

דרכים בפרשה של

R' Mordechai Appel, an alumnus of Yeshivas Mir Yerushalayim, is a regular Maggid Shiur in the Toronto community.



ומה הארץ השמנה הוא אם רזה היש בה עץ אם אין (י"ג, כ)

What is the land like; is it fat or lean? Are there any trees in it or not? (13:20)

Moshe Rabbeinu agreed to allow the spies to investigate the land, giving exact instructions regarding which information was pertinent to seek out. One of the items on the list was to confirm whether “there are trees in it or not”. Rashi explains that the word *eitz* refers to an *adam kasher*, a righteous man who would protect the inhabitants of Canaan through his *zechusim*.

A tree is a *mashal* to a tzaddik in whose merit a community or an individual is sustained. HOWEVER, in order to receive the merit of the tzaddik, one must be *machshiv* the tzaddik by showing him the proper *kavod*. If he “knocks” the tzaddik with every opportunity he gets, the merit of the tzaddik will not be there for him in his time of need.

In a *chassidische pshat*, Rav Meir Premishlaner z”l suggests that the episode of the *mekoshesh eitzim* was exactly this. The *mekoshesh* would go around gathering wood. Some trees he would chop down and others he would leave standing. He decided which tree was worthy and which one was not; which one would be firewood waiting to be burnt to a crisp, and which ones were good for building. The *mekoshesh* denigrated the tzaddikim. He decided that he knew who was worthy of being an “*eitz*”-tzaddik. Within a matter of seconds, he felt as if he could size up people and decide, *hayesh ba eitz im ayin*.

In today’s day and age of social media, we face the danger of the *mekoshesh eitzim*. Some punk can sit behind his desk and blog all his filth about *gedolei yisroel*, deciding who is an *eitz* and who is not, and every reader feels obliged to add his two cents. Sadly, when in times of need, the merits of the *tzaddikei hador* will not be there for them. The Chafetz Chaim warns us that it is not only the ones that say or write these words, but also the ones that read them and involve themselves with these discussions.

Chazal tell us that an *apikores* has no share in the World to Come. The *gemara* defines an *apikores* as one that denigrates *talmidei chachomim*. But why should it be that all is lost because of a negative comment about our gedolim?

This can be explained with the following *vort* from Rav Yisroel Salanter zt”l. The *gemara* in *Masechta Taanis* (24b) relates that each day a *bas kol*, a heavenly voice,

would call out, “*The entire world is being sustained because of Chanina bni; Chanina himself suffices with only a small measure of carob from week to week.*” This means that if Shimon succeeds in a very large deal, it is through the merit of the tzaddik, who himself lives on practically nothing.

Let us continue to the next step: Shimon sits at the table in shul during shalosh seudos and partakes in a conversation poking fun at our gedolim. This goes on week after week. In the meantime, business is great as usual. Fast forward 120 years: He comes Upstairs and they go through his checks and balances. They note that he was careful with Shabbos. He only ate the finest *hechsherim* and gave an endless amount of *tzedaka*. His *kibud av v’aim* was second to none, and he managed to complete *shas* no less than three times with *Tosafos*. Shimon is literally licking his lips imagining his portion. But then they show him the video (yes, the “*ayin ro’eh*” webcam is working even on shabbos) of him sitting there time and time again talking against or even merely participating in conversations knocking the gedolim. The gavel goes down and they tell him that he has nothing. *Zilch!*

“But what of Shaabos? What about all the mitzvos that I accomplished?” They respond that the list is quite impressive indeed. At this point losing himself, he yells, “SO WHERE IS MY REWARD?!” So now they show him the video screen yet again. They show him a beautiful home, a nice car, healthy children, and a wonderful wife. They explain that none of this comes for free. It must be earned. The fact that he honored his parents so beautifully gave him many healthy years. The merit of shabbos *Parshas Lech Lecha* caused him to receive a wonderful *nachas* report that week. The merit of learning *Tosafos* on *daf chaf zayin* got him his car. The *tzeddaka* that he gave earned him a large salary. They complete the entire list. He begins to cry and he asks, “What about my business partner and *chavrusah*; we did everything together, surely he has *gan eden*?” They respond that of course he does; a truly beautiful portion and they show it to him. He sees one gold tower marked shabbos, and another marked *bikur cholim* etc. Not comprehending, he questions why he has nothing; what is the difference between them? They explain, “Your partner had a great *parnassa* because of the tzaddik, and his car, the *nachas*, *shalom bayis* et al. are all on the tzaddik’s credit card. When he arrives up here, his account is still full. But because you made fun of the tzaddik you could not live off of him, therefore you have used all your reward in *Olam Hazeh*.”

As *Moshiach* draws closer, let us be *mechazek* ourselves in our *emunas chachomim*, and in that *zchus*, we should have all the *shefa* that we need down here, without using up any of our *schar* in the world to come!

מרדכי אפפלי, Good Shabbos,