



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

An Open Book Test

*“Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan.”
(13:2)*

A true story: Young Man to Rabbi: “Rabbi. I don’t need organized religion. I know I have a special relationship with G-d.

“A couple of years ago, I was riding my motorbike along a twisting mountain road in Colorado. It was a beautiful day. Suddenly I turned a steep bend and right in front of me was this huge Mack truck. He slammed on his brakes and so did I. I and the bike fell flat and slid all over the road, but I was going too fast. I slid and slid. There was a sheer drop from the edge of the road of about 500 feet. I saw the edge getting closer and closer. I couldn’t stop! I went over the

edge with the bike. It fell away beneath me. Suddenly, in front of me was this branch. I grabbed it and it held my weight. I managed to swing my way back to the side of the cliff and get back to the road. It was a miracle. I don’t need to keep the Torah. I know G-d is with me. Who else put the branch there for me?”

Said the Rabbi to the young man: “Maybe you should ask yourself Who put the Mack truck there in the first place?”

At the beginning of this week’s Parsha, Rashi asks, “why does the incident of the spies directly follow Miriam speaking slander about Moses?” But this seems to be a strange question. The reason that these events are juxtaposed is because they follow one another chronologically. That’s the way things happened. Why shouldn’t they be written one after the other?

At some time in our lives, we

have all taken an examination or a test of some kind. The essence of the test is that we don’t know what the questions will be. If we knew, it wouldn’t be a test. Not so is our relationship with the Creator. G-d never gives us a test without first giving us the answers.

The Jewish People had wanted to send spies into the Land of Israel for a long time prior to G-d giving permission. However, G-d knew that there would be a temptation to speak slander about the Land, and thus He waited until after Miriam had been punished for speaking slander so that the spies should clearly know that slander was prohibited. In other words, it wasn’t so much that the incident of the spies followed Miriam speaking slander, rather that Miriam speaking slander provided the object lesson which facilitated the sending of the spies.

G-d never gives us a test without first giving us the answers.

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LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Jericho

The first city to be conquered by Joshua and the Israelites, Jericho relied on its impenetrable fortifications to withstand any attack. After receiving his spies' report that the fear of Israel gripped the city's inhabitants, Joshua led his army

in a march around Jericho's massive walls for seven days. On the seventh day the walls miraculously gave way, allowing the Israelites to conquer the city.

The walls did not actually "come tumbling down" as the old spiritual has it. Since they were as thick as they were high, such a tumble would have

been meaningless. They sank into the ground, with only a small portion remaining above the ground to mark the miracle.

Modern Jericho is populated by Arabs, but there is an ancient synagogue which Jews have made repeated efforts to preserve as a Jewish holy place.

Response Line

Judge Knot

Jill Schlessinger wrote:

Is there anything in the Torah (or in other Jewish writings) that addresses the issue of interpreting someone else's feelings? For example: Something bad happens to someone and they are upset about it, and someone else tells them they are "over-reacting" and "irrational." What do Jewish writings say about making judgments about the legitimacy of other people's feelings?

Dear Jill Schlessinger,

In "Ethics of the Fathers" Hillel states, "Don't judge another until you reach his place;" meaning, until you have been in the exact same position. Therefore, you can almost never judge another's feelings.

Even if one feels sure that the other person is over-reacting, he should carefully consider if, how and when to express it. As Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says, "Don't try to appease

your friend at the moment of his anger, and don't try to comfort him when his dead lies before him."

Trying to cheer someone up at the wrong time, or to tell him he's over-reacting, can cause even more pain.

There are, however, "inappropriate" emotions. For example, the Talmud forbids "crying too much" — i.e., for too long a time — at the loss of a loved one. Eventually a person must get over his losses and move forward.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter is reputed to have said: "When a child's toy breaks, he feels as bad as an adult would feel if his factory were destroyed." In short, people experience losses at different levels, so it's nearly impossible to judge others' feelings.

Cremation

Name@Withheld wrote:

I am newly observant. My parents are close to 90 years old, and my mother has directed that her body be cremated. I have tried to bring up this issue with no success. Do you have any advice for me? Perhaps you know of an article I can send them which may

be easier than me speaking to them about it. Thank you.

Dear Name@Withheld,

I suggest "The Bridge of Life" by Rabbi Y. M. Tuchichinsky.

In the right time and place, you might respectfully point out to your parents that according to Jewish law, one should not "sit *shiva*" (observe Jewish mourning rites) for someone who was cremated voluntarily, nor is one obliged to bury their ashes. You will not be able to properly mourn for her, and no kaddish will be said for her. This may have an impact. In addition, the body of a voluntarily cremated person is not liable for resurrection; this is not so much because of the physical impediment, but rather in line with the concept that one who doesn't believe in resurrection will not experience it.

Cremation declares that this world is the beginning and end of Man. A basis of Jewish faith is that this is not true. The body is held on deposit, and together with the soul, it really belongs to G-d. G-d decides when and where a person should die, and what should be done with the body once it has fulfilled its "this-worldly" purpose.