



KINDER TORAH

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PARASHAS SHELACH

GRASSHOPPER OR GIANT?

"What was that little black thing, Avi? It jumped right in front of my face." "I think it was a grasshopper, Chaim. Let's look for it."

"There it is, I see it in the grass. It is a grasshopper."

"It sure is small, Chaim."

"Yes it is, Avi. It gives me a whole new perspective on the *chet ha'meraglim* (sin of the spies)."

"That was no small sin, Chaim. It caused an entire generation to die in the desert. It prevented a miraculous conquest of Eretz Yisrael, which would have resulted in the Jewish people settling there under the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu and brought the world to its final perfection. That would have been the greatest event in world history. What went wrong? What caused them to commit such a terrible sin?"

"That question is the subject of much discussion among the *meforshim*. Rav Sholmo Volbe zt"l spoke about it. He focused on the verse, 'There we saw the Nefilim, the sons of the giant from the Nefilim; we were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so we were in their eyes' (Bamidbar 13:33)."

"Grasshoppers are pretty small, as we see, Chaim."

"Yes, Avi. The residents of the Holy Land were giants. Rav Hirsch cites the Gemora (Zevachim 113a) and explains that the flood waters caused a weakening of the productivity of the soil of the lands of the earth. The flood waters did not fall in Eretz Yisrael, therefore, the Holy Land's power to produce giants was not diminished.* The *meraglim* saw people and fruits that were physical giants. The Ha'amek Davar comments that their hearts fell from fear. They took this as a sign that they would not be able to overcome these physical giants. And so, they gave their bad report."

"How could such a thing have happened?"

"That is Rav Volbe's question. Let us not forget that these *meraglim* were Princes of Klal Yisrael. They had stood at Har Sinai, seen the revelation of the Shechina, and heard the Dibros from Hashem's mouth. Their souls were filled with Torah and Yiras Shomayim. Would an Odom Godol ever describe himself as a grasshopper? Never! How could they have been intimidated by the size of the residents of the land? Didn't they know that Hashem would fight for them, just as He did in Mitzrayim and at the Yam Suf?"

"Yes, it is very surprising that they could

make such a mistake."

"Rav Volbe answers that it all depends upon how a person sees himself. Does he focus on his *ruchnius* (spirituality) or his *gashmius* (physicality)? If the *meraglim* had kept their minds on their high spiritual *madrayga* (level), they could not have gone wrong. They were Gedolei Yisrael, full of Torah and mitzvos. They were living in the world of *ruchnius* – only thinking about Hashem. What was there to fear? Nothing! He would take care of them. However, they lost the focus. They forgot about the *ruchnius* and entered the world of *gashmius*. In that physical world, they were small and weak next to the giants that lived in the land. And so, they lost their advantage – their *ruchnius* – and they failed."

"We have to learn a lesson from this, Chaim. We also are free to choose what we will focus on. We can spend our time thinking about Torah and mitzvos and be on an exalted *madrayga*. This leads to wonderful things. Because we think about Hashem, He thinks about us and helps us in every way possible. We should all be *zoche* (merit) to be with the Almighty, and have Him with us at all times."



LIFE'S TAPESTRY

The mitzvah of *tzitzis* (tying strings onto the corners of our garments) is unique. It has the power to remind us of all of Hashem's mitzvos. As the verse states, "That you may see it (the *tzitzis*) and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and perform them" (Bamidbar 15:39). What gives the *tzitzis* this special capability that no other mitzvah has? The Meshech Chochma has a beautiful parable to describe this precious mitzvah.

The Almighty created His world unfinished. He placed mankind, creatures with free will, here on this planet. When we exercise our free will properly and follow the Will of the Creator, we perform constructive deeds known as mitzvos. These mitzvos fix up the world, and elevate it to a holy status. And so, the world is compared to an unfinished garment. Similar to our *tallis* (four cornered garment) which has two finished sides and two sides left with unwoven strings. The Creator gave us a mitzvah to tie *tzitzis* (strings) and fix up the garment. And so, this is a parable to fixing up the world. We do our little part, by tying the strings, and we receive Divine Assistance the rest of the way.

Everything that Hashem created in this world has a mitzvah associated with it. When we perform the mitzvah, we "tie" that thing to Hashem. That allows the wellsprings of nature to open up and pour out their blessings. And so, the universe comes to perfection. If you, mankind, will weave together the threads of this world, you will become partners with Hashem in *maase bereshis* (the creation of the universe).

Kinderlach . . .

Have you ever created something? Built a model? Drawn a picture? Thought of a chiddush (original Torah thought)? Written an essay? Baked a cake? Didn't you get a tremendous feeling of satisfaction? You can help create something bigger than all of those things put together. The universe. Do a mitzvah. Perfect the world. The next time you look at your tzitzis, remember all of the mitzvos. Weave them into the tapestry of life.

Kinderlach . . .

You can be a spiritual giant. Don't lose the focus! Think about Hashem! Learn His Torah and keep it forefront in your minds. Always pay attention to His mitzvos and look for every opportunity to fulfill them. Remember that you are a keli (vessel) full of Torah and mitzvos. That is your focus; that is your perspective; that is your life.

*He adds that this growth potential applies to *ruchnius* also. When a Jew living in Eretz Yisrael focuses on spiritual growth, the Land has the power to make him into a spiritual giant. Had the Klal Yisrael entered the Land at this time, they would have grown to this highest level possible, and returned the earth to its original perfection like Gan Eden.

Parasha Questions:

- What happened to those Jews who tried to conquer Eretz Yisrael the morning after the *chet ha'meraglim*? (14:40-45)
- How did the *meraglim* die? (Rashi 14:37)
- Where does the word "tzitzis" come from? (Rashi 15:38)

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