



Pray for Me
Parshas Shlach

RABBI GROSSMAN ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA



Last Thursday I landed in Chengdu, China, the country's fifth largest city. Over 14 million people live in the city, the capital of the Sichuan province, while only 200 of them are Jews. Several of them have yet to merit observing the laws of Judaism, while some have begun to take steps towards their Jewish heritage.

My grandson Rabbi Dov Ber Hennig and his wife have been serving as the Lubavitch emissaries in the city for the past five years. They arrived when there was no Jewish activity in the area and when it was essentially a spiritual desert. They resurrected China's illustrious Jewish past and became a center for anything Jewish, for hundreds of miles around them.

They ensure Jews can attend a Passover Seder, get kosher food, come to prayers on Shabbos or study Torah. Primarily, the two serve as a source of consolation and consultation for the many Jews passing through who see them as a source of solace and guidance.

When I received the phone call that my grandson had a son, I decided to travel and participate in the *Bris*. It turns out that there had not been a *Bris* in the area in the past millennia. An historic event, by all accounts.

My grandson announced I was coming and that there would be special prayers and events during my stay.

One Israeli, Roi, did not hear the news. He was on his way to Kunming, also known as the "Spring City," which is a long way from Chengdu. Roi traveled by hitchhiking.

On Wednesday, while on such a ride, the driver told him he could not proceed on the road due to construction. Roi, without thinking, got out of the car and made his way towards the nearby city, which was a long walking distance away.

After hours of walking he realized he had lost his way, with no sign of civilization in sight. To make things worse, he had no phone reception and could not call for help.

He sat down on the ground to rest, and felt the desperation eating away within him. He began to cry and thought of all the nightmarish scenarios he might encounter.

While contemplating his life he thought of the religious high school he attended in Jerusalem. He remembered a visit to my house. He did not remember much, but remembered a song I taught him.

"What has happened has happened, the essence is to begin from the start. Father, completely renew me, ignite my soul."

Roi sat in the middle of nowhere, thousands of miles from home, and sang the song he had learned over a decade ago. He sang and was moved by the words. It was a prayer from the depth of his heart.

In our weekly parsha we read of the spies sent by the Israelites to Holy Land. The Torah tells us they were all leaders, "all of them were men of distinction; they were the heads of the children of Israel."¹

After encountering the fortified cities and the giants in Israel they became fearful, stating "however, the people who inhabit the land are mighty, and the cities are extremely huge and fortified, and there we saw even the offspring of the giant."²

The commentators are bewildered by the fact that such grand leaders speak negatively of the Holy Land. Did they not sense the sanctity of the land? There are many answers given.

Yehoshua and Calev did not join the other spies in speaking ill about Israel. Why so? Did they not see the giants? Did they not see what the other 10 spies did?

Before embarking on the espionage mission, Moshe changed Hoshea ben Nun's Yehoshua³ and prayed on his behalf, "May God save you from the counsel of the spies," while Calev went alone to Hebron to prostrate himself on the graves of the patriarchs in prayer so that he would not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their negative counsel.

Later on in the parsha G-d punishes the Israelites and declares they will not enter the Promised Land, except Yehoshua and Calev.

"All the people who perceived My glory, and the signs that I performed in Egypt and in the desert, yet they have tested me these ten times and not listened to My voice," while My servant Calev, since he was possessed by another spirit, and he followed Me, I will bring him to the land to which he came, and his descendants will drive its inhabitants out."

Why was Calev rewarded in such a way, and what about Yehoshua? Calev took a brave step and taught us a lesson for generations – a Jew must know that there is always someone listening to his prayers, that prayer from the depths of the heart can save you from any danger, even in a miraculous way.

On Shabbos evening, as we were sitting around the Shabbos table and discussing the significance of the Jewish soul, a tired looking backpacker walked in. Yes, it was Roi.

It turns out that his prayer generated wonders. A work manager at a work site far away was driving by when he heard the singing and stopped to find out what it was all about. He followed the voice and found a weak and tired young Israeli. He inquired about Roi's situation and learned of his plight.

The manager had mercy on Roi and took him to the Chabad house in Chengdu. Roi walked in and could not believe his eyes. Tens of people sat around the table, which was headed by the person who taught him the song of belief and salvation over a decade ago. Because G-d hears everyone's prayers.

¹ Bamidbar 13:3.

² Bamidbar 13:28.

³ The name יהושע is a compounded form of יהוה ישיעו, May God save you.