey Moharan I*, Lesson #72

The spies were kosher Jews at the time they set out (Rashi, *Numbers* 13:3).
 Don't trust in yourself until the day of your death (*Avot* 2:5; *Berakhot* 29a).
 There is no such thing as despair (*Likutey Moharan II*, Lesson #78).

The *yetzer hara*—the Evil Urge. Every person has one. Rebbe Nachman teaches that with every step closer to Hashem (God) that a person makes, he kills one *yetzer hara* and gets another, more refined *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* of the vast majority of humankind is very vulgar. Some people, though, have a *yetzer hara* that rushes them, pushing them too far and too fast on the spiritual journey. Some people even have a *yetzer hara* that is holy.

There are two stories going on in this week's parshah—three actually, if we count yours. The first story is that of the spies. The second is in the haftarah, the story of Rachav (*Joshua* 2).

The spies went on a seemingly simple mission: visit the Holy Land, report about its goodness and point the way. Instead they came back saying that the Land was not so good, it was unconquerable and the Jews just might as well stay in the desert, comfortably enwrapped in the Clouds of Glory.

Big mistake. How could they make it? What was their motivation?

The holy Zohar (2:158b) says that they were tzadikim, but gave themselves bad advice. “Here in the desert we are leaders, but in the Land Moshe will replace us with new leaders.” Obviously this is not meant to be understood that they were power-hungry or glory-seekers. If that were so, Moshe Rabbeinu would not have chosen them. Moshe Rabbeinu was very perspicacious and an excellent judge of character (see *Exodus* 18:21, 25).

Yet, they ended up doing something so terrible that they have no share in the World to Come (*Sanhedrin* 109b).

(The Arizal explains that the spies knew that the Jews of the Generation of the Desert, were on a spiritual plane that was too great for the Land of Israel to hold. Their crime was not believing that Moshe Rabbeinu had the ability to unite all the spiritual worlds and levels in such a way that God could call this world His home. See *Likutey Halakhot, Nedarim* 4:12.)

Rachav's story, despite a most unpromising beginning, has a *much* happier ending. Rachav was a Kanaanite. She was extremely beautiful (*Megilah* 15a) and at the tender age of ten began her occupation as a prostitute (*Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua* 9). She was so successful during her 40-year career that every noblemen visited her (ibid.). It may have been very glamorous, but certainly doesn't seem to be a recipe for spiritual success!

Yet Rachav married none other than Yehoshua, Moshe Rabbeinu's successor! She had descendants who served in the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) where they were privileged to utter God's ineffable Name. Some were prophets, one of whom was Yechezkel, who had the Vision of the Chariot (*Ezekiel* 1; *Ruth Rabbah* 2:1). What did she do to merit all this?

Rachav looked to kindness. When Kalev and Pinchas came to spy out the land, the Kanaanite authorities were hunting for them. At the risk of her life Rachav hid them. This kindness was so great that Hashem considered it a personal favor (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 8:9).¹ However, when she prayed she made no mention of this. Rather she prayed simply, “Hashem, I sinned with three, Forgive me with three” (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *ibid.*).²

So, what’s your story? How will it end?

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

1 – Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai teaches that her merit was so great that even if Rachav would have had 200 relatives who married into 200 different families, every member of every family would have been saved in her merit. Furthermore, she herself was gifted with a small measure of prophecy (*Ruth Rabbah* 2:1).

2 – Rachav’s clients would visit her establishment—which was located in the famous Wall of Jericho—by climbing up a rope and entering through a window. Her prayer was, “Master of the World! I sinned against You with three [things], *chevel*, *chalon* and *chomah* (rope, window and wall). Forgive me with three [mitzvot], *nidah*, *challah*, and lighting [Shabbat] candles”. *Nidah* refers to the laws of family purity. *Challah* is the tithe given to a kohein-priest from a fresh dough.

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