

דרכים
בפרשה
שלה

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ומה הארץ השמנה הוא אם רזה היש בה עץ אם עין

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 them the 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: **אם יש בהם** - **אדם כשר שיגן עליהם בזכותו** - 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. We find throughout the Torah that Tzaddikim are compared to trees (צדיק כתמר יפרח, כארו בלבנון ישגה)

However, it must be pointed out that in order to receive the merit of the tzaddik, one must be *machshiv* the tzaddik by showing 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.

When looking at these comments (based on the Gemara in Bava Basra 15), we must wonder why Rashi chose to explain the possuk based on a Aggadic interpretation. Doesn't Rashi always choose to go with the simplest, yet true to the possuk's interpretation? Wouldn't a simple reading of the possuk tell us that Moshe was asking them to inspect the trees? Furthermore, Rashi does explain all of the other items in the simple manner. So why the deviation here in these words?

The Ohr Hachaim and many other meforshim indeed explain the simple p'shat as teaching us that they were to inspect: **אם יש בה עץ** - if there were the regular trees, **אם אין** - as well as the more exotic trees *not* found in regular settings. This is because Eretz Yisroel is a place that lacks absolutely nothing, hence the need to

confirm that the Land has everything, plus all the extras.

The meforshim explain that if we look at the earlier words of the possuk, **ומה הארץ השמנה הוא אם רזה** - *What is the land like; is it fat or lean*, this would already cover the idea of telling the meraglim to look at everything on the land. This would surely include looking at the trees. A “fat” land would obviously have many trees as well. Accordingly, Rashi saw fit to interpret the possuk as teaching us something much more. The mission that they were sent for was to determine the security.

Furthermore, where were the meraglim looking for this Tzaddik? They were not looking in the shuls or the Beis Midrash. They looked on the streets, in the marketplace and in the fields. The reason is because the effect of a tzaddik and the protection he affords is not just in the beis midrash but actually everywhere and at all times.

So in that manner, Rashi quoted the gemara's interpretation - “Is there a tzaddik that will protect the Land?”

But we can ask again that this still seems to be different than the simple explanation of the possuk which is most uncharacteristic of Rashi!

It must be that Rashi understood that the concept of a tzaddik providing protection to a generation isn't just a stretch in the words of the possuk, nor is it a nice “chassidische pshat”. The *hailige* Rashi looked at our possuk and said, “this is poshut p'shat!” This is the basics of the way this world works. The tzaddikim are the ones that protect the generation. With their merits, even Bnei Yisroel themselves would need to rethink how to penetrate Eretz Yisroel. But without them, the security threat is so real that the Land is literally open for the taking.

This past week, here in Toronto, as well as other major cities of Klal Yisroel, we witnessed and partook in an event that far “eclipsed” the solar event of April 2024. In each and every location that the Gedolei Hador came to visit for a few precious moments, there were

hundreds, if not thousands, of men women and children that came to catch a glimpse of the kedusha. There were no special glasses that were given out to shield the eyes from the damage caused by such sights. It was exactly the opposite. The glasses required were those of emunah in the tzaddik. These glasses of emunah would provide protection for the entire generation. והיו עיניך רואות את מוריך!

In the times that we live in, with the difficult decrees that the world of Torah is faced with, it is a tremendous chizuk for us all to realize that יש בה עץ! There are trees. We have tzaddikim guiding us and we are not an orphaned generation. It is no wonder that within a few days, such an incredible amount of money was raised for the Torah of Eretz Yisroel, thus demonstrating that we fully accept the words of the Tzaddikim.

Regarding the zechus of those that follow the Tzaddik, it is worthwhile to repeat the following vort from Rav Yisroel Salanter zt"l:

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?

The *gemara* in *Masechta Taanis* (24b) relates: אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בכל יום ויום בת קול יוצאת ואומרת: כל העולם כולו ניזון בשביל חנינא בני, וחנינא בני דיו בקב הרובים מערב שבת לערב שבת: each day a *bas kol*, a heavenly voice, would call out, "The entire world is being sustained because of Chanina my son; 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, even on shabbos) of him sitting there time and time again talking against the gedolim. The gavel goes down and they tell him that he has nothing. Zilch!

"But what of the rewards of Shabbos? 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. 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. 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 Hazeih*."

As Moshiach draws closer, let us be mechazek ourselves in our *emunas chachomim*, and understand that we are only safe in this world in their merit. In that zchus, we should have all the protection and *shefa* that we need down here, without using up any of our *schar* in the world to come!

מרדכי אפפּעל, Good Shabbos,