



The Force of Prayer at the Grave of the Righteous Parshas Shlach

I was in Antwerp, Belgium, for a fundraising trip for Migdal Ohr, meeting with leaders and dignitaries, friends of Migdal Ohr.

During one of the meetings a young man was pointed out to me. "Do you see him? He has been observant for only two years." This was his story:

One of the Rebbes had a driver who knew the city well. The driver came from a religious family, but was currently not an observant Jew. The Rebbe listened as the driver told his life story. It was a very difficult and sad story. This was the reason he was no longer observant, he said. There were times it seemed he loathed everything that had to do with Judaism, but the Rebbe let him speak his piece. The Rebbe knew that responding would be of no use.

One day the Rebbe asked his driver to take him to the grave of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk. The trip to Poland would take many hours, and would be lucrative for the driver, nonetheless he said he did not wish to go. The Rebbe asked him why he was turning down the opportunity, the driver explained that the reason he didn't want to go was because he didn't want to pray at the gravesite. He agreed only after the Rebbe promised not to pressure him on the issue, and off they went.

In our weekly parsha we read about the spies sent by Moshe to scout out the Land of Israel before the Jewish People entered it. **"They went up in, the south, and he came to Hebron."** Who was the one who went to Hebron? Rashi explains: "Caleb went there alone¹ to prostrate himself on the graves of the patriarchs in prayer that he not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel."²

Later on, Caleb is rewarded: "But as for My servant Caleb, 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."³ Why is Caleb rewarded for praying at the graves of the patriarchs? Is one rewarded just for praying? Another question – how come he was not joined by Yehoshua?⁴

"These are the names of the men Moshe sent to scout the Land, and Moshe called Hoshea Ben Nun, Yehoshua."⁵ Our Sages interpret – Moshe prayed on his behalf, "May God

save you from the counsel of the spies."⁶ Yehoshua needed not any further prayer after this special blessing. Caleb, on the other hand, had no special spiritual support, and realizing his dire situation, he knew that only prayer at Hebron could save him, and so he went and beseeched G-d that he not be in one mind with the straying spies.

What is there at the grave of the righteous? The Vilna Gaon explains that during the time of exile the Divine Spirit dwells primarily at the graves of the righteous, and when one connects to the Divine Spirit there he can overcome any and all obstacles.

This is what Caleb prayed for at the graves of the patriarchs, and therefore: "I will give him [Caleb] the land on which he has walked"⁷, and it is written, "They gave Hebron to Caleb."⁸

The Rebbe prayed at the grave for a long time. One who has never been to Lizhensk cannot fully understand – people from all around the world come to pray, religious alongside non-religious.

As the Rebbe exited the compound the driver was waiting for him. The Rebbe sat in the car and said: "You have driven so far, why not enter the site, and place a stone on the grave and leave." Maybe not wanting to defy the Rebbe, he agreed. The Rebbe gave him his Kippa, and he entered. He was there for a long time, and the Rebbe went to search for him. He found him bitterly crying. He did not want to leave the righteous' grave site.

"I put a reassuring hand on his back," told the Rebbe, "I told him: 'do you know what you have merited today? A righteous person will serve as your advocate in the Heavens. From this day on he will care for you personally. Why be sad? Rejoice, for G-d has accepted your prayers."

¹ Hence the singular "he came"

² Bamidbar 13:22.

³ Bamidbar 14:24.

⁴ He and Caleb were the only two spies out of the twelve who did not speak ill of the Land of Israel.

⁵ Bamidbar 13:16.

⁶ The name יהושע is a compounded form of יהושיע, May God save you.

⁷ Dvarim 1:36.

⁸ Shoftim 1:20.