

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

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INDEPENDENT DECISIONS

This week's *parshah* begins with the words *Shelach lecha*, "Send for yourself." As Rashi explains, the word *lecha* indicates that Hashem wasn't commanding Moshe to send spies, rather it was to be up to Moshe's discretion.

Rashi then gives a bit of background: The *yidden* approached Moshe and requested that he send spies, and Moshe asked Hashem what to do. Hashem replied: "I told them that Eretz Yisrael is a good land and there is no need to investigate further. If they want to send spies, I won't stop them. I will let them err so they won't inherit it."

A BAFFLING CHOICE

This story begs for an explanation. How could Moshe send spies when it was clear that Hashem wasn't pleased with the *yidden's* request?

Until that point, Moshe didn't make a move without first consulting Hashem. Most of the time he was given instructions at the outset; if not (for example, by Pesach Sheni and by the *korbanos* of the *nesi'im*), he asked Hashem for his consent and only then took action. If Hashem didn't instruct him to send spies and left it up to him, it's quite clear that He wasn't happy with it. Why did Moshe decide to send them anyway?!

Furthermore, Hashem clearly expressed the reason why there was no need to send spies—because He had explicitly foretold the land's goodness. There should be no reason why Moshe would want to send spies!

Another question: In *Parshas Chukas* we find that Moshe sent

meraglim (according to most *mefarshim*, on his own initiative) to spy the city of Yaazer, and later, Yehoshua sent spies to Yericho. How could they send spies when they saw the negative outcome of the first episode, which resulted in a forty-year journey and the death of an entire generation of *yidden*?!

ANTICIPATING HASHEM'S WILL

The Midrash tells us that *Matan Torah* accomplished the elevation of what is below ("*tachtonim yaalu la'elyonim*"). This means that

a *yid* is not supposed to fulfill *mitzvos* merely with *kabbolas ol*, rather he should try his best to understand whatever he can, so that his physical intellect will be elevated to the truth of Torah. This is why one should even try to explain *chukim* to the best of his ability (as the Rambam says at the end of *sefer korbanos*).

This itself can be expressed in various ways. One system is to do one's best to understand a *mitzvah* **after** it has been commanded. Alternatively, one can try to recognize what Hashem wishes even **before** being told about it.

This was Moshe's logic when sending the spies. Although Hashem hadn't instructed him to send them, Moshe reasoned that perhaps it was time for the concept of *tachtonim yaalu la'elyonim* to be taken to the next level: until now, anything in doubt was brought to Hashem; now it was time to arrive at His will independently.

This idea was actually imparted by Hashem Himself. "Send for yourself" doesn't mean that Hashem was mixing out; it means that Hashem was **instructing Moshe** to reach a conclusion on his own.

"A *yid* is not supposed to fulfill *mitzvos* merely with *kabbolas ol*. He should try to understand whatever he can, so that his intellect will be elevated to the truth of Torah."

APPRECIATING ERETZ YISRAEL

Reaching Hashem's will on one's own initiative is even more important in the context of our *parshah*—the preparation to conquer Eretz Yisrael.

The conquering of Eretz Canaan and transforming it into a holy land was the epitome of *dirah betachtonim*, elevating the world to *kedushah*. An important aspect of creating a *dirah betachtonim* is that it must be supported by the *tachtonim* **themselves**. In the context of conquering Eretz Yisrael, this means that the *yidden* weren't merely supposed to rely on Hashem's word that it is a good land (although His word is certainly true). Hashem wanted the *yidden* to appreciate the land on their own, by sending spies to report on its beauty and richness.

Hashem's displeasure was because the *yidden* later made their entry be dependent on sending spies. Obviously, there was no need to send spies to determine **whether** to conquer the land or not. If Hashem commanded them to do so, then that was the course they should take. Hashem wanted spies to be sent for a different reason altogether—so that the *yidden* would achieve a meaningful appreciation of Eretz Yisrael.

ULTIMATE BECHIRAH

Since the conquest of Eretz Yisrael is a key theme in the Torah, a wide-ranging lesson can be learned from the way Hashem wanted it to take place.

When Hashem said he would let the *yidden* err, it doesn't mean that he didn't want them to inherit Eretz Yisrael. It was because Hashem wanted to give them the ability to have the ultimate *bechirah chofshis*.

When Hashem commands a person to do a *mitzvah*, his intellect

tends to find a rationale behind it, making it easier for him to choose the correct path. By putting the decision in their hands, Hashem allowed for the greatest type of *bechirah chofshis*: there is room for mistake, yet a person toils and reaches the right decision on his own.

There are times a person is confronted with a test that seems too great to be overcome. When found in such a position, one should realize that Hashem is placing the wrong path within reach to give him the ability to have true *bechirah chofshis*.

“When a person goes beyond the letter of the law and strives to study Torah and fulfill *mitzvos behiddur*, the *dirah betachtonim* he creates is truly part of him.”

This is also the meaning of Hashem's words, “so they will not **inherit** it.” An inheritance is something a person earns without effort; he has no connection to the estate and receives it by the mere virtue of being the inheritor. Hashem wanted Eretz Yisrael to be more than an inheritance; he wanted it be given as a **gift**. A gift is not given to anyone; it is given to someone who has acted beneficially in the past. Similarly, Hashem wanted the *yidden* to put effort into appreciating the land, thus allowing it to truly become theirs.

ELEVATING THE OPTIONAL

This idea can be applied to many areas. One example is found at the end of the *parshah*, which discusses the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*. Unlike *tefillin* and other *mitzvos*, *tzitzis* is somewhat optional: there is no obligation to buy a four-sided garment that requires *tzitzis*. But this is the whole idea: Hashem wants us to act on our own initiative and elevate the **optional** to *kedushah*.

In principle, a person can make do with studying “a chapter in the morning and a chapter in the evening.” However, when a person goes beyond the letter of the law and strives to study Torah and fulfill *mitzvos behiddur*, the *dirah betachtonim* he creates is truly part of him.

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