



Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Shelach | Sichah 4

The Context:

In the aftermath of the sin of the Spies, who discouraged the Jewish people from their desire to enter the Land of Israel, Moshe turned to G-d to seek forgiveness on behalf of the Jewish people. He began his prayer by saying, “Now, please, let the strength of *Ad-nai* (G-d) be increased....” (*Bamidbar* 14:17)

The Midrashic explanation of this cryptic statement is that Moshe was asking G-d to “strengthen” His attribute of mercy so it would overpower His attribute of judgment which, justifiably, wanted to destroy the Jewish people on account of their rebellion. (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 16:22)

The Questions:

- 1) The name of G-d used in this verse is *Ad-nai*, which also means “master,” and alludes to G-d in His role as a Master and Judge over Creation. If Moshe wanted to elicit G-d’s mercy, why did he invoke G-d’s judgment?
- 2) Why did Moshe formulate this specific prayer only after the sin of the Spies and not at an earlier crisis, in the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf?

The Preface to the Explanation:

In order to clarify this, we first need to understand the deeper dimension of the sin of the Spies. Chassidus explains that the Spies drew a distinction between the natural and the supernatural. They believed G-d miraculously intervenes on behalf of the Jewish people, but only when the Jewish people

live in a spiritually elevated fashion, outside the dictates of nature. In the desert, where the Jewish people were not involved with the mundane realities of the natural world — for example, they didn't have to farm the land to produce food, and they didn't have to work to provide for their livelihood — G-d provided for them miraculously. When the Jewish people conform to the natural world's expectations, however, G-d does not intervene, but rather, He leaves nature to its own devices.

Thus, the Spies declared that the Jewish people would be unsuccessful in conquering the land of Israel, because when entering Israel, the Jews would be expected to conform to the expectations of the natural world and would no longer be able to expect G-d's miraculous intervention. In the frank, natural assessment, "they are stronger than we." (*Bamidbar*, 13:31)

The Explanation:

The Spies, however, were wrong: For even though G-d did institute a system of nature that seems to preclude His involvement, G-d's power extends to the natural world nonetheless. This is expressed by the use of the name *Ad-nai*, which refers to G-d in His role as Creator of the natural world, but also alludes to his "mastery" over His Creation. The Spies, through their slander, "weakened," so to speak, this dimension of G-d.

When Moshe prayed, "Now, please, let the strength of *Ad-nai* (G-d) be increased..." he was asking for G-d to refute the Spies' assertion, and to display His mastery and strength over the natural world. That is why He used this specific name of G-d, and why this prayer was appropriate only as a response to the sin of the Spies.

The Zohar:

There is a perplexing teaching from the *Zohar* on this verse: "The Jewish people are privileged from among the idolatrous nations of the world, for G-d desires them; He is known by the Jewish people's name, and He takes pride in them." (*Zohar* vol. 2, p. 161a)

What relevance does this teaching have to Moshe's supplication? And why does the *Zohar* have to draw a distinction between the Jewish people and the idolatrous nations of the world — isn't the spiritual superiority of the Jewish people self-evident?

According to the above explanation, the *Zohar's* explanation is clear. The Spies underestimated G-d's power over the natural world because they underestimated the Jewish people's spiritual distinctiveness even while dwelling in the natural world. Because the Spies failed to see the pervasive power of the Jewish soul, which is a part of G-d, they also failed to perceive G-d's pervasive power in Creation.

The Spies assumed that a Jew's relationship with G-d is only pronounced in the "supernatural" areas of his life, when a Jew is manifestly occupied in spiritual pursuits. But when he conforms to the demands of the natural world just like any other human being, then nothing sets the Jew apart; his connection to G-d is not evident. This is mistaken. The truth is that even in those areas and times where a Jew seems identical to the rest of Creation — such as is the case during the era of exile, which conceals the Jew's true uniqueness — nonetheless, the Jewish soul is "privileged from among the idolatrous nations of the world." The Jewish soul is always one with G-d, and therefore, it is always unique and powerful, even when it is seemingly subjected to the dictates of natural law.