

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
SHELACH

BY RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN
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MUSSAR, MIDDOS, AND MERAGLIM

Parshas Shelach relates an extremely unfortunate incident in our nation's history. On the verge of entering and conquering Eretz Yisrael, the Jewish people asked Moshe to be prudent — first send out spies to scout out the land, so we will know what we are up against.

And although Hashem did not agree with this plan, Hashem allowed it to proceed, cautioning that since this plan was not according to Hashem's will, He will give the spies ample room to falter and fail.¹

And indeed, disaster struck when the Meraglim brought back a terrible account about the Land of Israel. "Giants, pestilence, a land that destroys its inhabitants," they claimed. And the people accepted the report without question. The sin of the spies has echoed through the generations, and we, today, are still feeling the weight of their deed.²

Reb Yechezkel Levenstein³ (1885–1974) points out that this path of destruction started with the original decision to send the spies. However, asks Reb Yechezkel, what sin was there in sending spies into a foreign nation? We find no command in the Torah, nor any directive from Hashem, forbidding such an act. In fact, Hashem Himself said, "If you want, send!" Why, then, has the Jewish nation been punished for something that is not a sin?

To this, Reb Levenstein answers, many times middos and mussar tell us certain things should, or should not be done. This is true even though they are not obvious sins, there is no clear halacha against them, and you will not find a pasuk in the Torah saying that it's not ok. Nevertheless, the spies, and Klal Yisrael, should have known they could be, and should be better. And this non-aveirah was indeed the beginning of their downfall.

The Shulchan Aruch is only one component of our avodas Hashem — we must remember to be vigilant about our middos as well.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

The only way a person can properly understand what Hashem wants of us outside of the Shulchan Aruch is through the study of mussar. This study will enable one to grow in their middos, and become a greater human being.

Mussar development occurs through the triumvirate of Chochmos HaMussar (the understanding of middos, and the human being), Mussar B'Hispailus (the emotionally intense study of mussar), and Chinuch HaMussar (the incorporation of mussar into our actions).¹

By opening a mussar sefer and studying it, one can accomplish the first, second, or even all three steps of mussar development.

Consistency is key. It is common and expected to not see any gains at first, but after constant repetition, one will undoubtedly see great changes to their nature and their character.²

1 Building Jewish Ethical Character, pg. 55

2 Ohr Yisrael, Letter Six

1 Rashi on Bamidbar 13:2 s.v. שלח לך, and 13:3 s.v. על פי

2 Taanis 29a

3 Ohr Yechezkel - Middos, pg. 271

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Mussar is like oil on top of water - it will eventually surface, and rise to the top (the positive effects of studying Mussar are guaranteed). - Rabbeinu Yisrael Salanter zt"l, Sefer Pitsgamim UMA'amarim M'Gedolei Baalei HaMussar, pg. 18

THE CAREER PATH OF THE UPRIGHT

Although Danny* had a master's in education, his teaching career never really took off. Maybe it was classroom management, or maybe it was his lesson plans, but he simply floated from job to job, until he found himself unemployed.

He started looking for other sources of income until a friend helped him get started in real estate. Though flipping houses had more risk than he normally felt he could handle, he was desperate, and desperate people do desperate things.

To his own surprise, he became very good, very fast. The past few years of financial uncertainty, and even ruin, had turned into prosperity. And his wife, Naomi, was thankful to Hashem, not just for the newfound wealth, but for giving her husband renewed life.

Danny had not been himself in those dark times. But during the past year, he was again the same wonderful person she had always known. Until recently. There he was, again sitting at the dining room table lost in thought, and it reminded her of those difficult days.

"Everything ok?"

Danny quickly smiled. "Sure is! I had a conversation with my *mashgiach* from *yeshiva*, Rabbi Greenberg, and it gave me a lot to think about. Remember what I mentioned to you a few weeks ago, about certain business practices?"

How could Naomi forget? Danny confided that he found himself slipping into some gray areas when it came to being honest and upstanding. The *posek* he called, Rabbi Potash, said everything is technically *halachically* acceptable. But Danny knew he was being underhanded, and it still bothered him.

"Sure, what did Rabbi Greenberg say?"

"He asked me if I think this is what Hashem wants. So I've been thinking a lot about that recently. And to be honest, I think it's not."

"So now what?"

"Well, I'll continue in this line of work, but I must cut out certain practices. There's no question about it. If it's not what Hashem wants, do you think I'll be successful?"

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Some *Rishonim* say the requirement for proper *middos* is among the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvos*.¹ And even those who disagree nevertheless say one must do *teshuvah* for bad *middos*.²
- In fact, Reb Chaim Vital writes that although proper *middos* are not part of the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvos*, they are so fundamental and essential, bad *middos* are, "much, much worse than *aveiros*."³
- Though there may not be a specific *pasuk* for good *middos*, nevertheless, the requirement for good *middos* is *mi'doraisa* — both for Jews and non-Jews.⁴

1 *Sefer HaChinuch*, Mitzvah 611, *Rambam Hilchos De'os* 1:5-6

2 *Meiri Ma'amer HaTeshuva* 1:4

3 *Sha'arei Kedusha* 1:2

4 *Igros Moshe Y"D* 2:130, *Toras Avraham*, pg. 270

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