Shelach 2017

1.

What was the sin of the spies?

“Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan that I give to the children of Israel; one man each from his father’s tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them.” (13, 2)

"שלח לך אנשים ויתרו את ארץ כנען אשר אני נתן לבני ישראל איש אחד איש אחד למטה אבתיו תשלחו כל נשיא בהם."

Rashi explains that the Jews wanted to send spies to investigate the land, despite Hashem assuring them that everything would be good. Hashem then guaranteed that the spies will error since they didn’t trust Him. The Sifsei Chachamim explains that they were mistaken when they claimed that the land eats its own people. The reason they though this is because they saw many people being buried.

The question arises; why is their punishment so great? Granted they made a mistake, but why were they so severely punished. **What was their big sin? Rabbi Yaakov Niemen** (Darchei mussar) explains that there are different levels of emunah (belief) in Hashem. One doesn’t need a lot of wisdom to realize that Hashem created the world. Just as other objects such as a watch weren’t made on their own, so too, the world wasn’t created on its own. The pasuk (Shemos 20, 2-3) says "אנכי יקוק אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים." “I am Hashem Your God Who took you out of Egypt.” This is the first commandment. Why does the pasuk say that Hashem took you out of Egypt as opposed to that He created the world? It is evident that Hashem created the world. However, being taken out of Egypt is less apparent. This is the second level of emunah; realizing that Hashem is behind everything, even acts that appear natural or humanly orchestrated. There is even a higher level of emunah than this however. We mustn’t question Hashem’s actions. When Moshe informed the Jews when they were in Egypt that they would be taken out from Egypt by Hashem, everyone agreed as stated in the pasuk. It was very easy for them to believe this since it was such good news. This is why Shiur Hashirim is holier than all other shiros, including Koheles, Dovids song and Devora’s song etc. All of these songs were sung during times of success. Shiur Hashirim differs in this regard. It was sung during times of hardship. Believing in Hashem during difficult times is more of a challenge, and thus greater than believing in Hashem during times of success. Hashem commanded Avraham to offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice. Avraham didn’t question Hashem’s commandment, despite Hashem’s assurance of many children descending from Yitzchak.

With this we can explain the spy’s sin. If Hashem said Israel will be good, then it won’t be bad, even if there are people being buried. Such great people should have more emunah. At their level this is considered a sin.

2.

Why is the tzadik specifically compared to dates and cedar trees?

“And how is the land in which it dwells-is it fertile or is it lean? are there trees in it or not? You shall strengthen yourselves and take from the fruit of the land.” (13, 20)

"ומה הארץ השמנה הוא אם רזה היש בה עץ אם אין והתחזקתם ולקחתם מפרי הארץ והימים ימי בכורי ענבים."

Why is this pasuk in the singular tense? Seemingly it would be more appropriate to say see if there are trees. What land doesn't have trees? Furthermore, they were already instructed to see if the land was fertile or not. Why then does the pasuk return and command them to see if there are trees? Rashi explains that this pasuk refers to investigating if there is a kosher person so that everyone would be protected in his merit. The Maskil LeDovid explains that Rashi offered this explanation because the pasuk says tree in the singular tense, and because they were already instructed to see if the land was fertile or not. **Rashi Kepeshuto explains that tzaddikim are compared to trees because just like trees provide shade and protect everything around it, so too, tzaddikim provide shade and protect everything around them.**

The pasuk in Tehilim (92, 13) says "A righteous man will flourish like a date palm, like a cedar in the Lebanon he will grow tall." "צדיק כתמר יפרח כארז בלבנון ישגה." **Why is the tzadik compared to a date tree and a cedar tree?** The date tree is shorter than the cedar tree. Date trees produce a lot of fruit. The dates receive their nutrients from the date tree. Consequently, the date tree becomes weak and its height is stunted. The cedar tree doesn't have any fruit. Thus, it is able to grow taller. The tzadik is compared to both of these tree's, explains the Ozer Hamashalim quoting the Hafllah because he consists of both. **Tzaddikim positively influence other people who are compared to fruit. These tzaddikim use a lot of their energy to help others turn into beautiful fruit. Perhaps the growth of these tzaddikim will be stunted similar to the date tree since they spend so much of their precious time and energy helping others. Dovid Hamelech is therefore informing us that this is not true. Rather the tzadik will grow tall similar to the cedar tree.**

Another explanation is as follows. The Meod Loez explains that date trees take a lot of time to produce fruit. So too, it takes a lot of time to see the fruits from the actions of a tzadik. Furthermore, just like the date tree grows in an erect position, so too, tzaddikim grow straightly. They don't get distracted by other temptations. The Nachlas Tzvi (end of parshas Vayishlach page 90) elaborates and says it is very hard to consistently learn and perform mitzvos throughout ones entire life without every deviating. It is for this reason that the tzadik is compared to the date tree; because dates trees grow straight up.
It is noteworthy to point out that there are exceptions. There have been certain tzaddikim who have stumbled and then gotten up again and fixed themselves.