



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Don't Count Your Eggs before They Hatch

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In loving memory of

ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman
who loved and supported Torah learning.

Shelach

Don't Count Your Eggs before They Hatch

“ The Right of Return.”

The so-called “Right of Return” is a problem that is constantly discussed. Every time that the subject of the Palestinians comes up, the subject of the Right of Return also comes up—the question of what to do with the hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees who fled the Holy Land during the 1948 War of Independence, with many of them (and their children and grandchildren) living in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon.

These refugees claim that they want to go back to their old homes in Haifa, Jaffa, Beersheba and so on.

Israel, of course, is sharply opposed to this idea. But the question remains: How did this problem come about in the first place? Why indeed did hundreds of thousands of Arabs abandon their homes in 1948? Why did they flee?

One of the central reasons for this flight is that the armies of the Arab countries announced to the Arabs living in Israel before the war that they were going to overpower the Jews living in the country with planes, tanks, shells and so on—and so it would be better for them to get out and let them do their work. And when they would be done wiping out the Jews, G-d forbid, their Arab brethren could happily return to their homes.

The radio station of the Haganah, the fledgling Israeli military, on the other hand, urged the Arab residents to stay put and not flee. But the Arabs didn't listen to the Jews' requests, instead listening to the instructions of the Arab leaders and running away.

And what happened, as everyone knows, was the complete opposite: Israel won the war and now, the former Arab residents had nowhere to come back home to. The irony is that before the war even began, the Arabs were talking as if they already won the war!

A similar story happened in Biblical Israel.

The Tanach tells us of the Jewish king Achav, the ruler of the Jewish Nation from 740 to 720 BCE. He was a powerful king whose capital was in the Shomron region of the Holy Land.

But one day, King Achav got a message from Ben-Hadad, the King of Aram (today's Syria)—who had the mightiest military in the Middle East in those days.

So Ben-Hadad sent a message to Achav with the demand that the Kingdom of Israel submit to the Kingdom of Aram. "Your silver and gold are mine; your beautiful wives and children are mine," said Ben-Hadad to Achav (Kings I 20:3).

Achav figured that the King of Aram wanted the Kingdom of Israel to submit to him and pay him a huge tribute—like the 32 other kings who had submitted to Aram. So he sent a message back to Ben-Hadad: "As you say, my master, the king, I am yours as well as all that is mine."

However, he got back a sharply worded message of the King of Aram. Ben-Hadad demanded that Achav physically transfer to him all the gold and silver and womenfolk and children of the Kingdom of Israel. To this, of course, Achav could not agree.

Achav called an urgent meeting of the nation's elders—something like Congress—and asked for their opinion. They answered him that he should in no way respond to such claims: "Do not obey and do not consent."

When Ben-Hadad heard Achav's response, he warned him that he'll come with an army so big that the Shomron sands wouldn't be enough to contain the footprints of his soldiers—he basically told Achav that he was going to wipe out the Kingdom of Israel, that there would be nothing left of them.

But to that, the King of Israel issued a response that became a famous saying for all generations to come: "One who girds shall not boast as one who ungirds."

"One who girds" refers to a warrior girding his sword before heading out to battle. "One who ungirds" means the warrior ungirding his sword upon returning from the field of battle." And what Achav was basically saying, "We're still before battle—don't boast as if you've already won." Ultimately, there was a great battle and, with G-d's help, the Kingdom of Israel won.

It's a pity the Arab world never learned this lesson.

And now, we come back to our weekly Torah portion.

In this week's Parshah, we read about the Miraglim, the famous ten spies who were sent by Moses at the command of G-d Himself to scout out the Holy Land.

Now, the ten Miraglim came back to the Jewish Nation camped in the desert outside the Holy Land and had a rather negative report to make: The land is impossible to conquer.

However, two of the ten denied this lie, and it was a lie, and shouted out, "Let us go up, for we can conquer it!" These were the heroes Joshua and Caleb.

And in this week's Haftarah, which we read after the Torah reading, we read about how Joshua actually conquered the land.

Now in general, when comparing Moshe Rabbeinu and Joshua, our Sages say, “the face of Moshe was like the sun, the face of Joshua was like the moon” (Rashi, Bamidbar 27:20). This means that just like the moon has no light of its own but merely reflects the sun’s light, so too was Joshua’s entire existence one of reflecting Moshe’s spiritual light unto others.

But there’s another side to this too. In the Book of Devarim (8:1), Rashi says that a mitzvah is “not called a mitzvah except by the name of the one who completes it”—meaning that a mitzvah done 1/3rd, 1/2 or even 3/4ths of the way is not complete. If you didn’t finish doing the entire mitzvah, it’s as if you didn’t do anything—and it is specifically those who complete the last quarter of the mitzvah who get credit for doing the entire mitzvah... even those parts that he or she didn’t do.

Rashi uses this explanation in connection with the burial of Yosef. Continuing the previous statement, Rashi writes, “As the verse states, ‘And the bones of Yosef which the Children of Israel had brought up from Egypt were buried in Shechem.’ But wasn’t Moshe alone involved with them to bring them up from Egypt? Rather, [it says ‘which the Children of Israel had brought up’] because [Moshe] had not done enough to complete it and it was completed by [the Children of] Israel, it is named after them.”

And we can possibly explain that, yes, Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who took the Jewish Nation out of Egypt, led them through the desert and even conquered the lands of Sichon and Og, and brought them to the doorstep of the Promised Land—but who actually brought the Jewish Nation into the Holy Land? This was Joshua. And thus, the mitzvah of inheriting the land was essentially completed by Joshua.

Moshe for his part, was the “girder”—he was the one who had “put on the sword”; he was the one who had started it. But who was the “remover”? Who was the one who came back from battle? This was Joshua.

You could be the greatest player of the universe. You could be considered the king of your sport. But if you don’t finish the last quarter of the game, you don’t have anything. And this is true for life in general and for Judaism in particular.

What gets recorded in history is not those who put on their swords but those who take them off. Bottom line? The most important thing of all is action.

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