



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Maapilim!

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In loving memory of

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

SHELACH

Maapilim!

Good Shabbos!

Who knows the story of the Maapilim? If you google that word, you will see the meaning as “Illegal immigrants who came to Palestine in the Aliya Bet program.

But if you read this week’s Parshah, we learn about the Maapilim too!!

The parsha talks about the *Meraglim*, the famous Spies.

The Jewish Nation had pressured Moshe Rabbeinu to send spies to check out the situation in the Land. Moshe had not wanted to do it. He claimed that if G-d wants to give us the Land, then we need to depend on Him that he’ll give us something good and under good conditions. But the Jews were stubborn.

Finally, Moshe sent 12 spies—and they returned with a summary: “We cannot go up”—it’s not going to work.

The Jewish Nation heard that, and immediately, the Torah tells us that “the nation cried that night,” shouting that they didn’t want to go into the Land. So G-d got involved in the middle of the chaos and immediately told Moshe: If they don’t want it, they don’t need it—so this generation shall perish in the desert and the next generation will enter the Land.

Up to that point, we've all heard the story.

But the story has a continuation. When Moshe came back to the people to tell them that they had just gotten a black stamp on their passports that said they'd never get into the Holy Land, they reacted in a way Moshe had not expected: "The nation mourned greatly"—for an entire night they cried over the decree that they would not be entering the Land at all.

But in the morning they woke up with a spirit of repentance, of *teshuvah*. As the Torah tells us, "They arose early in the morning and ascended to the mountain top, saying, 'We are ready to go up to the place of which the L-rd spoke, for we have sinned' " (Bamidbar 14:40). It had only been a moment for which their evil inclinations had gotten the better of them and had confused them—but as soon as they heard the decree, they immediately regretted what they had done.

So they pressured Moshe that now they do indeed really want to enter the Land. But Moshe informed them that it was now against G-d's Will: "It shall not succeed," as the Torah tells us.

But a small group of defiers, the "mapilim," insisted, and "they defiantly ascended to the mountain top." But the results were grim: "The Amalekites and Canaanites who lived on the mountain came down and smote them and crushed them until Chormah."

All they got was defeat.

The Rebbe asks: "This is amazing, because it's a known general rule that 'Nothing stands in the way of teshuvah'—and yet, even though the Jewish Nation did teshuvah from the Sin of the Spies and said, 'We are ready to go up to the place of which the L-rd spoke...' Moshe said to them, 'It shall not succeed.' "

Now this is a powerful question. After all, the rule in Judaism is that nothing stands in the way of repentance—and here, though they truly sinned when they said they don't want go up to the land, they already regretted it and said "we have sinned" by the next morning. So why did G-d not really accept their repentance? After all, the entire concept of teshuvah is the possibility to rectify the past.

There's a famous story in the Talmud about Elisha Ben Avuya, who was one of the greatest Sages of Israel and the teacher of the great Rabbi Meir. Yet somehow, the great Elisha Ben Avuya abandoned Judaism and fought against everything Jewish. He would actually go into yeshivos and convince students to leave the study hall and go study for a career. He likewise would give the Romans, who ruled the Holy Land at the time, advice on how to persecute the Jews and make them violate Shabbos. But despite all that, Rabbi Meir, his former student, didn't abandon him even after he went off the path and continued learning Torah from him.

So the Talmud tells us that one Shabbos when Rabbi Meir was lecturing in a study hall in Teveria (or Tiberias as it's called in English), someone suddenly notified him that his former master, Elisha Ben Avuya, was outside at the moment, riding by on a horse.

Rabbi Meir interrupted his lectures and went outside to meet him. Elisha asked him, "Nu? What did you say in your lecture?" So Rabbi Meir repeated his lecture to him. Elisha corrected him and said that Rabbi Akiva said otherwise. And so they walked along, the "teacher" riding on his horse on Shabbos and the student, a teacher in his own right, traveling alongside him by foot. And so they went a long distance from the city.

Suddenly, Elisha turned to Rabbi Meir and said, "Return back... the Shabbos limit ends here."

To explain: According to halachah, Jewish law, you're not allowed to walk more than 2,000 amos, which comes out to about 3,000 feet, outside the city into the wilderness. This distance is called the "techum Shabbos"—the Shabbos border.

So here, amazingly, Elisha Ben Avuya was worried that his religious student might violate the techum Shabbos on Shabbos. So Rabbi Meir seized the chance and turned those very words upon his former master: "You return too!" he said, meaning that he should come back to Judaism.

Elisha answered him that he had once been riding a horse in Jerusalem on Shabbos, and this Shabbos was also Yom Kippur, and he had passed behind the Kodosh HaKodashim, the Holy of Holies. While riding past, he heard a Bas Kol, a Heavenly Voice, saying, "Return, O wayward sons, except for Acher" (Acher (meaning "the other one") was the nickname given for Elisha Ben Avuya after he renounced Judaism.) This meant that everyone can do teshuvah, everyone will be accepted back by G-d, except for Acher. That was the voice Elisha heard from Heaven, and so he essentially told Rabbi Meir, "I'm doomed. I have no chance."

Here the Rebbe asks, "Apparently no one could come to Elisha with complaints"—he explicitly heard that he would not be accepted if he returned. So what do we want from him?

But the Rebbe says that the explanation is that "despite having heard a voice from Heaven like that, he needed to try to do teshuvah by pushing his way in, and then his teshuvah would have been accepted in spite of the heavenly voice."

Judaism believes that nothing stands in the way of teshuvah indeed—so even if G-d Himself tells you that He cannot accept you back, you still have a chance.

But if that's the case, we can come back to our Torah portion right here and ask, "Why did G-d not accept the Jewish Nation's teshuvah and bring them into the Land? True, the Jewish Nation made a mistake. But they regretted it. Why not give them another chance?"

Perhaps we can say that the Mapilim were really nothing more than a small group—that most of the people were not with them. True, they all mourned when they heard that they would never enter the Holy Land—but that is not to say that they were all truly ready to immediately enter the Holy Land.

Let's suppose that somebody came along and announced that all of the Jews in this country now have a one-time opportunity to move to Israel—and if they don't, they'll forfeit their right to enter the land forever and they'll never be given permission to enter Israel. Everyone would be very sad to hear that they would lose their right to make aliyah—but how many of us would actually be prepared to leave it all behind and immediately go to Israel?

Certainly there would be individuals who would be ready to do so, "a few Mapilim." The majority of the community, on the other hand, would genuinely mourn a lot that they lost the right to move to Israel—but neither would they sell their houses and run to Israel.

So this, my friends, is what happened with the Mapilim.

True, the nation mourned greatly when they heard that they would never even once enter the Holy Land. But in practical reality, to be ready the very next morning to go up and fight to conquer the land, for that only a small group of Mapilim were ready. Most of the people were not with them—and so "It shall not succeed," as Moshe said.

The entire concept and goal of entering Israel is “when all its inhabitants are upon it”—meaning that the entire Jewish Nation enters the land together. But at the moment this does not occur, and they are not ready to enter the land, then that’s not it—that’s not the aliyah, the return to Israel, that G-d had in mind and that was not the promise G-d made to our Patriarchs.

So when Moshe said “It shall not succeed,” he meant that it’s not enough that the Mapilim want to enter the Holy Land—rather, we need *everyone* to want to enter the Holy Land, for the entire Jewish Nation to be convinced of this. Running ahead alone and leaving everyone else behind accomplishes nothing.

So the lesson for us, my friends, is this: There are many Jews who want to enter the spiritual Land of Israel. They want to do more mitzvos. They want to progress in their Judaism. They want to learn more Torah. They want to climb the mountain.

But they end up leaving the rest of the family far behind.

We must remember that in order to enter the Promised Land, we must have “all its inhabitants upon it”—everyone needs to get there together. And if you don’t succeed in convincing your own family in joining your journey in Judaism, you could ultimately end up like the Mapilim did, G-d forbid. You could end up losing your way, because if you don’t have family backing and support, then you ultimately won’t be able to stand alone.

When it comes to coming to the Promised Land, the entire family has to get there together.

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