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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Shelach ✍️ Rabbi Nochum Bauman

Reach your Potential

How can it be that 12 people who just 40 days earlier were described as being great individuals (“And they were all men” 13:3 see Rashi), made such a turnabout and became the cause of great mourning for the Jewish people for generations to come? Did they lack bitachon and doubt that Hashem would help them enter Eretz Yisroel? Perhaps this phenomenon can be explained as follows. After the 12 spies returned from their “mission” of checking out the land of Israel, they reported to Moshe and the nation saying, “We saw the giants and we were in our eyes like grasshoppers, and that’s how we were in their eyes.” (13.33) The spies viewed themselves together with the whole nation as **unworthy** of Hashem’s help to overcome the giants due to their many sins, such as the Golden calf, serving Idols in Egypt, etc. They therefore **underestimated** themselves of being worthy to overcome the inhabitants of Eretz Yisroel.

This idea is illustrated in the following story. There was once a homeless man named Sam, who would stand outside a Manhattan office building every day, collecting coins and selling pens in order to have money to buy food. Most of the people that worked in the building did not pay much attention to him, and even though they dropped some coins into his can, they never took the time to stop and speak to him. One day, a new employee, R’ Chaim, came to the company, and as he walked through the door he noticed Sam standing there with his tin can. He took out some coins and dropped

them in the tin can, and then R’ Chaim smiled and said, “One day you’ll be a business man like me.” This went on daily for several months until R’ Chaim was transferred to a different branch of the company. Several years later, a well dressed business man entered R’ Chaim’s office and said to him, “Do you recognize me?” Startled, R’ Chaim answered, “No, am I supposed to?” The man told him that his name was Sam and that he was the homeless man that used to stand outside his company’s door and collect coins. R’ Chaim could not believe his ears. “How did you become such a respectful business man?” R’ Chaim asked. Sam smiled and said, “It was all thanks to you. Every day, after you put some coins into my can, you would tell me with a smile ‘you’ll be a business man like me one day.’ I actually began to believe in myself again! With your encouragement, I took off my homeless clothes and began working towards this goal!”

The power of self-worth is invaluable! “And you will be for me a kingdom of Kohanim and a great nation”. We must constantly keep in mind that we are Hashem’s chosen people. This belief will hopefully encourage us to live up to our true potential. May we be zoche to recognize the extent of our greatness, to believe in it, and then to act upon it! May Moshiach come speedily in our day.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Visiting Kivrei Avos and Tzaddikim

Rabbi Henschel Plotnik

As the meraglim entered Eretz Yisroel, Kalev detoured to Chevron in order to daven at the hallowed burial place of the Avos (Sotah 34b). Kalev asked the Avos to daven on his behalf that he not fall prey to the counsel and evil plan of his fellow meraglim. This serves as one source for the time-honored custom of visiting kevarim, especially of ancestors, and to pour one's heart out in tefillah there (See also ms' Ta'anis 16a Rav Mani). Indeed, Kevar Rachel has always been a place of tefillah as Rachel herself declared she would daven on our behalf as we passed her by on our way to Galus. Although Rashi in Vayechi quotes this well known Chazal, it does not actually say that we would daven at Rochel's kever, rather that Rochel would cry for us. There is, however, another Chazal that says that when Yosef was sold into slavery in Egypt, he stopped at Kevar Rachel to daven, and Rachel answered him that Hashem would always protect him (quoted in P'nei Baruch ch. 37:1).

Rashi in Ms' Yevamos (122A) quotes the geonim that on a yahrtzeit of a great man, people visit his gravesite. The Sefer Chasidim writes that the deceased benefit when their beloved ones go to their kever and pray for their souls. (#450 and #710). In turn, the deceased intercede on behalf of the living (#757).

The Ran (droshos #8) writes that tefillah at the kever of a tzaddik is especially potent, and according to the Gra, in a generation bereft of tzaddikim where the shechina cannot easily find a place to dwell, it is present at the eternal resting places of tzaddikim (Quoted in Medrash Halacha Parshas Shlach). According to the famous Kabbalistic Sefer, Leshem Shvo V'achlama, the kever of a tzaddik in the diaspora has the same kedusha as one in Eretz Yisrael! (See Minchas Elazar Vol.1 #68 for a lengthy discourse on the joy this brings to the niftar as well).

Seforim caution against directing tefillos towards the deceased in a way that implies we are asking them to answer us. This would chaila border on "doresh el hamaysim", and accepting other powers besides Hashem Himself upon ourselves.

There is a dispute amongst the various authorities however, as to the manner with which we daven at a kever. According to the Gesher Hachaim (vol 2 p.207), the crux of the argument is if we are able to address the maysim directly to ask them to intercede on our behalf, or can we only daven to Hashem directly that He accept their pleas for us. A tefilla sets off a chain of events that arouses the nefesh of the niftar which hovers over the gravesite. In turn, the nefesh informs the "ruach" which is yet further above, and the ruach then informs the neshama. (Based on the Zohar as quoted

in Gesher HaChaim). In this way, the tefilla eventually "reaches" Hashem (See also Tosfos in Sotah 34b that describes the sequence of the chain of tefilla at a kever). It is because of this machlokes that various texts in davening and selichos have differing nuschaos (versions).

Despite the abovementioned sources, some still maintain not to speak directly to the deceased and not to request his intercession, but only to daven to Hashem on the merit of the niftar. (See Be'er Hetev 581 and Chayei Odom Ch. 138 as well as the Bach Y.D. 217 just to name a few sources) Additionally, there is also a dispute concerning how to address angels when we daven and enlist their aid on our behalf- a topic for separate discussion.

It is a widespread assumption that if one has not visited the gravesite of his ancestors for 7 years, he should never go again. The She'arim M'tzuyanim B'halacha (128 note 22) quotes from the Shem M'Shimon that this is totally unfounded, and in fact the Zohar in Parshas Shmos reports that one particular great man visited his father's burial place after a 12 year lapse. Among other sources, he quotes the Sanzer Rov, that if there was a big lapse since the last visit, one should send a messenger ahead of time to notify the niftar. There are other versions of this "k'peida" that ten years is the maximum time one should allow between visits. Interestingly, the P'nei Baruch mentions a proof in the name of Sefer Yosef Da'as, that from Kalev himself we see no such concern for he had never been to Chevron before this encounter mentioned in the Chumash! This proof however has been dismissed, for some authorities hold that the k'peida only applies for lapses **between** visits, and not for first time pilgrims.

The Gesher Hachaim dismisses any concern for the above, and when one was simply not able to go (anus) other authorities feel that there is no reason altogether to refrain from visiting (see P'nei Baruch ch. 37 note 47). Since this whole concept has no source in Shas, Poskim, or any other reliable sefer (even the Ta'amei Minhagim refers to it only as "something people say"), Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 2 #612) discourages people from refraining from visiting a parent's kever after a long lapse in light of the mitzvah of kibbud av v'em.

In conclusion, Rav Shternbuch writes in another teshuva (vol 3:61) that he has a tradition when davening at the kever of a tzaddik to include in his tefila that he be answered in the merit of all the tzaddikim buried there. Otherwise, he writes, he will be taken to task for not emulating the ways of that particular tzaddik. At a parent's kever however, one only davens there, out of honor for the parent.

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