



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

Executive Director, Camp HASC

Author of *Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuva* (Mosaica 2021)

# Shelach: A Land that 'Pickles'

Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the legendary *mashgiach* of the Mir Yeshiva was a unique scion of the Mussar tradition of deep self-analysis, inner work and moral refinement. A close disciple of both the Alter of Slabodka, Reb Nosson Tzvi Finkel, as well as the Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, he embodied the essence of Mussar. R' Yerucham was renowned for his *shmuessen*, lectures which expressed his awe-inspiring intensity for spiritual elevation. Over four generations, hundreds of talmidim received guidance under the personal supervision of “the Mashgiach”. Many of these, in turn, became leaders and builders of Torah study across the globe.

One of Reb Yerucham’s great *talmidim* was Rav Mottel Rabinowitz, zt”l. After escaping with refugees from the Mir Yeshiva, and reaching Shanghai, Rav Mottel was imprisoned for more than three years in Japanese internment camp while attempting to make his way to the United States, braving disease and near starvation with *mesirus nefesh*. Ultimately, Reb Mottel dedicated himself to rebuilding Torah

and passing on the *mesorah* at Yeshivas Mercaz haTorah in Montreal, and became a beloved *rebbe* and role model for an entire generation of *bnei Torah*.

More than two decades ago, Rav Moshe Weinberger, shlit’a, met Reb Mottel, one of the last living great *alter Mirrers*, a title given to a person who had studied in the old Mir Yeshiva in Poland. Rav Weinberger asked the elderly *talmid chacham*: “Can you please share something about learning with Reb Yerucham? A *ma’aseh*, a story, maybe?”

Reb Mottel demurred. “I’m not a chasid,” he said, “I don’t tell stories.” After a few silent moments, however, the elderly disciple of Reb Yerucham spoke: “Did you ever see how pickles are made? Cucumbers are placed into a jar filled with water and brine, and after some time...they become pickled! I don’t know how, but after being in the presence of the Mashgiach, after a certain amount of time, I could not look at the world the same way. Something took place, like we were sealed in a jar and pickled. After that, no matter what, we can’t be the same way we were before....”

וַיֵּצֵאוּ דַבַּת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תָּרוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לֵאמֹר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר עָבְרָנוּ בָּהּ לְתוֹר אֹתָהּ אָרֶץ אֲכִלֹת  
יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ הוּא וְכָל-הָעַם אֲשֶׁר-רָאִינוּ בְּתוֹכָהּ אַנְשֵׁי מְדוּתִים:

(The *Meraglim*, the ‘spies’ who were sent by Moshe to scout out Eretz Yisrael,) spread an evil report about the land which they

had scouted, telling Bnei Yisrael, “The land we passed through to explore is a *land that consumes its inhabitants*, and all the people we saw in it are men of stature!” (13:32)

Chazal understood that wherever the spies passed, the Canaanites were preoccupied with burials and mourning, and *הקדוש ברוך הוא עשה לטובה, כדי לטרדם*; “Hashem intended this for good, so that the Canaanites would not notice the *meraglim*.” (*Sotah*, 35a)

Instead of recognizing, appreciating and reporting on this miraculous Divine kindness, the *meraglim* implied negativity and fear, saying that “the land devours its residents.” This *dibat haAretz* became the root cause of tremendous long-standing troubles for the whole nation.

Rebbe Nachman (*Likutei Moharan*,

129) explains the inner-working of אָרֶץ אוֹכֵלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ, “A land that consumes its inhabitants”....

כי טבע האכילה - שהמזון נתהפך לזון, כגון קשהחי אוכלת צומח, כגון עשבים, נתהפכו העשבים לחי, כשנכנסין בתוך מעיה. וכן מחי למדבר, כשהמדבר אוכל החי, נתהפך החי למדבר

*The nature of eating is that the nourishment is transformed into the nourished. For*

example, if an animal consumes vegetation, such as grass, the grass, when it enters its stomach, they are transformed into the animal. The same applies from animal to human being; when a human consumes an animal, the animal is transformed into a human.

וְלִכְלֵ מְקוֹם שְׂנֵכְנֵס לְשֵׁם הַמְזוֹן שְׂנֵתְחַלֵּק לְהַאֲבִירִים, נִתְהַפֵּף לְמַהוּת הַאֲבִיר מִמַּשׁ שְׂנֵכְנֵס לְשֵׁם. כְּגוֹן הַחֵלֶק מִהַמְזוֹן הַנֵּכְנֵס לְהַמַּח נִתְהַפֵּף לְמַח, וְהַנֵּכְנֵס לְלֵב נִתְהַפֵּף לְלֵב, וְכֵן לְשָׂר הַאֲבִירִים.

Moreover, wherever the food that is divided among the limbs enters, it is literally transformed into the substance of that limb. For example, the part of the food that enters the brain is transformed into brain, and that which enters the heart is transformed into heart. The same is true of the other limbs.

וְזֶהוּ: אֶרֶץ אֲכָלֶת יְיֹשְׁבֶיהָ - כִּי אֶרֶץ הוּא בְּחִינַת אֲמוּנָה, כְּמוֹ שְׂכָתוֹב (תְּהִלִּים ז'): שֶׁכֵּן אֶרֶץ וְרַעַה אֲמוּנָה.

And this is the meaning of “A land that consumes its inhabitants”. “Land” corresponds to faith, as it is written (Psalms, 37:3), “Dwell in the Land and cultivate faith.”

וְזֶהוּ: אֲכָלֶת יְיֹשְׁבֶיהָ: כִּי כְּשֵׁנֵכְנֵס לְאֶרֶץ, שֶׁהִיא בְּחִינַת אֲמוּנָה, נִאֲכָל אֶצְלָהּ, הֵינּוּ שְׂנֵתְהַפֵּף לְמַהוּת

And this is the implication in “consumes its inhabitants” — for when one enters the Land, which is the concept of faith, he is consumed by it — i.e., he is transformed into its substance.

Rebbe Nachman explains that this transformation takes place through cleaving to a righteous person — being in the close presence of tzadik and believing in their power. One is ‘pickled’ in the tzadik’s presence, ‘consumed’ and transformed into their substance.

When we eat, the food nourishes us and is transformed and elevated, absorbed

into the cells, blood, sinew and bones of our bodies, literally becoming part of us. In this way, Eretz Yisrael is ארץ אוכלת יושביה, “a land that eats its inhabitants”. When a Jew comes to this “good Land”, we are devoured by its goodness, transformed, elevated and subsumed into its holy atmosphere.

Our physical presence and connection to the Land ‘nourishes’ *Artzeinu haKedoshah*, satisfying its hunger for us, and as a miracle of Divine kindness, we reach higher and higher states of actualization and faith. We are not just affected and shaped by our surroundings; on some level we become them. This is why, when we “go up” to the Land, something takes place in its presence, and “no matter what, we can’t be the same way we were before...” ■



Choose from a variety of curtains & blinds in the comfort of your home

Get **10% OFF** with this ad

Made & installed to order

- Curtains & draperies
- Designer curtains
- Venetian & Woven wood blinds
- Blackout, Vertical, Roller, Roman & Pleated shades

Call Joe Stepsky for a free consultation

052 5988 889

www.ashleywilde.co.il

Amazing Drapes are the sole importer of Ashley Wilde to Israel

Amazing Drapes