



Parshas Shelach 2020, the significance of our actions

Our Parsha begins with the episode of the spies' reconnaissance of the land of Israel. The Jewish people lacked faith in what G-D had told them about the land, so they asked Moshe if they could send spies to study Israel and report back.

Moshe asks G-D, who replies that he is allowed to send spies, but He is not commanding him to do so. Moshe then picked one leader from each tribe and assigned them this special task.

The spies headed out to perform their directives, they spent 40 days surveying the land and its people. When they returned to Moshe, they reported that the land was indeed flowing with milk and honey. But they warned that its citizens are giants who are powerful and mighty, and its cities are well fortified. Therefore, it will be impossible to conquer.

The Jewish nation turned to Moshe and told him that they rather return to Egypt than be defeated in battle. Upon hearing their complaints, G-D informed Moshe that He would punish the Jewish people for their persistent lack of faith. He exiled the Jewish nation to forty years of wandering throughout the desert and banned any male over the age of 20 from entering the land of Israel.

The Parsha concludes with a story of a man who was caught gathering wood in direct defiance of the laws of Shabbos. The men who found him brought him before Moshe Rabbienu to be judged. Moshe asked G-d what should be done, as he did not know what to do. G-d replied that he must stone this man to death for breaking Shabbos.

However, a question comes to mind: How did Moshe not know what to do in a person clearly breaking Shabbos? Didn't Moshe Rabbienu bring down the two sets of

Luchas and spend many days and nights studying the Torah with G-d? Why did he ask G-d what should be done in a seemingly obvious situation?!

The Gemara in Bava Basra (119b) explains that Moshe had to ask G-d what to do in this case because the man in question was actually righteous. As we see in Parshas Pinchas (27:1), his name was Tzelafchad, and his daughters were called righteous for being instrumental in fundamentally changing inheritance laws. The Kli Yakar writes that they learned their righteousness from their father.

The Tosfos in Bava Basra clarifies that Tzelafchad's rationale for breaking Shabbos was only for the sake of G-d. For many people were saying since G-d decreed that they were not going to enter the land of Israel, there was no longer an obligation to perform the Mitzvahs. So Tzelafchad stood up and desecrated Shabbos to show the Jewish nation the consequences of such actions.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe writes that although his intentions were pure, his Shabbos desecration could not be excused. Keeping and guarding the Shabbos demonstrates our belief that G-d created the world. As we say during Davening on Shabbos morning, *“The Jewish people shall keep Shabbos, for observing Shabbos throughout the ages is a covenant for all time. It is a sign for all of time between the Jewish nation and Me. Because G-d made heaven and earth in six days, and on the seventh day, He rested from work and was refreshed.”*

In our daily life and during these trying times, it is imperative that we understand that our actions, no matter how big or small, have real value. This is both an amazing privilege and a great responsibility.

Since we were given the freedom to choose, we are accountable for all the decisions we make. Thus, it is essential that we consider the consequences of our actions before they happen. We need to ask ourselves if this decision will lead me closer to reaching my goals and accomplishing my potential.

***“Intentions do not insulate us from the consequences of our actions.
Good intentions might sound nice, but the positive deeds matter.”***

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*