

Shelach Lecho – When Bad is Really Good – David Foksett

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"And how is the Land in which it [the nation of people] dwells – is it good or bad?" (Bamidbar 13:19)

The commentators discuss as to what Moshe Rabbeinu was referring when he asked the spies to report about the condition of Eretz Yisroel. According to Rashi, Moshe's enquiry was directed to whether or not the land had healthy water sources: springs and deep wells.

The Sforno supports this idea by pointing us towards a source of the textual persuasion in Parashas Eikev: "*For Hashem your G-d is bringing you to a **good land**: a land with streams of water, of springs and underground water coming forth in valley and mountain...*" (Devarim 8:7).

Moreover, the Ibn Ezra writes that in addition to the quality of the water, Moshe also wanted the spies to report about the air quality.

However, Rashbam takes a different view. His interpretation of 'good or bad' refers to the land's ability to sustain the people in time of conflict i.e. its produce; whether or not there would be a need to forage or hunt before engaging in the theatre of war.

Having identified what, the spies were looking for as 'good,' now consider the prospect of the land being 'bad'. How could Moshe Rabbeinu allege it so, that Eretz Yisroel be in any way 'bad'? The consequences of speaking disparagingly about the land, resulted in the spies and their generation being destined to live out their days in the wilderness. Did Moshe intend to cause the spies to falter? Surely, he would not purposely place a stumbling block before them!

The Kotzker Rebbe, Reb Menachem Mendel, answers that Moshe did not suggest that Eretz Yisroel could be intrinsically bad in any shape or form. Rather, he had the foresight to know that the spies may not have been capable of interpreting correctly any negative aspect of what they saw. He envisaged that upon their return, he would explain to them how what they perceived as bad was really good for them. An example of this is found in Rashi's commentary to possuk 32:

"[It] is a land that devours its inhabitants". Despite the spies witnessing what had appeared to be a mass of funerals, they failed to recognise that Hashem caused these 'bad' events only for the 'good' of the spies: to divert the attention of the Canaanites. This in turn assured the spies' safety during their mission. Had they sought Moshe's interpretation of the events, then their report to Bnei Yisroel would have been far less negative.

The Gemora in Moed Katan 9b (as learnt recently in the Nechemia Broch Monday night shiur given by the Rav) provides us with another case of when bad is really good for you:

Upon instruction from his father, the son of R' Shimon bar Yochai went before R' Yonasan ben Asmai and R' Yehuda ben Geirim to receive a brocha. Having received the brocha, he returned to his father somewhat perplexed and pain-stricken by the words of the Rabbonim. R' Shimon asked his son to recall the words of the brocha: "*May it be Hashem's will that you sow and not reap; You will take in and not bring out; Bring out and not take in; Let your house be destroyed and your inn be inhabited; Your table disturbed; and may you not see a new year.*"

R' Shimon responded, elucidating that these derogatory statements were in fact blessings in disguise:

"May it be Hashem's will that you sow and not reap" = **You will rear children and they shall not die**

"You will take in and not bring out" = **You will take in daughters-in-law; your sons will not die and their wives leave you**

"Bring out and not take in" = **You will have daughters who will marry; their husbands will not die**

"Let your house be destroyed and your inn be inhabited" = **'House' refers to this world; 'inn' refers to the world to come**

"Your table disturbed" = **That your table should be disturbed by the activities of your children**

"May you not see a new year." = **Your wife shall not die; you shall not have to remarry**

Honing in on 'Your table disturbed', Rabbeinu Chananel explains that the brocha here is to have numerous children. The Talmid R' Yechiel MiParis in turn comments that it is the tendency of children to disturb things that are on a table. Thus, highlighting that we should be truly thankful to be blessed with our children's shenanigans! A poignant example of when something 'bad' is really good for you – a true blessing in disguise.

This Dvar Torah was written to mark the birth of our daughter: Ayala Rus. May we all merit that our tables continue to be disturbed!