

“Midor L’dor” Service, Parshat Shlach Lecha – Einav’s Dvar Torah – July 2, 2016

Shabbat Shalom. Welcome. The parashah today is Shlach Lecha. In this Parasha a dramatic event occurs. God has promised Canaan to Israel, so Moshe sends twelve scouts into the country. Moshe sends twelve spies, one from each tribe. They were, however, not just anyone, but leaders within their tribe. Out of the twelve men who were sent in to Canaan, ten of them came back saying that settling in Canaan would be an impossible task. However there were two who were more optimistic. Kalev ben Yefuneh and Yehoshua Bin Nun were the only loyal scouts. Kalev, from the tribe of Judah, and Yehoshua, from the tribe of Ephraim, both came back saying that they would be able to prevail and take over Canaan.

One thing that I noticed was the tribes the loyal scouts came from, Judah and Ephraim. Throughout Jewish history, these two tribes have been very significant. It’s not just a coincidence that the only two people who were being loyal to Hashem came from these tribes. Each has his own story.

Judah was the fourth son of Jacob. His three older brothers, Reuven, Shimon, and Levi, were cursed, unlike himself as he was blessed. In Parashat Vayechi, Jacob is lying on his deathbed and he calls his sons in to bless them. However only a handful get blessings. The rest aren’t so lucky. Judah gets a very good blessing for being brave and skilful and also because he showed loyalty in many situations. One, when Joseph had been thrown into the pit and Reuven had said that the other brothers should kill him, Judah piped up and volunteered the idea that they should sell him instead. He didn’t want to have Joseph’s blood on his hands. Two, when the eleven brothers were in Egypt and Joseph was commanding Benjamin to stay behind, Judah begged to stay instead. This got him back some credit because it showed Joseph his loyalty.

Ephraim was the younger of Joseph’s two sons. Also in Vayechi, we see Jacob blessing both of Joseph’s sons together. Traditionally, the right hand goes on the eldest son, but Jacob decided to place his right hand on Ephraim, the youngest. As Jacob explained to Joseph, he knew that Ephraim would grow up to be just as powerful as Menashe, the eldest. And indeed, Ephraim was a greater nation.

Another significant feature that I found was in a book called The Woman’s Torah Commentary. When the scouts came back and they started to talk about the land, the ten that disliked it said that they wouldn’t be able to succeed if they tried to take over Canaan. These ten spies strongly believed that it was impossible to settle in Canaan, even though God had given it to them. This was a failure of trust. This sin was considered second worst in this period of time after the Golden Calf episode, but why?

Rashi suggests one possibility based on the last word 'mimenu'. Right after Kalev has said that they will prevail, the faint-hearted spies speak out again, "We are not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we"

When we think of the word 'mimenu', it suggests that the meaning is 'we'. However, grammatically 'mimenu' can mean 'than we' or 'than he'. Therefore it is possible that the ten spies are suggesting that the people in Cana'an are stronger than 'he', stronger than God. Such a failure of trust in God equals the insult of the Golden Calf. This leads God to rejecting that generation so they can't enter Cana'an.

However, there were two exceptions to this punishment. Kalev ben Yefuneh and Yehoshua bin Nun. This shows that the good deeds of Ephraim and Judah were so good that the merit had been passing down for generations, just like we are passing down our traditions today, 'midor le'dor'.

Shabbat Shalom.