

## Potomac Torah Study Center

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**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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How does an observant Jew react when God sends him a message? The key to my question is that messages from Hashem almost always arrive as what Rabbi David Fohrman (alephbeta.org) calls "pokes." During times in the Torah, God would speak to some individuals – Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, and Moshe are the most prominent examples. Most often, except for Moshe, God speaks to selected individuals while they sleep. Hashem does not speak directly to Yosef or any of his brothers – but He sends "pokes" to Yosef in the form of dreams that he can interpret (whether his own or Paro's dreams). Prophecy ends around the time of Mordechai and Queen Esther. Since then, any messages from Hashem are in the form of "pokes" – messages that we must interpret and understand without direct conversation.

As I have written before, I have had these pokes at times – typically times when I really want something (like a specific job) and must face the disappointment of my desire not coming through. One poke resulted in my moving to a job in Washington, DC – where I met Hannah and we started our own family. Another poke resulted in my taking a job at the FTC rather than Labor Department – a change that put me on a career path much better suited to my talents and interests. Gods put opportunities in front of me that result in a much more satisfying life than I could have with what I initially want.

The Torah is full of these pokes, or unanticipated events that create opportunities that work out for the better for our people. Yaakov sends Yosef to check on his brothers, who place him in a pit while they go away to have lunch. Before they can return, traders come upon him, pull him out of the pit, and sell him to a caravan of spice sellers traveling to Egypt. Yosef thrives in Egypt, even while working as a slave, and then as a prisoner before Paro's dreams give him the opportunity to rise to the top. Since the end of prophecy, we Jews have had the obligation of developing a relationship with Hashem and realizing when He sends us a message "Lecha" – for our benefit.

Moshe sends leaders of each of the tribes to travel through the land and bring back word of whether it is a good land, and to describe the people, cities, and vegetation. Ten of the leaders go beyond Moshe's instructions and add political comments – that the people are giants, that the cities are fearsome, and that the land kills the people. (The ten evil leaders misread Hashem's pokes. The cities have strong walls because the people are weak and cannot not survive without them. The people have a parade of funerals because Hashem causes deaths to distract the people from the Jewish tourists. Only Caleb and Yehoshua feel pokes from Hashem and understand that the God who has protected B'Nai Yisrael since first sending Moshe and Ahaon to Paro will continue to protect the people as He had promised to their Avot.)

As the scholars of Alephbeta.org observe, the story of the Meraglim has many parallels to events earlier and later in Tanach. For example, the story of the men investigating the land has many parallels with the war against Amalek. In both cases, God tells Moshe to select a few men from each tribe. Moshe puts Yehoshua in charge in both events. When the men investigating the land report, their first enemy nation they mention is Amalek. In Shemot, God does the fighting,

and all B'Nai Yisrael do is observe Moshe. When Moshe lifts his hands toward Shemayim (the sky), B'Nai Yisrael prevail. When Moshe lets down his hands, Amalek makes advances. The Meraglim are supposed to remember the battle against Amalek and how Hashem protects B'Nai Yisrael, as long as the people look to God for help. Caleb and Yehoshua understand the parallel and realize that Hashem will ensure that B'Nai Yisrael prevail – but the other leaders lack faith and trust in Hashem. Despite watching God provide for all their needs for two years in the Midbar (let alone previously in Egypt), these leaders of the people do not understand the many pokes that Hashem continues to present to them.

In Sefer Shemot, God is very forgiving to B'Nai Yisrael when they fail to appreciate that Hashem is always with the Jews and always saving them, even behind the scenes. During the plagues, every plague destroys the Egyptians (bodies, water, crops, and lives) while by-passing the Jews. God destroys the Egyptian army, chariots, and horses; does the entire battle against Amalek; brings water from a rock and food from the sky. After two years, when B'Nai Yisrael leave the base of Har Sinai, He loses patience when ten leaders of tribes do not trust Hashem's power and promises. While the number of Jews dying in earlier adverse events is in the hundreds or few thousands, the sin of the Meraglim results in a death sentence for 600,000 adult Jews (although over a period of 38 years).

Scholars of military history say that they can explain why the winning side of virtually every war prevailed. The exception again and again is Israel prevailing against a hundred million Arabs, especially in wars on multiple fronts. A religious Jew who understands how Hashem sends us messages with "pokes" understands Israel's success over the past seventy-five years. The God who has protected our people since Egypt (and protected our Avot before then) continues to protect us. What He wants from us is to trust in our God, establish a conversation with Him, and watch for His pokes when He sends us messages. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, started me on the path to learning this lesson more than fifty years ago. Our task is to teach the lesson to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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## **Shlach – Bring Us Closer to the Land of Our Dreams**

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5777

*HASHEM spoke to Moshe and Aaron, saying, "How much longer will **this evil (AIDA) congregation** who are causing to complain against Me [exist]? The complaints of the children of Israel which they caused them to complain against Me, I have heard. (Bamidbar 14:26-27)*

*this evil (AIDA) congregation: This refers to the spies; from here we derive that a congregation ("a minyan") numbers [a minimum of] ten. — Rashi*

What constitutes a(n) (AIDA) congregation? We need a(n) (AIDA) congregation, a Minyan for all matters of public holiness ("davar shebekedusha"), to read the Torah, to say Kedusha, Kaddish, Barchu, to repeat Shemona Esrei, to make Sheva Brochos, and the list goes on. Rashi spared us a few steps in the math equation. From a series of seemingly disconnected verses a thread of common words are joined and using the Torah as a self-referential dictionary our Sages build a bridge to the definition of a Minyan.

In one verse it is written, "*And I shall be sanctified (b'toch) **among** the Children of Israel.*" In another, by the incident with Korach G-d tells Korach, ". . . *separate (m'toch) from **among** this **evil (AIDA) congregation.***" From the connection between TOCH and TOCH – among and among, we learn to link the concept of G-d being sanctified -- to a congregation. Now the size of that congregation, an AIDA, is derived from the Meraglim, the spies. There were twelve spies and two remained loyal and remained clean from the evil report that discouraged the masses. So when the verse states, "*How much longer will **this evil (AIDA) congregation** who are causing to complain against Me [exist]?*" we get the final puzzle piece that a Minyan is minimally a group of ten.

It's a wonder that we learn how to sanctify HASHEM from these evil and disgruntled groups! There must be a good reason or two.

In the 2nd of the Ten Commandments the following pronouncement is made:

*"You shall neither prostrate yourself before them nor worship them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a zealous God, Who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons, upon the third and **the fourth generation** of those who hate Me, and [I] perform loving kindness to **thousands [of generations]**, to those who love Me and to those who keep My Commandments. (Shemos 20:5-6)*

Alert to the fact that there are not 2000 generations, Rashi explains, "*It is thus found that the measure of reward [from God] exceeds the measure of [His] retribution by [the ratio of] one to five hundred, for this one is for four generations, and that one is for two thousand generations.*"

Incredibly, that statement is only meant to demonstrate and deliver the mathematical ratio that HASHEM is 500 times more rewarding than punishing. First thing to learn is -- before we complain about how bad things seem we should first notice 500 ways that life is working well. That should quiet the complainer within.

Also, when discussing the consequences of not performing Bris Mila or not partaking the Korbon Pesach, the Chidushei HaRim infers in the positive direction from the harsh result in the negative. If one is "cut off" for failing to comply with these two Mitzvos, then 500 times more so one is attached, connected, bonded for their performance.

Maybe we can employ the same logic regarding a Minyan. If ten people were able to discourage an entire nation, delaying the entering of the Land of Israel for 40 years, and frustrating a generation then how much more so in the positive direction, at least 500 times more so, when ten men join to sanctify the name of HASHEM publicly, will that serve to inspire an entire nation, raise our highest hopes, and **bring us closer to the land of our dreams.**

Good Shabbos! [emphasis in original]

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5777-shlach/>

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## Shelach: A Leadership of Faith, Not Fear

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2023

Shlach is as much a story of leaders as people. It is a story of leaders both poor and good. Ten of the twelve spies, poor leaders, saw challenges that confronted them in Canaan and ran: *"We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we"* (Bamidbar, 13:31). Yehoshua and Calev, good leaders, saw the same challenge and pushed forward: *"Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it"* (13:30). What accounts for this difference?

The simple answer is fear. When a person is afraid, all he or she can see is the object of his or her fear. Even for those who had seen all the miracles, had all the reasons to believe in God, faith faltered when confronted with fear. The people had seen the hand of God in Egypt, Har Sinai, and the Wilderness, and still here, were unable to believe God would save them. Their reaction was the same as at the Red Sea. They prefer to go back and be slaves in Egypt or stay in the Wilderness rather than confront their fears. Fear is irrational; it paralyzes.

The answer to fear is faith. **Where fear sees only obstacles, faith sees opportunities:** "We are able to overcome it!" This is what separates good leadership from bad. Leadership based on fear is no leadership at all. Good leadership must be based on faith in God and Torah, faith in others and in one's self. Only leadership of faith could take the people into the Promised Land.

This is one of the things that distinguishes Modern Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy has in many ways become a religion of fear: fear of the outside world, of asking hard questions, of delegitimization, and of being honest with ourselves about our own shortcomings. It is much safer, some say, to reject the outside world, protecting ourselves in a cloistered environment.

There is much to be afraid of in the unknown, outside world. What will happen if we confront postmodernism, archeology, science, philosophy, academic Talmud, Biblical criticism, feminism, and homosexuality? What will happen — how might the world judge us — if we confront spousal abuse, rabbinic sexual abuse, alcoholism, and drug abuse? What will happen if we genuinely address the marginalization of single mothers, converts, the developmentally disabled, those suffering from depression, and children with special needs? Many in the Orthodox community have chosen to look at these challenges and say, *"We cannot go up, for they are stronger than we!"* The response is to put up walls and remain in the desert.

But there is more than fear of the outside world. There is fear of losing full control, of granting people a degree of autonomy. It is scary for some to imagine individuals and communities — or even local rabbis — thinking for themselves. For some, the answer to this is to have communal issues decided by a Gadol and his da'as Torah, to say: *"Is it not better for us to return to Egypt? Perhaps we were slaves in Egypt, but everything was secure and predictable. In Egypt, someone else did the thinking for us."* This is leadership of fear, a yiddishkeit destined to stay in the desert and never go into the Promised Land.

Calev was a different kind of leader with a ruach acheret, a different spirit. He saw the formidable challenges and most certainly experienced fear, but did not give into it. He responded to fear by reaffirming his faith, and we must do the same. We must trust in God. We must trust in the Torah and its ability to confront life's challenges. We must trust that it can be taken out of its shell and brought to bear on theological struggles, the economy, and injustice. We need to have enough faith in the Torah that we can honestly face up to the challenges of agunah, homosexuality, universalism, and particularism. We need to trust that it can help us embrace archeology, science, history, and feminism rather than rejecting them, allowing us to see a larger and deeper truth.

We also need religious leaders who trust in people as well as the Torah. We need leaders who do not withhold information or misrepresent halakha out of a false belief that the people can't handle the truth, leaders who value the expertise and the voice of every member of the community, respecting them and including their voices in its piskei halakha and decision-making process.

Leadership and a Torah based on faith, not fear, will be open to hearing other voices, even those in opposition. The natural response is to try to shut these voices down, as even Yehoshua did when Eldad and Meidad were prophesying in

the camp: *"My master, Moshe, restrain them."* It requires a great leader to resist this, to recognize that we as a people will only be richer and wiser if we can listen to and respect visions that are different from our own. It is a rare leader who has enough faith in himself that he can welcome challenge.

What we most desperately need are religious leaders who have enough faith in the people, whose deepest desire is not to lead the people but to empower them. Such leaders know that they will only truly succeed when they have inspired each individual to find his or her unique vision and follow it, not when everyone conforms to their vision. We need leaders who can say, *"Who would give that all the nation of God would be prophets, that God should give God's spirit upon them!"* We need leaders who will take us into the Promised Land.

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2023/06/a-leadership-of-faith-not-fear-2/>

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## **Truth...or Consequences --Thoughts for Parashat Shelah Lekha**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

A Midrash tells that when the Almighty was about to create Adam, a debate broke out among the angels. Some advised Him not to create human beings, others urged him to create humanity. Hesed (compassion) said: let human beings be created because they will do acts of kindness. Emet (truth) said: let them not be created because they will be filled with lies. Tsedek (righteousness) said: create them because they will do acts of justice. Shalom (peace) said: don't create them because they will be filled with strife.

God then cast Emet down to earth. The angels objected: why did you treat Emet disrespectfully, since Truth is Your hallmark? God replied: The truth will blossom forth from the earth.

And then Adam was created.

At the very point of the creation of humanity, this Midrash teaches, it was clear that human beings would be a mixed blessing. They would form a society filled with lies and strife – but also filled with compassion and peace. In weighing the pluses and minuses, God opted for creating humanity. He planted Truth into the soil of the earth, with the confidence that one day Truth will blossom, and humanity will be redeemed.

In this week's parasha, the leadership of Moses and Aaron comes under fire after ten spies give a negative report about their findings in the Promised Land. This wasn't the first — or the last — test to their leadership. Yet, Moses and Aaron emerged in our tradition as exemplars of different types of leadership.

In rabbinic teachings, Moses is identified with Truth and Aaron is identified with Compassion. God chose to give commandments through both of them. If Moses was often strong and demanding, Aaron was often resilient and kind. Moses and Aaron represent two essential qualities – Truth and Compassion – which together can tilt humanity in the right direction.

The Jewish people, over these past thousands of years, have sought to live according to the ideals and laws taught by Moses and Aaron. We have been impressively committed to finding a proper balance between Truth and Compassion; we have sought the redemption of humankind by seeking ultimate Truth, and by rejecting the falsehoods and idolatries that fill the human imagination. We have stressed the centrality of lovingkindness and charity.

There has long been a dissonance between our inner world of Truth and Compassion – and the external world in which we live, a world in which lies and violence abound. Throughout the ages, Jews have been subjected to one persecution after another; every sort of lie has been lodged against us; we have been maligned and murdered generation after generation. We look around at our world today, and see that repressive nations are given seats of honor at the UN – and Israel is routinely condemned! We see terrorist regimes threatening Israel, firing missiles into Israel – and the world faults

Israel consistently. We see anti-Semitic lies go unchallenged, we see terrorism against Jews idealized, we see a world full of "good people" who stand by and do nothing or say nothing in defense of the Jewish people.

And yet, we persist in our inner spiritual world. We say our prayers each day. We maintain faith in God, and in the ultimate redemption of humanity. Our faith in God is remarkable; but our faith in humanity is even more remarkable. After all we have experienced, can we really believe that people will change for the better, that hatred and lies and violence will come to an end?

The figure of Moses reminds us that we cannot compromise in our search for truth. We cannot shy away from the demand for genuine justice. The figure of Aaron reminds us that we must not forget about human frailty and fear, we cannot lose sight of compassion and peace. Jewish life – and human life in general – must be a dynamic process of thinking and growing and courageous commitment to those values which redound to the glory of humanity. When we see ugly behavior and hear ugly words around us, we realize how far humanity still is from fulfilling God's hopes for us.

God cast Emet to the earth, indicating that the day will surely come when Truth will blossom forth, when individuals and nations will admit their lies and injustices and cruelties. On that day, not only will the Jews be redeemed, but so will all the nations of the world. Truth will become so clear, that all human beings will cleanse their souls and recognize the hand of God in history.

When we strive to internalize the teachings and characteristics of Moses and Aaron, we bring more Truth and Compassion into the world. In our day to day lives, these little steps may seem trivial in the face of the many problems confronting us and humanity. Yet in the cosmic struggle for the soul of humankind, we move the world a little closer to the day when Truth will blossom forth from the earth. May this day come sooner rather than later.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3130>

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## **The Grasshopper Effect and Other Defects in Modern Orthodox Leadership**

By David Balint \*

Since the days of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the Orthodox world has been blessed with many great leaders and thinkers who have scrupulously observed halakha (Jewish law) but who have, at the same time, adjusted to the modern world, including its science and technology. In more recent times, we have been fortunate to have Yeshiva University as guided by Rabbi Norman Lamm and more recently by Richard Joel. We have had a series of outstanding chief rabbis of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, most recently, Jonathan Sacks. There was the incomparable Joseph B. Soloveitchik, of course, whose inspirational teachings have generated numerous leaders across the globe.

I continue to be impressed with Jewish thinkers such as Menachem Kellner, David Hartman, Adam Ferziger, Marc Shapiro, José Faur, Joseph Telushkin, and many others. At the same time, we have inspiring congregational leaders who have assumed wider roles, such as Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Rabbi Benjamin Lau, Rabbi Marc Angel, and Rabbi Avi Weiss. In Israel we have the example of Yeshivat Har Etzion, so ably led by Rabbis Aharon Lichtenstein and Yehuda Amital. One cannot help but be impressed with the textual skill of Rabbi Menachem Leibtag.

Notwithstanding our recent history of esteemed leaders and thinkers, the weaknesses in our Orthodox world cannot be ignored if they are to be mended. A variety of factors have resulted in a collapse of any meaningful application of the word

"leadership" to Modern Orthodoxy. This collapse is mostly self-induced.

A few years ago I was walking on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem. In the Jewish world there are not six degrees of separation but rather, only one or two for the most part. I was searching the passing faces for people I knew. There was something oddly familiar about a gentleman approaching me, but I assumed it could not be anybody that I knew because the man was decked out in a long black coat and big-brimmed black hat of the type rarely seen in my hometown of Seattle except for on the occasional meshulah (charity collector). As my brain adjusted, though, I could see that it was a rabbi I had known for many years. I knew him as a moderate, educated, Modern Orthodox congregational leader. My confusion was multiplied when I remembered that this rabbi was Sephardic, yet he was dressed as if he were someone from Eastern Europe in the high fashion of Polish gentry 200 years ago. We greeted each other and I asked him why he was dressed in Hareidi garb. He straightforwardly answered that, in order to fit in and be taken seriously as a rabbi, he felt he had to dress in that manner and conform to "the look."

This encounter was symbolic as it relates to the topic at hand, which is the leadership crisis. This brings us to one of the most distinct factors in the decline of leadership: a massive inferiority complex. When the Jews left Egypt, they left with the direct intervention of God, with all God's visible power and with the promise of continuing intervention in the conquest of the Promised Land. Moses assembled the leadership of the time and sent them to reconnoiter the land. Despite having all of the power of God behind them, the majority had a crisis of confidence. Ten of the twelve spies projected their own insecurities onto the situation with the Canaanites, and in a famous bout of self-criticism said: "We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so were we in their eyes" (Numbers 13:31-33).

In the context of this discussion, many in our Modern Orthodox world, including congregational rabbis and organizations, seem to frequently operate with one eye on the Hareidi world as if it consisted of giants. As a consequence, they seem to view themselves as inferior. It is time to stop this grasshopper effect. . . . [see below for continuation]

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/grasshopper-effect-and-other-defects-modern-orthodox-leadership>

[For the continuation of this article (too long to print complete in this forum, see the attached E-mail document: **Shelach The Grasshopper Effect.**]

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### **Shelach -- Window Shopping** by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

Over two decades ago, some of my first teaching experiences were in a JCC offering introductory classes to Siddur, Mitzvos, and Jewish History. The classes were a great way to meet Jews from the area and expose them to Torah and Mitzvos.

During those years I would often tell my wife, "I feel like a tour guide. I show the tourists the sights, and then we part ways with a good-natured wave." There was certainly a wonderful sense that we were all part of the Jewish people. But there was no expectation on behalf of the participants to forge a relationship that was any deeper.

The reality, however, is that because of those good-natured tourist-like exposures, many families were affected. Numerous families started observing Shabbos, many started to send their children to Yeshiva, and enough momentum was created from that core group to start a shul.

I recall such a tidbit of wisdom from the mother of a classmate of mine. One day during vacation, my friend and I told his mother that we were going out to the mall to go window shopping, "Like tourists."

She replied, "Be careful where you window shop. Before you realize it, you might end up buying."

Tourist-like window shopping can be a great way to warm up to anything and then be ready to do the deal.

Perhaps this was the intent of sending the spies to scout out the promised land. They were to be the eyes and ears of the people exposing themselves to the blessings of the land and bringing back a report. That report was to help the people warm up to the idea of transitioning into this special land. In this way the people would enter the land with a sense of appreciation and excitement.

Unfortunately, the spies did not understand their task. They thought their task was to pass judgment and make a recommendation. Instead of bringing back a heartwarming report, they chose to think in terms of their own estimates: If the conquest could or should be done. This, they were not asked to do. The land had already been divinely promised to the Jewish people. What they were asked to do, by touring and window shopping, was to pave the way into the land.

Later in the Parsha we find a mitzva addressing this concept of exposure, but this time regarding bad exposures. The Torah tells us, "You shall not tour after your hearts and minds." That is, don't expose yourself and explore topics or environments that might take you away from Torah. At first, this seems far-fetched: I am a loyal Jew. What difference does it make if I expose myself to bad scenes or writings that mock religious people? Yet, the Torah restricts this because we know that exposure to something can well bring a person's heart closer to it.

Reflecting on that mother's comment about window shopping, I later realized that she wasn't just talking about purchasing an item. "Be careful where you window shop." Before you know it, you might well buy into the values, aspirations, and way of thinking of where you really want to be.

I once had to visit a Jew who was in a high security prison. After passing through various checkpoints with well-armed guards I arrived at a holding area for visitors which faced the barbed wire enclosure of the prison. I'm not quite sure how, but without realizing it, I walked past a certain line painted on the floor. A guard barked at me with a menacing tone. "You want to be a prisoner? You cross that line, and we won't tell the difference between you and them."

It was clear from his tone, that although I was just visiting jail )remember the game "monopoly"( once you become a tourist you could easily slip in.

When I was in Yeshiva, a few boys once went to an area where Jewish young men should not be found. When the Rosh Yeshiva found out, he called them in for a conversation. One of the boys declared, "Listen: Sometimes a guy just has to hang out."

The Rosh Yeshiva promptly responded, "Certainly. That's true. Sometimes a person just has to hang out. But if you hang out in good places, good things will happen to you."

I know a man who started buying volumes of the ArtScroll Gemora when they first came out. His wife asked him, "Whatever for? You never studied this!"

He replied that it was just an important part of Jewish scholarship and he wanted to own a few volumes.

With time his bookshelves looked like a well-stocked Jewish library, and he began to open the seforim and study from them. He discovered our TEACH613 Take Ten for Talmud series and stayed with it for a complete cycle. Today he studies Talmud in depth with a daily Chavrusa and a shiur once a week. Good things start by touring and window shopping in good places.

The lesson of this week's Parsha is the enormous power of touring places and ideas that we don't normally frequent. Regarding the negative the Torah commands us, "You shall not tour after your hearts and minds." In a positive sense, we can only wonder what might have happened if the spies had brought back a positive report. Instead of a 40-year setback, the Jewish people would have been revved and ready to enter the land of blessings that was promised to their ancestors.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!



\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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## **Shelach -- Actualized by Action**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \*

This week's parsha begins with the painful episode of the spies. As our ancestors approached the Promised Land, they began their preparations by sending forth some of the greatest men in the generation to spy out the land. The official reason for sending the spies was to assess the nature of the war they would be fighting – the strength of the nations currently living in Israel, as well as to bring back a first-hand report of just how wonderful the Promised Land truly was.

Unfortunately, the mission did not go as planned. When they returned, ten out of the twelve spies reported that Israel was simply too dangerous a land to conquer. Rather than bringing back the maps and information necessary to begin planning their attack, they brought back a message of fear and danger. They even sought to undermine the excitement about the land of Israel, reporting that it was an unhealthy land where it is hard to survive, “a land that consumes its inhabitants.” (Bamidbar 13:32)

Tragically, despite the efforts of the remaining two spies, Yehoshua and Calev, the nation was swayed by these negative reports. The night after they returned, the Torah describes how the entire nation raised their voices in lament and cried in their tents that night. The excitement of entering Israel gave way to panic.

The Ramba”n (Bamidbar 13:2) explains that the sin of the spies and of the nation was far deeper than simple lack of faith. This incident took place just over a year after leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah. The Exodus from Egypt was preceded by a year of open miracles in which Hashem repeatedly distinguished between Jew and Egyptian, with the plagues afflicting Egyptians wherever they went, yet never affecting any Jews. After the Exodus, they experienced the Splitting of the Sea and the drowning of their tormentors. A few weeks later they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai as G-d entered into an eternal pact with the Jewish people, promising that we will always be His nation in this world, enjoying a unique, treasured status. They lived for a year on mann, a spiritual food that fell from Heaven, drank water which flowed from a rock, and were protected from the elements by Heavenly clouds. After all this how could they dare to accuse G-d of bringing them to a land that would kill them? The Ramba”n adds that even sending spies to plan battle tactics was inappropriate. They were being led by the Clouds of Glory. When the time came to enter into the land, Hashem would continue guiding their path. Why should they need to send spies and make plans for themselves?

The next morning, things got even worse. The nation gathered before Moshe and Aharon and had the audacity to bemoan that they didn't die in Egypt or in the desert! The sentiment spread and sought to appoint a leader to guide them back to Egypt! At this point, Moshe and Aharon “fell on their faces before the nation.” (Bamidbar 14:2-5) The Ramba”n (Bamidbar 14:5) explains that Moshe and Aharon were falling in supplication - begging the nation, “please my brothers don't become evil, so this shouldn't be a hindrance for you.”

Despite the grave error of lacking faith which the Ramba”n described, they were not yet evil. It was only when they actively prepared to return to Egypt that they were “becoming evil.” It requires action to become evil. Questioning, worrying, even crying out of despair in and of themselves won't ruin a person. It is only once we act on those feelings and actualize them that the individual is truly, deeply changed.

If our sinful actions have a unique ability to mold us and damage us, then how much more so do our mitzvos have the capacity to raise us up and purify us. Each act of kindness and goodness concretizes the goodness within us and sets us on a path towards even more greatness.

We are blessed to have endless mitzvah opportunities. Each one is a gift, a chance to solidify our intent and direct our

path in life. It is only through mitzvah actions that we can truly and deeply change who we are.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

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## Shelach

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter \*

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a Devar Torah this week. Watch for future Devrei Torah from Rabbi Hefter in this spot.]

\* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see [www.har-el.org](http://www.har-el.org). To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

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## Shelah Lekha: The Tzitzit Test

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

### Why do we wear Tzitzit?

*It shall be for you a fringe, and when you see it, you shall remember all the of God's Mitzvot and you will perform them, and you will not detour, led by your heart and eyes which cause you to deviate.*

The Talmud (Berakhot 12:2), explains that upon seeing the Tzitzit, one retracts thoughts of three forbidden acts:

*Your heart – that is heresy... your eyes – that is promiscuity... deviate – these are thoughts of idolatry...*

This is not a halakhic statement but rather a commentary representing the opinion of the author, Rav Yehudah bar Haviva. The obvious difficulty is that he breaks the rationale for the commandment into three parts, without any support in the original text, and that heresy and idolatry are one and the same. However, future generations have dwelt on the idea of Tzitzit as protection against forbidden sexual acts, probably because of the fantastic story in the Talmud (Menahot 44:1) about a promiscuous man whose Tzitzit saved him from one such act.

Commentators have struggled with the concept of Tzitzit, as there is no immediate and clear relation between the wearing of the Tzitzit and the remembrance of the Mitzvot:

*R Moshe Al-Sheikh (1507-1593) compares the Tzitzit to tying a knot in the handkerchief to remind yourself something, only at the time the practice was to tie a thread around one's finger.*

But he continues to say that the practice is useless if one tied the thread without focusing on what he had to remember, and he notes that this is the problem with the Tzitzit. People wear it as a ritual, and they do not focus on the message of the Tzitzit and what it is supposed to remind them. Is it possible that we are missing an essential idea of the Tzitzit?

In the Midrash on the Parasha, R Meir suggests that by wearing Tzitzit one merits an interview with the Divine Providence:

*One who fulfils the mitzvah of Tzitzit, it is as if he has welcomed the Shekhina, because the blue fringe resembles the ocean, the ocean resembles the firmament, and the firmament resembles the Divine Throne.*

R Meir's words should not be taken literally. The ocean and the sky are colorless, and the Divine Throne is an abstract concept, without any physical attributes. In my opinion, R Meir offers a meditative process which allows humans to contemplate God's greatness. It is hard for us to comprehend the vastness of the universe, and even more so, that of its Creator. R Meir says that upon seeing the blue fringe, one thinks of the ocean, which has been, and still remains, a formidable challenge to mankind. Even today, our most advanced and titanic contraptions are dwarfed by the magnitude of the oceans, and we have not begun to scratch the tip of the proverbial iceberg in studying the mysteries of the ocean. That first step sets the stage for the next one, which is the comparison to the sky. The sky, meaning the universe, is greater than the ocean as the ocean is greater than a human being )of course it is much greater than that, but that perspective is sufficient for the mental exercise(. The next step is thinking of the creator, which is greater than the universe by the same scale.

This would be a wonderful process, and there is no doubt that observing the marvels of nature is at the core of the spiritual experience, but this process is not clearly conveyed by the biblical text. Furthermore, we must assume that before R Meir offered this meditative technique there was an immediate message was associated with the Tzitzit, and which confirmed one's faith.

### **Tzitzit in the Ancient Near East**

The riddle of the Tzitzit always intrigued me, until several years ago I came upon a book by Prof. M. Inbar, dealing with Prophecies in the Mari Documents, in which the author describes the spiritual world of Mari, which thrived on the banks of the Euphrates in the 18th century BCE. The information was found on clay tablets found at the Tel-Hariri site, and one detail caught my eye. It was the concept of prophecy and its verification. It turns out that the Mari culture was blessed with no less than four categories of prophets, one of which, called Barru, was in charge of confirming the validity of the others. What evidence was brought to the forensic lab of those "Prophecy Verifiers"? You have guessed correctly: the Tzitzit. Writes Prof. Inbar )p. 47-48(:

*The divine polygraph, used to ascertain the intention of the gods, could tell whether the prophet is telling the truth and was he indeed a messenger of the gods. The examination was performed by holding a fringe from the prophet's garments or a lock from his hair )or from one who listened to the prophet(. Those objects were sent to the the Barru, who would perform ritual divinations. They believed that the objects represent their owners, and the results of the divination would determine the veracity of the prophecy.*

*In one case, a local governor submits the items to the king and writes:*

*I have sent to my master a lock from the prophet's hair and a fringe from his garment, let my master decide whether he is a true prophet.*

This concept of the examination of prophecy in the Ancient Near East sheds light, in my opinion, on the Mitzvah of Tzitzit. Wearing fringed garments by the whole nation shows their firm belief in Moses's prophecy, and as a result, in the totality of the Torah and the Mitzvot. This is because the whole nation was present at Mount Sinai, and has witnessed the prophecy of Moses, as it is written )Ex. 19:9( *"the people will hear as I speak with you, and they will have faith in you for eternity."* The presence of the whole nation in the prophetic event makes all of them, according to the yardstick of the ancient culture, subject of the examination of prophecy. By wearing garments with four visible corners carrying fringes, they declare their faith in the prophecy, as if saying *"here are my fringes, come and take whatever you want."* One who wears Tzitzit declares he has such confidence in the prophecy, as well as in the prophet who delivered it, and therefore he is not afraid that one will cut the corner of his garment and will examine it to verify the prophecy. By contrast, one who casts doubt on the prophecy will try to hide the corners of the garment to avoid examination.

### **The coat – dress code for prophets**

Coats and robes appear in the Bible as prophets' clothes of choice. It is said of Samuel that his mother would make for him small coat every year )I Sam. 2:19(. When his spirit was summoned by King Saul, he was described as wearing a

coat )Ibid. 28:14(. It is said of Elijah that his robe had special qualities, and that he bequeathed it to Elisha as part of delegating his prophetic authorities to him )I Kings 19:13-19(. It is most interesting to look at the way the prophet Zachariah )13:4( refers to false prophets:

*...on that day, the prophets will be ashamed of their visions and prophecies; no more will they wear a woolen robe to mislead the people.*

Another allusion to the practices of the false prophets can be found in the book of Jeremiah )9:24-10:11(. The prophet addresses the Israelites and their pagan neighbors, saying:

*...as one they will be exposed as fools and ignoramuses... they wear blue fringes and royal purple made by wise men.*

Jeremiah says that pagans do possess wisdom, but their prophecy is fake, and they disguise their deceit with the external elements of blue dye and royal purple.

### **Cutting the corner of the garment**

Following the war against Amalek, the prophet Samuel confronts King Saul and tells him that God has rejected him as a king. When the prophet turns to leave, the distraught king grabs the corner of his garment and tears it. It is much more than an attempt to hold the prophet back! It is an act which represents a doubt the king casts on Samuel's prophecy. Saul's act is harshly rebuked by Samuel. First, he compares the tearing of his garment to the tearing of the kingdom from Saul. He then states that the status of his prophecy has not changed: *"the Eternal God of Israel will not deceive and will not regret."* Samuel had to say it because Saul doubted his prophecy. There are other cases in the books of Samuel and Kings where this idea is present.

### **The Ultimate Tzitzit**

In Midrashic literature the term "an all-blue tzitzit" is a sarcastic description of one who thinks he is perfect, but we do find in the Torah an all-blue robe - the coat of the high priest, described thus:

*Make the coat of the Ephod all-blue. The opening at the top ]lit. mouth of its head[ will be inside it. There will be a woven seam around it, like embroidery, it will not be torn. Make on its fringes pomegranates of blue, royal purple, and crimson... and golden bells in them around. One golden bell and one pomegranate... on the fringes of the coat around. It will be on Aaron when he serves, and his voice will be heard when he comes to the inner sanctuary ]to be[ in front of God, and when he comes out, so he will not die.*

The coat is an enhanced version of the tzitzit, as demonstrated by this chart:

#### **Tzitzit**

One blue fringe.

Fringes are threads of wool.

Remembrance through sight:  
"you will see and remember"

#### **Coat**

The whole garment is blue

A complex pattern of golden bells and pomegranates, which are woven from blue, royal purple, and crimson wool.

Remembrance through sound:  
"his voice will be heard"

Sound can be heard even without being present, and to a greater distance )e.g. foghorn(. As Aaron is about to enter the sanctuary, he is reminded of the special situation in which he finds himself, and he is encouraged to act accordingly.

## A challenge to tear.

A statement: it will never be torn )explained below(.

The intrinsic connection between the coat and the tzitzit was probably clear to Maimonides, since he describes the coat of the high priest as similar to the small tzitzit worn by some under their garments )*Laws of the Temple Vessels*, 9:3(:

*The coat is all blue. Its threads are folded 12 times, and its opening is woven from the garment itself. It has no sleeves but rather is split into two wings from the neck down...*

There is no biblical or Talmudic source to support Maimonides' description of as a small Tzitzit, and the Raavad challenges him succinctly: "*where did he get this from?*"

Indeed, Maimonides' commentators struggle to understand his words or find the source. Most of them refer to the commentary of Nahmanides on the Torah, and suggest that there might have been a Talmudic source which was lost. However, according to what I have presented here, there is a close relationship between the coat and the tzitzit, and therefore Maimonides, maybe intuitively, described the coat as a garment with four corners.

## It shall not be torn

The final argument to prove this point is in the words of the Torah "*it shall not be torn.*" One opinion in the Talmud is that tearing the coat is a punishable act )Yoma 72:2(, but this opinion is challenged with the argument that linguistically it is a word of advice: "*it is good to weave it in that manner so it will not be torn.*" Maimonides, however, rules that it is punishable. That is because just as the fringes of a regular tzitzit are a declaration of faith, so is the whole coat of the High Priest, and anyone who tears it shows his disregard for the divine prophecy.

This is beautifully expressed by two words chosen to describe the coat – mouth and lip:

*...its mouth will be integral, its mouth will have a lip around it, it will be like a mouth of embroidery, it will not be torn.*

Those two words are immediately associated with prophecy, especially that of Moses )Ex. 4:11-16; 6:12(:

*I am heavy of mouth... who has given man a mouth... I will be with your mouth... you will put the words in his mouth and I will be with your mouth and his mouth... he will be your mouth... how will Pharaoh listen to me when I am heavy of lips?*

In conclusion, the Tzitzit, in its original cultural context, served as a powerful statement of belief and trust in the divine origin of Moses' prophecy, and consequently, in the validity of the whole Torah. Though these constructs are not part of our social or religious system today, we could still identify with them in the sense of one who "*wears his religion on his sleeve,*" and be proud of our rich and inspiring heritage.

\* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD( and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

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**Shavuon Sh'lach**  
by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

For the filming of *Kid Sister*, the film crew worked tirelessly to find an actor that could portray Rabbi Moshe Rube. They finally settled on this handsome fellow ]photo not reproduced here[ to play the rabbi, and I'm quite flattered.

Okay, they actually didn't base their rabbi-actor choice on me but it got me thinking, who would I want to play me if someone were filming the story of my life? What about you? Who would you like to play you? If you're a man, George Clooney or Brad Pitt probably came to mind. If you're a woman, Meryl Streep, Kate Winslet or 1950's Marilyn Monroe might fit the bill. Whoever it is, I'm sure we'd all want someone pretty and famous because at some point we all wanted to be them.

The spies from our Torah portion fell into this trap. They said "we felt like insects when we saw the powerful, handsome, strong, amazing, people of Canaan. We wish we could be them. Instead, we are nothings. So therefore, all of us must abandon hope of entering Israel for we cannot measure up" to the "George Clooneys" of Canaan. The nation of Israel listened and said, "You're right. We are all terrible compared to them. We don't want to go." Calamity then ensues as God grants their wish and they die in the desert.

So based on this, maybe we should consider playing ourselves when they make a Netflix show about our lives. After all, we are the only ones capable of being us. We can't be George Clooney any more than George Clooney could be Clark Gable. And George Clooney doesn't have the talents we have. We can admire the qualities of the actors and all people around us while still embracing our own path that only we can walk on.  
Shabbat Shalom

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Kneseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(.

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## **You Gotta Have Faith, Faith, Faith** by Rabbi Daniel Epstein \*

*"I am not afraid, for God is with me. I was born to do this"— Joan of Arc*

Joan of Arc uttered these immortal words as she was setting out on her journey to battle the English army. This was a woman with bitachon, with faith.

This week's parsha Shlach deals with sending spies as the Jews are about to embark on a difficult conquest, much like the aforementioned 16 year-old Joan of Arc. The episode of the spies ultimately ends in disaster. They return with a fearful report which subsequently leads to the entire generation dying out in the wilderness. This episode is the focal point of Sefer Bamidbar. Up until this point, the Jews are preparing to enter the land of Israel and conquer it from the enemies living in it. Now with their morale dashed by the leaders of the generation, they are destined to dig their own graves and wait to die out.

How could things go so wrong, so quickly? Many factors contributed to this debacle. One factor could be related to the morale of the leaders that influenced the people, the opposite of Joan of Arc. At the end of the spies' report to the nation, they said "*we were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so we were in their eyes*" )Numbers 33:13(. They thought that they were very lowly and so they couldn't win.

What a colossal mistake! The leaders did not have bitachon in Hashem, that God would fight for them as we are later told in sefer Devarim. But they made another mistake as well.

If we take a look at the Haftarah, we see that their assumption about the morale of the Canaanites was also incorrect. We fast forward around 40 years, when the Jews are once again going into the land of Israel. Yehoshua sends spies, and this time instead of assuming the Canaanite mindset, they actually ask and speak to a Canaanite. This is a great lesson in itself. If you want to know how someone feels about something, just ask them. If you read the account from our parsha carefully, you will see the spies never actually speak to anyone on the ground, they just assume they were seeing them as ants.

When the spies actually speak to a Canaanite woman, she tells them the people are scared, that their hearts melted when they heard about krias Yam Suf and the other victories of Am Yisrael (Josh. 2:9-11). She then expresses amazing bitachon and says Hashem will fight your battles and win. Her name is Rachav, which can mean wide or expansive. She has a growth mindset. She sees possibilities where the spies were very narrow. They only saw the problems. That's one of the main messages behind Joan of Arc and Rachav: to have bitachon in Hashem and bitachon in yourself. Have faith and belief in the possibility of this growth mindset.

That's my berakha for you this Shabbat. We should all have this growth mindset and not think about the problems like the spies. We should think about the possibilities like Rachav and Joan of Arc. Shabbat Shalom.

\* Senior Jewish Educator and experienced Maggid at the George Washington University Hillel, where he serves more than 5,000 Jewish students. He sends a weekly E-mail Dvar Torah, available at [danstora.com](http://danstora.com).

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Shlach: Rejecting the Land of Israel**

A dispirited discussion took place at Beit HaRav, Rav Kook's house in Jerusalem, not long after the end of World War II. The Chief Rabbi had passed away ten years earlier; now it was his son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook, who sat at the head of the table.

One participant at the Sabbath table had brought up a disturbing topic: the phenomenon of visitors touring Eretz Yisrael and then criticizing the country after returning to their homes. "These visitors complain about everything: the heat, the poverty, the backwardness, the political situation — and discourage other Jews from moving here," he lamented.

Rav Tzvi Yehudah responded by telling over the following parable, one he had heard in the name of Rabbi Samuel Mohilever, the rabbi of Bialystok.

#### **The Failed Match**

There was once a wealthy man who sought the hand of a certain young lady. She was the most beautiful girl in town, and was blessed with many talents and a truly refined character. Her family was not well-off, so they were eager about a possible match with the prosperous fellow.

The young woman, however, was not interested in the match. Rich or not, the prospective suitor was known to be coarse and ill-mannered. She refused to meet with him.

The father asked her to at least meet with the young man in their home, so as not to embarrass him. "After all, one meeting doesn't obligate you to marry him!" To please her father, the young woman agreed.

The following Sabbath afternoon, the fellow arrived at the house as arranged, and was warmly received by the father. Shortly afterwards, his daughter made her entrance. But her hair was uncombed, and she wore a faded, crumpled dress and shabby house slippers. Appalled at her disheveled appearance, it did not take long before the young man excused himself and made a hurried exit.

"What everyone says about this girl — it's not true," exclaimed the astonished young man to his friends. "She's hideous!"

Rav Tzvi Yehudah stopped briefly, surveying the guests seated around the table. "Superficially, it would appear that the brash young fellow had rejected the young woman. But in fact, it was she who had rejected him."

"The same is true regarding the Land of Israel," the rabbi explained. "Eretz Yisrael is a special land, only ready to accept those who are receptive to its unique spiritual qualities. The Land does not reveal its inner beauty to all who visit. Not everyone is worthy to perceive its special holiness."

**“It may appear as if the dissatisfied visitors are the ones who reject the Land of Israel,” he concluded. “But in fact, it is the Land that rejects them!”** ]emphasis added[

A thoughtful silence pervaded the room. Those present were stunned by the parable and the rabbi’s impassioned delivery. Then one of the guests observed, “Reb Tzvi Yehudah, your words are suitable for a son of your eminent father, may his memory be a blessing!”

### **Seeing the Goodness of Jerusalem**

Rav Tzvi Yehudah’s response was indeed appropriate for Rav Kook’s son. When visitors from outside the country would approach the Chief Rabbi for a blessing, Rav Kook would quote from the Book of Psalms, *“May God bless you from Zion”* )128:5(.

Then he would ask: **What exactly is this “blessing from Zion”? In fact, the content of the blessing is described in the continuation of the verse: “May you see the goodness of Jerusalem.”** ]emphss dded[

The rabbi would explain: “The verse does not say that one should merit seeing Jerusalem; but that one should merit seeing “the goodness of Jerusalem.” Many people visit Jerusalem. But how many of them merit seeing the inner goodness hidden in the holy city?”

“And that,” he concluded, “is God’s special blessing from Zion.”

)*Stories from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Malachim Kivnei Adam* by Simcha Raz, pp. 227-278, 230.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHLACH60.htm>

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## **What Made Joshua and Caleb Different? )Shelach Lecha 5771(**

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

The spies sent by Moses to explore the land came back with a wholly misleading report. They said:

*“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we . . . The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature”* Num. 13:31-32

In fact, as we later discover in the book of Joshua, the inhabitants of the land were terrified of the Israelites. When Joshua sent spies to Jericho, Rahab told them:

*“A great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.” When the people heard what God had done for the Israelites, “our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you”* )Josh. 2:9-11(

The spies should have known this. They themselves had sung at the Red Sea:

*“The people of Canaan melted away; terror and dread fell upon them.”* Ex. 15:15-16

The spies were guilty of an attribution error, assuming that others felt as they did. They said:

*“We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we were in their eyes.”* Num. 13:33



But as the Kotzker Rebbe noted, they were entitled to make the first claim but not the second. They knew how they felt. They had no idea how the people of the land felt. They were terrified of the Canaanites and failed to see that the Canaanites were terrified of them.

But there are two obvious questions: First, why did ten spies make this mistake? Second, why did two of them, Joshua and Caleb, not make it?

Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck has written a fascinating book, *Mindset*, on why some people fulfil their potential, while others do not. Her interest, she says, was aroused when she observed the behaviour of 10-year-old children when given puzzles to solve. Some, when the puzzles became difficult, thrived. They relished the challenge, even when it proved too hard for them. Others became anxious. When the puzzles became hard, they were easily discouraged.

She wanted to understand why. What makes the difference between people who enjoy being tested and those who don't? What makes some people grow through adversity while others become demoralised? Her research drove her to the conclusion that it is a matter of mindset. Some see their abilities as given and unalterable. We just are gifted or ordinary, and there is not much we can do about it. She calls this the "fixed" mindset.

Others believe that we grow through our efforts. When they fail they don't define this as failure but as a learning experience. She calls this the "growth" mindset.

Those with a fixed mindset tend to avoid difficult challenges because they fear failure. They think it will expose them as inadequate. So they are reluctant to take risks. They play it safe.

People with the growth mindset react differently. *"They don't just seek challenge, they thrive on it. The bigger the challenge, the more they stretch."* When do people with the fixed mindset thrive? *"When things are safely within their grasp. If things get too challenging . . . they lose interest."*

Parents can do great damage to their children, she says, when they tell them they are gifted, clever, talented. This encourages the child to believe that he or she has a fixed quantum of ability. This discourages them from risking failure. Such children say things like, *"I often feel that my parents won't value me if I'm not as successful as they would like."*

Parents who want to help their children should, she says, praise them not for their ability but for their effort, their willingness to try hard even if they fail. A great basketball coach used to say to his players, *"You may be outscored, but you will never lose."* If they gave of their best, they might lose the game but they would gain and grow. They would be winners in the long run.

The fixed mindset lives with the constant fear of failure. The growth mindset doesn't think in terms of failing at all.

Apply this logic to the spies and we see something fascinating. The Torah describes them in these words:

*"All were men Jof standing[; they were heads of the Israelites"* Num. 13:3

They were people with reputations to guard. Others had high expectations of them. They were princes, leaders, men of renown. If Dweck is right, people laden with expectations tend to be risk-averse. They do not want to be seen to fail. That may be why they came back and said, in effect: We cannot win against the Canaanites. Therefore we should not even try.

There were two exceptions, Caleb and Joshua. Caleb came from the tribe of Judah, and Judah, we learn in the book of Bereishit, was the first baal teshuvah. Early in life he had been the one who proposed selling Joseph into slavery. But he matured. He was taught a lesson by his daughter-in-law, Tamar. He confessed, *"She is more righteous than I am."* That experience seems to have changed his life. Later, when the Viceroy of Egypt (Joseph, not yet recognised by the brothers) threatens to hold Benjamin as a prisoner, Judah offers to spend his life as a slave so that his brother can go free. Judah is the clearest example in Bereishit of someone who takes adversity as a learning experience rather than as failure. In Dweck's terminology, he had a growth mindset. Evidently he handed on this trait to his descendants, Caleb among them.

As for Joshua, the text tells us, specifically in the story of the spies, that Moses had changed his name. Originally he was called Hoshea, but Moses added a letter to his name )Num. 13:16(. A change of name always implies a change of character or calling. Abram became Abraham. Jacob became Israel. When our name changes, says Maimonides, it is as if we or someone else were saying:

*"You are not the same person as you were before" Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:4*

Anyone who has experienced a name-change has been inducted into a growth mindset.

People with the growth mindset do not fear failure. They relish challenges. They know that if they fail, they will try again until they succeed. It cannot be coincidence that the two people among the spies who had the growth mindset were also the two who were unafraid of the risks and trials of conquering the land. Nor can it be accidental that the ten others, all of whom carried the burden of people's expectations )as leaders, princes, men of high rank( were reluctant to do so.

If this analysis is correct, the story of the spies holds a significant message for us. **God does not ask us never to fail. He asks of us that we give of our best. He lifts us when we fail and forgives us when we fail. It is this that gives us the courage to take risks.** That is what Joshua and Caleb knew, one through his name change, the other through the experience of his ancestor Judah. ]emphasis added[

Hence the paradoxical but deeply liberating truth: Fear of failure causes us to fail. It is the willingness to fail that allows us to succeed.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shelach-lecha/what-made-joshua-and-caleb-different/>

Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Any footnotes from the original speech have not been preserved.

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## **The Harlot Who Discovered a Higher Satisfaction**

By Yossi Ives \* © Chabad 2023

The portion of Shelach concludes with the mitzvah of attaching tzitzit to the edges of a four-cornered garment. Why? "So that you may remember Him and fulfill His commandments."<sup>1</sup> To illustrate this, the Talmud<sup>2</sup> tells of a man "who was meticulous about the observance of tzitzit" and who we later discover was actually a yeshiva student, who hears about an exquisite harlot operating on a distant island who charges 400 gold coins for her services. He sent her the money and booked his slot.

We wonder what a budding Torah scholar was doing engaging in this kind of pleasure. It also seems very unlikely that this man had this kind of money to spare, so what was he doing blowing such a vast sum on this adventure?

Rather, here was an individual who was living a regular life according to his pious leanings, but who began to question whether he was missing out on worldly pleasures. So he decided to pursue what seemed to him the most extravagant adventure into the world of sin. He would go all-out to experience the height of indulgence and see what it was about.

He arrived at a palace, at the heart of which lay a chamber with seven beds, six of silver and one of gold. Each bed was higher than the next, and was reached via a ladder. At the very pinnacle lay the woman he had paid so much to visit.

Everything about the moment was designed to be overwhelming, overpowering the senses.

But just as he was disrobing, the fringes of his tzitzit slapped him in the face. As Rashi suggests, this was no coincidence. The Divine Hand was at work reminding him of who he was and what his values were. Stunned, the man slipped off the bed and slumped to the ground. The woman joined him there, confused by his sudden loss of interest. She said to him: "I

swear by the life of the ]Roman[ emperor, that I will not let you go until you tell what fault you found in me ]that made you lose interest[."

Said the man: "I swear that I have never seen a woman as beautiful as you. But, there is this unique commandment from G d called tzitzit ..." He went on to explain the significance of the mitzvah as a reminder of our fidelity to the Almighty, Who both rewards and punishes. Despite having shelled out so much money, and despite having traversed such great distances, being confronted by the message of the tzitzit stopped him in his tracks.

He had come to experience, at least once in his life, the ultimate in physical pleasure, only to discover that there is something that has an even greater pull on a person – their relationship to G d! Despite the glamor and allure, even in the face of the promise of the pinnacle of human desire, he realized that there is something even more desirable – his Judaism; spiritual satisfaction.

The woman was shocked. "I shall not let you go unless you tell me your name, the name of your city, the name of your master, and the name of the yeshiva where you studied Torah." The man wrote down this information and handed it to her.

This is perhaps the most fascinating part of the story. How did this woman know that he had a rabbi and studied Torah? Given what he had come to do that day, his behavior was hardly that of a Torah student!

Perhaps even more perplexing is his willingness to divulge his identity, given the compromising situation he put himself in. Why would he agree to provide specific information that would make it so easy for his activities to become known to his own illustrious rabbi?

This woman knew the power she had over her clients. Never before had anyone displayed that level of self-control. She realized that only someone with unique inner strength would be able to resist temptation in the manner she had just witnessed. Only a person who had been inspired by Torah would have been so transformed by the sign of the tzitzit brushing against his face.

To her it was obvious that this had to be someone instilled with Torah values, someone who had studied in a yeshiva. She didn't ask him if he had a rabbi, but who was his rabbi. Such a person doesn't just happen, but is the product of years of investment.

For all of the embarrassing nature of the situation, this man knew that he had prevailed and had achieved greatness. He had nothing to hide; he had acquitted himself admirably. We can only speculate about what the man expected would happen next, but it is unlikely that he foresaw what was to transpire.

Amazed by what happened, the woman decided to make some changes to her own life. She gave a third of her wealth to the crown )in exchange for permission to convert(, a third she distributed to the poor, and the remainder she took with her. She made her way to the yeshiva of the great Rabbi Chiyya, the man's teacher. "Rabbi," she demanded, "give the order that they should make me a convert ]to Judaism[."

Rebbi Chiyya sensed that something about this was unusual. "Have you perhaps set your eyes upon one of my students?" Whereupon she produced the note given to her by the man, signaling that she had witnessed a miracle that had inspired her to discover Judaism. Rebbi Chiyya understood the enormous impact this encounter had on both of them. He acquiesced to her request for conversion, and gave his approval to the marriage. "Go, acquire your prize," he told her. "Those sheets which you laid out for him in a manner that was prohibited, now you can lay them out for him in a manner that is permitted."

This woman thought that she had the keys to true pleasure, only to discover that there is a happiness that trumps it. The power of what she had to offer was no match to spiritual strength. All the hype around her luster evaporated when confronted with the infinite appeal of that which is holy and pure. And now that she had decided to go in search of spiritual riches herself.

In a sense, that man could be any one of us. Perhaps our story is not quite as dramatic, but the theme is not so different. We can spend enormous amounts of effort and resources in pursuit of vain satisfaction, only to come to the realization that true and lasting happiness is attained through the grandeur of the soul.

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 15:41.
2. Talmud, Menachot 44a.

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[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/5553931/jewish/The-Harlot-Who-Discovered-a-Higher-Satisfaction.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5553931/jewish/The-Harlot-Who-Discovered-a-Higher-Satisfaction.htm)

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### **Shelach: Today It's All Love**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

*G-d instructs Moses regarding wearing tassels tzitzit( on the corners of four-cornered garments. These serve as a reminder to perform all G-d's commandments. )Numbers 15:37-41(*

Originally, each tassel consisted of three white threads and one turquoise thread, all four doubled over, hanging from each corner of the garment.

Nowadays, however, all four threads are white, since we can no longer identify with certainty the creature from whose blood the turquoise thread must be manufactured.

Allegorically, the turquoise thread symbolized the awe of G-d and the white threads the love of G-d. The fact that by Divine providence all the threads of the tassels are nowadays white indicates that in our era, our approach to G-d is mainly thorough love rather than awe and fear.

By cultivating love of G-d, one can thereby achieve all the levels of spiritual growth that formerly required a separate emphasis on fear and awe.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3, p. 304

Gut Shabbos,  
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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# **The Grasshopper Effect and Other Defects in Modern Orthodox Leadership**

By David Balint \*

Since the days of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the Orthodox world has been blessed with many great leaders and thinkers who have scrupulously observed halakha (Jewish law) but who have, at the same time, adjusted to the modern world, including its science and technology. In more recent times, we have been fortunate to have Yeshiva University as guided by Rabbi Norman Lamm and more recently by Richard Joel. We have had a series of outstanding chief rabbis of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, most recently, Jonathan Sacks. There was the incomparable Joseph B. Soloveitchik, of course, whose inspirational teachings have generated numerous leaders across the globe.

I continue to be impressed with Jewish thinkers such as Menachem Kellner, David Hartman, Adam Ferziger, Marc Shapiro, José Faur, Joseph Telushkin, and many others. At the same time, we have inspiring congregational leaders who have assumed wider roles, such as Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Rabbi Benjamin Lau, Rabbi Marc Angel, and Rabbi Avi Weiss. In Israel we have the example of Yeshivat Har Etzion, so ably led by Rabbis Aharon Lichtenstein and Yehuda Amital. One cannot help but be impressed with the textual skill of Rabbi Menachem Leibtag.

Notwithstanding our recent history of esteemed leaders and thinkers, the weaknesses in our Orthodox world cannot be ignored if they are to be mended. A variety of factors have resulted in a collapse of any meaningful application of the word "leadership" to Modern Orthodoxy. This collapse is mostly self-induced.

A few years ago I was walking on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem. In the Jewish world there are not six degrees of separation but rather, only one or two for the most part. I was searching the passing faces for people I knew. There was something oddly familiar about a gentleman approaching me, but I assumed it could not be anybody that I knew because the man was decked out in a long black coat and big-brimmed black hat of the type rarely seen in my hometown of Seattle except for on the occasional meshulah (charity collector). As my brain adjusted, though, I could see that it was a rabbi I had known for many years. I knew him as a moderate, educated, Modern Orthodox congregational leader. My confusion was multiplied when I remembered that this rabbi was Sephardic, yet he was dressed as if he were someone from Eastern Europe in the high fashion of Polish gentry 200 years ago. We greeted each other and I asked him why he was dressed in Hareidi garb. He straightforwardly answered that, in order to fit in and be taken seriously as a rabbi, he felt he had to dress in that manner and conform to "the look."

This encounter was symbolic as it relates to the topic at hand, which is the leadership crisis. This brings us to one of the most distinct factors in the decline of leadership: a massive inferiority complex. When the Jews left Egypt, they left with the direct intervention of God, with all God's visible power and with the promise of continuing intervention in the conquest of the Promised Land. Moses assembled the leadership of the time and sent them to reconnoiter the land. Despite having all of the power of God behind them, the majority had a crisis of confidence. Ten of the twelve spies projected their own insecurities onto the situation with the Canaanites, and in a famous bout of self-criticism said: "We were like grasshoppers in our eyes, and so were we in their eyes" (Numbers 13:31-33).

In the context of this discussion, many in our Modern Orthodox world, including congregational rabbis and organizations, seem to frequently operate with one eye on the Hareidi world as if it consisted of giants. As a consequence, they seem to view themselves as inferior. It is time to stop this grasshopper effect.

We must ask ourselves: Who are these "giants," and what do they stand for? The Hareidi world is characterized not only by observance of strictures (humrot), but also by the baggage that generally (although not always) comes with the long black coat and wide-rimmed black hat. More often than not, that baggage includes a rejection of reality. For example, most Hareidim insist that the universe is strictly 5,768 years old, despite overwhelming proof from geology, physics, astronomy, and biology that the universe is approximately 14 billion years old, the age of the earth is approximately 4.5 billion years, and life on this planet dates from about 3.5 billion years ago. They reject any notion of evolution, making themselves look foolish in the eyes not only of scientists but also in the eyes all people whose worldview is grounded in factual reality.

In addition, most Hareidim hold that a literal interpretation of Midrashim is often the most accurate. Here, I quote extensively from Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishna. Rambam's wisdom, written 825 years ago, still resonates. Since this passage inspires me, I quote it in full:

It is important for you to know that there are three classes [of thinkers] who differ in their interpretation of the words of the

Sages, of blessed memory. The first class comprises the majority among those that I have come across and whose compositions I have read and of whom I have heard. They understand the words of the Sages literally and do not interpret them at all. To them all impossibilities are necessary occurrences. They only do this because of their ignorance of sciences and their being distant from [various] fields of knowledge. They do not possess any of the perfection that would stimulate them [to understanding] of their own accord, nor have they found someone else to arouse them. Therefore, they think that the intent of the Sages in all their precise and carefully stated remarks is only what they can comprehend and that these [remarks] are to be understood literally. This is despite the fact that in their literal sense some of the words of the Sages would seem to be so slanderous and absurd that if they were related to the uneducated masses in their literal sense, and all the more so to the wise, they would look upon them with amazement and exclaim: 'How is it possible that there exists in the world anyone who would think in this manner or believe that such statements are correct, much less approve of them!' This class is poor [in understanding] and one should pity their folly. In their own minds, they think they are honoring and exalting the Sages, but they are actually degrading them to the lowest depths. And they do not perceive that, as God lives, it is this class of thinkers that destroys the splendor of the Torah of God into saying the opposite of what it intends to convey. For God said in His perfect Torah: This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. [Deuteronomy 4:6] But this category [of thinkers] expounds the words of the Sages in their literal sense so that when the nations hear them, they will say: "Surely this small nation is a foolish and degenerate people." (Introduction to his commentary on Perek Helek)

Throughout rabbinic literature, our Sages note that God's highest gift to humankind is our intelligence and our ability to think. But in the Hareidi world, people feel that their highest duty is to turn off that brain and allow their "Rav" or a "Gadol" to do their thinking for them about even the simplest and most personal things, including occupation, residence, spouses, and politics. Despite the acknowledged disappearance of prophecy within Judaism, at least until messianic times, Hareidim all but import it back into our faith through the concept of "Daas Torah." Loosely defined, "Daas Torah" is knowledge of all things because of immersion in Torah unadulterated by any other knowledge. (See Lawrence Kaplan, "Daas Torah: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority," in the Orthodox Forum, Rabbinic Authority and Personal Authority.) We see the spectacle of well-known Hareidi rabbis speaking with self-confidence as to why God did specific things as if they have spoken to God directly. God's supposed reasons for the Holocaust proliferate, for example. In more recent times, God's so-called reasons for the devastation of New Orleans by Katrina, or reasons for the debacle of the last war in Lebanon against Hizbullah have been expounded by these "sages." The more isolated a Hareidi leader is from science, current events, indeed any secular knowledge, the more that world considers that leader as holy. These are the "giants" before whom many in the Modern Orthodox world feel small.

I have to question whether we really need to "look up" to the Hareidi world which overwhelmingly rejects the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Should we really be in awe of those in Israel who avoid national service-yet accept state welfare in huge numbers? For that matter, if we all took on their lifestyle, who would pay for it? In Israel we would all live in abject poverty. In the United States, we would take state welfare. In both countries we would live in ever-increasing ignorance. How is this a long-term solution to world change?

Jewish self-confidence eschews any need to seek validation in the views, real or imagined, of others. The Torah was given by God and, accordingly, we must view God's system as perfect. Jews have always been an infinitesimal percent of the world's population but this minority status has never been a concern of ours. Historically, Christianity and Islam have sought through force and active proselytizing to convert as many people as possible to their respective religions. Islam continues to support, for the most part, these goals through violence, while Christianity continues to pursue these goals by softer methods. Mormons have honed the proselytizing skills to such a degree that there are now almost as many Latter Day Saints in the world as there are Jews-even though Joseph Smith incorporated the religion only in 1830. Each of these religions partially justifies itself by pointing to what each of them perceives to be proof of the inherent validity of their religion. They argue that their religions are true because they have attracted so many millions of adherents, as if truth is a matter of popular vote, or is self-validated by large numbers of members. Many of our Modern Orthodox leaders turn, in similar fashion, to the Hareidi world for validation. The fact that so many Orthodox leaders act (or refuse to act) with one eye over their shoulder to how they think the so-called gedolim of B'nei Brak or Monsey will perceive them is an acute demonstration of an endemic shortage of self-confidence. People who are self-confident are not afraid of the marketplace of ideas, nor do they need to be ideologues believing in the most ridiculous of things despite evidence and proof to the contrary.

Another manifestation of the weakness of leadership is in the proliferation of outreach kollels of all stripes around the country, including Kollel MiZions. (See the article by Adam Ferziger of Bar Ilan University: "The Emergence of the Community Kollel.") There are a number of reasons why Modern Orthodox rabbis welcome these kollels into their midst and, so often, actively promote them. One of the reasons is that Orthodox leadership has become lazy and has outsourced to the kollels one of its primary functions. Leadership would imply feelings of responsibility for all Jews. Leadership would also require the desire to promote greater levels of observance in all congregants. Leadership would include outreach to nonmembers. Yet instead of taking on the responsibility, our Modern Orthodox leaders all too often simply abdicate. They sit back and watch the kollel families do their work for them, not realizing that their own authority and effectiveness are undermined.

The outreach function of the kollels has one other drastic effect on the quality of Modern Orthodox leadership. Except for the Kollel MiZion movement, the rabbis chosen for these kollels are, more often than not, trained in Hareidi yeshivas. Therefore, directly and indirectly, these kollels promote the views of the Hareidi yeshivas to the people with whom they interact, many of whom do not have backgrounds sufficiently solid to aid them in sorting out the wheat from the chaff.

Are these kollels encouraging their adherents to ask questions of and seek guidance from their local Orthodox rabbis? Occasionally this does happen, but more often they themselves give the answers, or they seek the answers from their own teachers and relay them to their adherents. The kollels are a Trojan horse to Modern Orthodox leadership but, by the time they realize it, it is often too late. (See my article on the Seattle experience at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals website, [www.jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org) [3] [1] [1], entitled "The Seattle Kollel: A Study of Unintended Consequences.")

Often, when sufficient numbers of supporters are achieved, the kollels then promote their own schools (as was done in Seattle) and promote their own synagogues-and pressure the communities directly and indirectly to adopt Hareidi standards. An example of a Hareidi takeover is the transformation of the Breuer's Community in Washington Heights, New York City. That community supposedly followed in the footsteps of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. The legacy was "Torah im derekh erets," Torah with the ways of the world. Rabbi Hirsch promoted the idea that truth is unitary, and that Judaism should strictly adhere to halakha, while responsibly and selectively incorporating well-tested facts and truths that come to us by way of secular culture. That community's transformation into just another Hareidi community was documented by George D. Frankel in his five-part 2002 essay entitled "Dan Shall Judge His People."

Within the North American Modern Orthodox community, the very concept of what a congregational rabbi is supposed to be has changed, leaving many in the dust of practical irrelevance. It used to be sufficient for the rabbi to be a halakhic expert and a good Talmud teacher. Today he must be so much more. Many of our Modern Orthodox rabbis lack any training, or even much interest, in the kinds of skills necessary for successful congregational leadership. Earning semikha (ordination) from most yeshivas does not require (nor do they even offer) training in psychology, sociology, communications, educational theory, or many other prerequisites for effective leadership within the context of the modern world. Until the various yeshivot teach and promote real leadership skills there will continue to be a decline in the effectiveness and power of congregational rabbis.

Another factor that promotes a decline in leadership is the way we allow Modern Orthodox leaders to be maligned. Those vibrant rabbis within the Modern Orthodox world who do spend time and energy trying to find the tools to attract and mold greater levels of observance are often ostracized and heavily criticized for their efforts. This negativity is not only from the Hareidi world but also from the Modern Orthodox community, another sign of insecurity and the need to seek validation from the right wing. While the conga lines during Adon Olam in Riverdale might not be my cup of tea, one cannot argue that spirited services and displays of warmth and friendship have brought thousands of Jews closer to God and have inspired ever-increasing levels of personal and communal observance and involvement. The pillorying of those rabbis who are making valiant efforts to truly lead can only discourage others from even trying. Here the aforementioned generalized insecurity manifests itself. Why? Because even within the Modern Orthodox world many rabbis are quick to jump on the Hareidi bandwagon of criticism of their fellows. Each tries to outdo the next in tearing down a colleague to "prove" how much more "religious" he is.

Torah Judaism provides a structure for a moral life. We as a people have been inhibited from maximizing our specific function and job on earth by millennia of persecution. Nevertheless, without a mission, without a purpose, no organization can stay healthy. Jewish leadership entails responsibility to perfect our fellow Jews and to teach the world by word and by

example the ways of God, in order to bring the world to ethical monotheism. However, there is a strange fact within observant Judaism, including Modern Orthodoxy. Generally speaking, the further to the right one goes, the less one is concerned about fellow Jews outside one's own particular group and, certainly, the less one is concerned about the non-Jewish world. It is interesting to note that the further left toward Reform Judaism one goes, the more of an emphasis can be found on tikkun olam (repairing the world)-but the less emphasis one can find on the rest of the phrase, b'malkhut Shaddai (under the kingship of God). For this reason the causes embraced by the left are sometimes contrary to Jewish law. The further to the right one goes, one finds that the emphasis is on the yoke of heaven, and recognition of a responsibility to fix the world fades to nothingness. True leadership would promote the sight of kippot in rallies against the genocide in Darfur and the other ongoing mass murders. We should see participation in the promotion of human rights across the globe, not only for refuseniks, but also for the downtrodden in Zimbabwe. Our synagogues should be visible pillars of support for local food banks and neighborhood watch committees.

"Leadership" makes itself irrelevant when it fails to vigorously and unequivocally condemn immoral or illegal behavior just because the perpetrator is part of the Orthodox community. We should not be silent about sexual predators within our midst and within some of our schools. We should not turn a blind eye to the abuse of children or the denigration of women. Leadership should insist that tax evasion is not just a game and that dishonesty in business is not to be tolerated. There should not be an automatic defense of a kosher meat processor who systematically violates the law and treats workers as disposable commodities. There seems to be a fear that the rabbi who speaks out on these issues will himself be criticized by those further to the right.

When is the last time that many of us asked a halakhic question of our local Orthodox rabbi? And when we do ask questions, do we get well thought-out, reasoned opinions? When our lay and local leadership attend yeshiva in the United States or in Israel and turn to their roshei yeshivot for halakhic guidance they thereby undermine Orthodox leadership by failing to take seriously the local community rabbis. This is especially true today because of the proliferation of cheap communications by telephone and email. Our roshei yeshivot should stop this practice and encourage decisions at the local level.

When we do ask questions, we see the grasshopper effect again, because often an opinion is given orally with the refusal to put it in writing. In Seattle there are, for example, extensive written guidelines by the local Va'ad for Passover procedures and products. Oral advice is sometimes at odds with the written advice because local Orthodox rabbis simply don't want to put in writing a view that they think is correct but that will draw criticism from those further to the right. We have become people of the look, rather than people of the book. (See the Jerusalem Post article by Michael Freund, 1/29/08, entitled "People of the Look.")

Another problem with maintaining moderation within the Orthodox world is structural. Often, as in Seattle, the local Orthodox rabbis organize, ostensibly for more strength. They join together in a Va'ad for the purposes of uniform community standards. Since these Va'ads operate by consensus, there is a shift in these community standards to the most extreme views of the furthest right member. The nature of consensus is often, in practice, that the most extreme views have to be honored or there will be no consensus.

The recent controversy over conversions is a good example of the partial abdication of Modern Orthodox leadership in the United States, and is a further example of the "grasshopper effect." Many Orthodox rabbis throughout the United States know how ineffective they are at inspiring observance. They therefore have gravitated toward political requirements for conversion, requirements that have only tangential relationship to talmudic requirements for conversion. Every generation adds strictures, partly to show how "serious" they are about their Judaism. They frontload the conversion process with demands and commitments far beyond any requirement for native-born Jews. (See the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) geirus [sic] standards on their website.) One reason they do this is they hope it will mean they will not have to spend energy inspiring converts to greater observance after conversion. The RCA's effort to conform to the will of the now Hareidi-controlled Chief Rabbinate is another example of the grasshopper effect. The RCA's effort to appease the Chief Rabbinate was almost immediately mocked by the ruling in Israel invalidating (supposedly and only in their view) potentially thousands of conversions previously done under the Chief Rabbinate's own Conversion Authority.

I recommend the book *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* by Eric Hoffer (1902-1983). Hoffer was a longshoreman who wrote philosophy. In 1983 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for this book. In it, he analyzes the nature of ideology. One of the chief components of his argument is that beliefs are held onto so strongly by the ideologue that reality and any evidence appearing to contradict the belief system is simply ignored. Jewish leadership



will fail to the extent that it holds onto beliefs such as the literal interpretation of Midrash, and a less than 6,000 year history to the universe.

In the short term, those true believers who find it necessary to not only be trembling (hareidim) before God but to also be trembling before science and the unfolding nature of reality, will continue to gain strength. There is a certain power that the true believer has, as witnessed by the political movements of the last century and continuing to the present time.

The world is moving too fast. Technology today is creating a new *haskalah* (enlightenment). Fundamentalism and rejection of reality are an understandable reaction found, not only within Judaism, but even more so within Islam, Christianity, and even within Hinduism. The Hareidim are in good company with Christian fundamentalists in the United States. For example, according to a Gallup Survey in 2004 almost half (45 percent) of Americans believe that the world is under 10,000 years old and that humans were created in our present form within that period. However, although understandable, the effort to shut off the stream of information is not a solid long-term approach to the challenge that faces us.

What Modern Orthodox leadership can offer in place of such a short-sighted approach is a path to the future that accepts reality, examines it through the lens of Jewish values, and helps us to strengthen our observance in the face of change. That is why we need to encourage an independent leadership at the international, national, and local levels. We need rabbis and lay leaders who are not so insecure in their Judaism that they must look to the Hareidi world for validation.

The Modern Orthodox have the numbers. According to a detailed study by Samuel C. Heilman, cited in his book *Sliding to the Right, the Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*, approximately 11 percent of identifiable North American Jews are Orthodox. Of them, only 27-32 percent could be classified as Hareidi, with half of that number being Hasidim. In other words, about 70 percent of observant Jews in North America fall into the category of Modern Orthodox.

In addition to the numbers, the Modern Orthodox also have the economic power, the educational and organizational background, and the knowledge to continue to lead the Jewish people throughout this century and into the future. We need leaders who can strengthen us for the future by understanding the present. We need leaders who recognize the potential of Modern Orthodoxy. We need leaders who embrace our strengths, and who reject the grasshopper mentality.

We must ask ourselves: Who are these "giants," and what do they stand for? The Hareidi world is characterized not only by observance of strictures (*humrot*), but also by the baggage that generally (although not always) comes with the long black coat and wide-rimmed black hat. More often than not, that baggage includes a rejection of reality. For example, most Hareidim insist that the universe is strictly 5,768 years old, despite overwhelming proof from geology, physics, astronomy, and biology that the universe is approximately 14 billion years old, the age of the earth is approximately 4.5 billion years, and life on this planet dates from about 3.5 billion years ago. They reject any notion of evolution, making themselves look foolish in the eyes not only of scientists but also in the eyes all people whose worldview is grounded in factual reality.

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It is important for you to know that there are three classes [of thinkers] who differ in their interpretation of the words of the Sages, of blessed memory. The first class comprises the majority among those that I have come across and whose compositions I have read and of whom I have heard. They understand the words of the Sages literally and do not interpret them at all. To them all impossibilities are necessary occurrences. They only do this because of their ignorance of sciences and their being distant from [various] fields of knowledge. They do not possess any of the perfection that would stimulate them [to understanding] of their own accord, nor have they found someone else to arouse them. Therefore, they think that the intent of the Sages in all their precise and carefully stated remarks is only what they can comprehend and that these [remarks] are to be understood literally. This is despite the fact that in their literal sense some of the words of the Sages would seem to be so slanderous and absurd that if they were related to the uneducated masses in their literal sense, and all the more so to the wise, they would look upon them with amazement and exclaim: 'How is it possible that there exists in the world anyone who would think in this manner or believe that such statements are correct, much less approve of them!' This class is poor [in understanding] and one should pity their folly. In their own minds, they think they are honoring and exalting the Sages, but they are actually degrading them to the lowest depths. And they do not perceive that, as God lives, it is this class of thinkers that destroys the splendor of the Torah of God into saying the opposite of what it intends to convey. For God said in His perfect Torah: This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all

these statutes and say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. [Deuteronomy 4:6] But this category [of thinkers] expounds the words of the Sages in their literal sense so that when the nations hear them, they will say: "Surely this small nation is a foolish and degenerate people." (Introduction to his commentary on Perek Helek)

Throughout rabbinic literature, our Sages note that God's highest gift to humankind is our intelligence and our ability to think. But in the Hareidi world, people feel that their highest duty is to turn off that brain and allow their "Rav" or a "Gadol" to do their thinking for them about even the simplest and most personal things, including occupation, residence, spouses, and politics. Despite the acknowledged disappearance of prophecy within Judaism, at least until messianic times, Hareidim all but import it back into our faith through the concept of "Daas Torah." Loosely defined, "Daas Torah" is knowledge of all things because of immersion in Torah unadulterated by any other knowledge. (See Lawrence Kaplan, "Daas Torah: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority," in the Orthodox Forum, Rabbinic Authority and Personal Authority.) We see the spectacle of well-known Hareidi rabbis speaking with self-confidence as to why God did specific things as if they have spoken to God directly. God's supposed reasons for the Holocaust proliferate, for example. In more recent times, God's so-called reasons for the devastation of New Orleans by Katrina, or reasons for the debacle of the last war in Lebanon against Hizbullah have been expounded by these "sages." The more isolated a Hareidi leader is from science, current events, indeed any secular knowledge, the more that world considers that leader as holy. These are the "giants" before whom many in the Modern Orthodox world feel small.

I have to question whether we really need to "look up" to the Hareidi world which overwhelmingly rejects the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Should we really be in awe of those in Israel who avoid national service-yet accept state welfare in huge numbers? For that matter, if we all took on their lifestyle, who would pay for it? In Israel we would all live in abject poverty. In the United States, we would take state welfare. In both countries we would live in ever-increasing ignorance. How is this a long-term solution to world change?

Jewish self-confidence eschews any need to seek validation in the views, real or imagined, of others. The Torah was given by God and, accordingly, we must view God's system as perfect. Jews have always been an infinitesimal percent of the world's population but this minority status has never been a concern of ours. Historically, Christianity and Islam have sought through force and active proselytizing to convert as many people as possible to their respective religions. Islam continues to support, for the most part, these goals through violence, while Christianity continues to pursue these goals by softer methods. Mormons have honed the proselytizing skills to such a degree that there are now almost as many Latter Day Saints in the world as there are Jews-even though Joseph Smith incorporated the religion only in 1830. Each of these religions partially justifies itself by pointing to what each of them perceives to be proof of the inherent validity of their religion. They argue that their religions are true because they have attracted so many millions of adherents, as if truth is a matter of popular vote, or is self-validated by large numbers of members. Many of our Modern Orthodox leaders turn, in similar fashion, to the Hareidi world for validation. The fact that so many Orthodox leaders act (or refuse to act) with one eye over their shoulder to how they think the so-called gedolim of B'nei Brak or Monsey will perceive them is an acute demonstration of an endemic shortage of self-confidence. People who are self-confident are not afraid of the marketplace of ideas, nor do they need to be ideologues believing in the most ridiculous of things despite evidence and proof to the contrary.

Another manifestation of the weakness of leadership is in the proliferation of outreach kollels of all stripes around the country, including Kollel MiZions. (See the article by Adam Ferziger of Bar Ilan University: "The Emergence of the Community Kollel.") There are a number of reasons why Modern Orthodox rabbis welcome these kollels into their midst and, so often, actively promote them. One of the reasons is that Orthodox leadership has become lazy and has outsourced to the kollels one of its primary functions. Leadership would imply feelings of responsibility for all Jews. Leadership would also require the desire to promote greater levels of observance in all congregants. Leadership would include outreach to nonmembers. Yet instead of taking on the responsibility, our Modern Orthodox leaders all too often simply abdicate. They sit back and watch the kollel families do their work for them, not realizing that their own authority and effectiveness are undermined.

The outreach function of the kollels has one other drastic effect on the quality of Modern Orthodox leadership. Except for the Kollel MiZion movement, the rabbis chosen for these kollels are, more often than not, trained in Hareidi yeshivas. Therefore, directly and indirectly, these kollels promote the views of the Hareidi yeshivas to the people with whom they

interact, many of whom do not have backgrounds sufficiently solid to aid them in sorting out the wheat from the chaff.

Are these kollels encouraging their adherents to ask questions of and seek guidance from their local Orthodox rabbis? Occasionally this does happen, but more often they themselves give the answers, or they seek the answers from their own teachers and relay them to their adherents. The kollels are a Trojan horse to Modern Orthodox leadership but, by the time they realize it, it is often too late. (See my article on the Seattle experience at the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals website, [www.jewishideas.org](http://www.jewishideas.org) [3] [1] [1], entitled "The Seattle Kollel: A Study of Unintended Consequences.")

Often, when sufficient numbers of supporters are achieved, the kollels then promote their own schools (as was done in Seattle) and promote their own synagogues-and pressure the communities directly and indirectly to adopt Hareidi standards. An example of a Hareidi takeover is the transformation of the Breuer's Community in Washington Heights, New York City. That community supposedly followed in the footsteps of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. The legacy was "Torah im derekh erets," Torah with the ways of the world. Rabbi Hirsch promoted the idea that truth is unitary, and that Judaism should strictly adhere to halakha, while responsibly and selectively incorporating well-tested facts and truths that come to us by way of secular culture. That community's transformation into just another Hareidi community was documented by George D. Frankel in his five-part 2002 essay entitled "Dan Shall Judge His People."

Within the North American Modern Orthodox community, the very concept of what a congregational rabbi is supposed to be has changed, leaving many in the dust of practical irrelevance. It used to be sufficient for the rabbi to be a halakhic expert and a good Talmud teacher. Today he must be so much more. Many of our Modern Orthodox rabbis lack any training, or even much interest, in the kinds of skills necessary for successful congregational leadership. Earning semikha (ordination) from most yeshivas does not require (nor do they even offer) training in psychology, sociology, communications, educational theory, or many other prerequisites for effective leadership within the context of the modern world. Until the various yeshivot teach and promote real leadership skills there will continue to be a decline in the effectiveness and power of congregational rabbis.

Another factor that promotes a decline in leadership is the way we allow Modern Orthodox leaders to be maligned. Those vibrant rabbis within the Modern Orthodox world who do spend time and energy trying to find the tools to attract and mold greater levels of observance are often ostracized and heavily criticized for their efforts. This negativity is not only from the Hareidi world but also from the Modern Orthodox community, another sign of insecurity and the need to seek validation from the right wing. While the conga lines during Adon Olam in Riverdale might not be my cup of tea, one cannot argue that spirited services and displays of warmth and friendship have brought thousands of Jews closer to God and have inspired ever-increasing levels of personal and communal observance and involvement. The pillorying of those rabbis who are making valiant efforts to truly lead can only discourage others from even trying. Here the aforementioned generalized insecurity manifests itself. Why? Because even within the Modern Orthodox world many rabbis are quick to jump on the Hareidi bandwagon of criticism of their fellows. Each tries to outdo the next in tearing down a colleague to "prove" how much more "religious" he is.

Torah Judaism provides a structure for a moral life. We as a people have been inhibited from maximizing our specific function and job on earth by millennia of persecution. Nevertheless, without a mission, without a purpose, no organization can stay healthy. Jewish leadership entails responsibility to perfect our fellow Jews and to teach the world by word and by example the ways of God, in order to bring the world to ethical monotheism. However, there is a strange fact within observant Judaism, including Modern Orthodoxy. Generally speaking, the further to the right one goes, the less one is concerned about fellow Jews outside one's own particular group and, certainly, the less one is concerned about the non-Jewish world. It is interesting to note that the further left toward Reform Judaism one goes, the more of an emphasis can be found on tikkun olam (repairing the world)-but the less emphasis one can find on the rest of the phrase, b'malkhut Shaddai (under the kingship of God). For this reason the causes embraced by the left are sometimes contrary to Jewish law. The further to the right one goes, one finds that the emphasis is on the yoke of heaven, and recognition of a responsibility to fix the world fades to nothingness. True leadership would promote the sight of kipot in rallies against the genocide in Darfur and the other ongoing mass murders. We should see participation in the promotion of human rights across the globe, not only for refuseniks, but also for the downtrodden in Zimbabwe. Our synagogues should be visible pillars of support for local food banks and neighborhood watch committees.

"Leadership" makes itself irrelevant when it fails to vigorously and unequivocally condemn immoral or illegal behavior just because the perpetrator is part of the Orthodox community. We should not be silent about sexual predators within our midst

and within some of our schools. We should not turn a blind eye to the abuse of children or the denigration of women. Leadership should insist that tax evasion is not just a game and that dishonesty in business is not to be tolerated. There should not be an automatic defense of a kosher meat processor who systematically violates the law and treats workers as disposable commodities. There seems to be a fear that the rabbi who speaks out on these issues will himself be criticized by those further to the right.

When is the last time that many of us asked a halakhic question of our local Orthodox rabbi? And when we do ask questions, do we get well thought-out, reasoned opinions? When our lay and local leadership attend yeshiva in the United States or in Israel and turn to their roshei yeshivot for halakhic guidance they thereby undermine Orthodox leadership by failing to take seriously the local community rabbis. This is especially true today because of the proliferation of cheap communications by telephone and email. Our roshei yeshivot should stop this practice and encourage decisions at the local level.

When we do ask questions, we see the grasshopper effect again, because often an opinion is given orally with the refusal to put it in writing. In Seattle there are, for example, extensive written guidelines by the local Va'ad for Passover procedures and products. Oral advice is sometimes at odds with the written advice because local Orthodox rabbis simply don't want to put in writing a view that they think is correct but that will draw criticism from those further to the right. We have become people of the look, rather than people of the book. (See the Jerusalem Post article by Michael Freund, 1/29/08, entitled "People of the Look.")

Another problem with maintaining moderation within the Orthodox world is structural. Often, as in Seattle, the local Orthodox rabbis organize, ostensibly for more strength. They join together in a Va'ad for the purposes of uniform community standards. Since these Va'ads operate by consensus, there is a shift in these community standards to the most extreme views of the furthest right member. The nature of consensus is often, in practice, that the most extreme views have to be honored or there will be no consensus.

The recent controversy over conversions is a good example of the partial abdication of Modern Orthodox leadership in the United States, and is a further example of the "grasshopper effect." Many Orthodox rabbis throughout the United States know how ineffective they are at inspiring observance. They therefore have gravitated toward political requirements for conversion, requirements that have only tangential relationship to talmudic requirements for conversion. Every generation adds strictures, partly to show how "serious" they are about their Judaism. They frontload the conversion process with demands and commitments far beyond any requirement for native-born Jews. (See the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) geirus [sic] standards on their website.) One reason they do this is they hope it will mean they will not have to spend energy inspiring converts to greater observance after conversion. The RCA's effort to conform to the will of the now Hareidi-controlled Chief Rabbinate is another example of the grasshopper effect. The RCA's effort to appease the Chief Rabbinate was almost immediately mocked by the ruling in Israel invalidating (supposedly and only in their view) potentially thousands of conversions previously done under the Chief Rabbinate's own Conversion Authority.

I recommend the book *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* by Eric Hoffer (1902-1983). Hoffer was a longshoreman who wrote philosophy. In 1983 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for this book. In it, he analyzes the nature of ideology. One of the chief components of his argument is that beliefs are held onto so strongly by the ideologue that reality and any evidence appearing to contradict the belief system is simply ignored. Jewish leadership will fail to the extent that it holds onto beliefs such as the literal interpretation of Midrash, and a less than 6,000 year history to the universe.

In the short term, those true believers who find it necessary to not only be trembling (hareidim) before God but to also be trembling before science and the unfolding nature of reality, will continue to gain strength. There is a certain power that the true believer has, as witnessed by the political movements of the last century and continuing to the present time.

The world is moving too fast. Technology today is creating a new *haskalah* (enlightenment). Fundamentalism and rejection of reality are an understandable reaction found, not only within Judaism, but even more so within Islam, Christianity, and even within Hinduism. The Hareidim are in good company with Christian fundamentalists in the United States. For example, according to a Gallup Survey in 2004 almost half (45 percent) of Americans believe that the world is under 10,000 years old and that humans were created in our present form within that period. However, although understandable, the effort to shut off the stream of information is not a solid long-term approach to the challenge that faces us.

What Modern Orthodox leadership can offer in place of such a short-sighted approach is a path to the future that accepts reality, examines it through the lens of Jewish values, and helps us to strengthen our observance in the face of change. That is why we need to encourage an independent leadership at the international, national, and local levels. We need rabbis and lay leaders who are not so insecure in their Judaism that they must look to the Hareidi world for validation.

The Modern Orthodox have the numbers. According to a detailed study by Samuel C. Heilman, cited in his book *Sliding to the Right, the Contest for the Future of American Jewish Orthodoxy*, approximately 11 percent of identifiable North American Jews are Orthodox. Of them, only 27-32 percent could be classified as Hareidi, with half of that number being Hasidim. In other words, about 70 percent of observant Jews in North America fall into the category of Modern Orthodox.

In addition to the numbers, the Modern Orthodox also have the economic power, the educational and organizational background, and the knowledge to continue to lead the Jewish people throughout this century and into the future. We need leaders who can strengthen us for the future by understanding the present. We need leaders who recognize the potential of Modern Orthodoxy. We need leaders who embrace our strengths, and who reject the grasshopper mentality.

\* David Balint, an attorney, is a communal activist in Seattle's growing Jewish community. This article appears in issue 3 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Reprinted at:  
<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/grasshopper-effect-and-other-defects-modern-orthodox-leadership>

# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Assembling Reminders

Imagine the following: You are driving ever so slightly above the speed limit. You see a police car in your rear-view mirror. You slow down. You know perfectly well that it is wrong to exceed the speed limit whether anyone is watching or not but, being human, the likelihood of being found out and penalised makes a difference.

Recently a series of experiments has been conducted by psychologists to test the impact of the sense of being observed on pro-social behaviour. Chenbo Zhong, Vanessa Bohns and Francesca Gino constructed a test to see whether a feeling of anonymity made a difference. They randomly assigned to a group of students either sunglasses or clear glasses, telling them that they were testing reactions to a new product line. They were also, in an apparently unrelated task, given six dollars and chance of sharing any of it with a stranger. Those wearing clear glasses gave on average \$2.71, while those wearing sunglasses gave an average of \$1.81. The mere fact of wearing dark glasses, and thus feeling unrecognised and unrecognisable, reduced generosity. In another experiment, they found that students given the opportunity to cheat in a test were more likely to do so in a dimly lit room than in a brightly lit one.[1] The more we think we may be observed, the more moral and generous we become.

Kevin Haley and Dan Fessler tested students on the so-called Dictator Game, in which you are given, say, ten dollars, together with the opportunity of sharing any or none of it with an anonymous stranger. Beforehand, and without realising it was part of the experiment, some of the students were briefly shown a pair of eyes as a computer screen saver, while others saw a different image. Those exposed to the eyes gave 55 per cent more to the stranger than the others. In another study researchers placed a coffee maker in a university hallway. Passers-by could take coffee and leave money in the box. On some weeks a poster with watchful eyes was hanging on the wall nearby, on others a picture of flowers. On the weeks where the eyes were displayed, people left on average 2.76 times as much money as at other times.[2]

Ara Norenzayan, author of the book *Big Gods*, from which these studies are taken, concludes that "watched people are nice people." [3] That is part of what makes religion a force for honest and altruistic behaviour: the belief that God sees what we do. It is no coincidence that, as belief in a personal God has waned in the

West, surveillance by CCTV and other means has had to be increased. Voltaire once said that, whatever his personal views on the matter, he wanted his butler and other servants to believe in God because then he would be cheated less. [4]

Less obvious is the experimental finding that what makes the difference to the way we behave is not simply what we believe, but rather the fact of being reminded of it. In one test, conducted by Brandon Randolph-Seng and Michael Nielsen, participants were exposed to words flashed for less than 100 milliseconds, that is, long enough to be detected by the brain but not long enough for conscious awareness. They were then given a test in which they had the opportunity to cheat. Those who had been shown words relating to God were significantly less likely to do so than people who had been shown neutral words. The same result was yielded by another test in which, beforehand, some of the participants were asked to recall the Ten Commandments while others were asked to remember the last ten books they had read. Merely being reminded of the Ten Commandments reduced the tendency to cheat.

Another researcher, Deepak Malhotra, surveyed the willingness of Christians to give to online charitable appeals. The response was 300 per cent greater if the appeal was made on a Sunday than on any other day of the week. Clearly the participants did not change their minds about religious belief or the importance of charitable giving between weekdays and Sundays. It was simply that on Sundays they were more likely to have thought about God. A similar test was carried out among Muslims in Morocco, where it was found that people were more likely to give generously to charity if they lived in a place where they could hear the call to prayer from a local minaret.

Nazorayan's conclusion is that 'religion is more in the situation than in the person,' [5] or to put it another way, what makes the difference to our behaviour is less what we believe than the phenomenon of being reminded, even subconsciously, of what we believe.

That is precisely the psychology behind the mitzvah of tzitzit in this week's parsha of Shelach Lecha: This all be your tzitzit and you shall see it and remember all the Lord's commandments and keep them, not straying after your heart and after your eyes, following your own sinful desires. Thus you will be reminded to keep all My commandments, and be holy to your God. Num. 15:39

The Talmud (Menachot 44a) tells the story of a man who, in a moment of moral weakness, decided to pay a visit to a certain courtesan. He was in the course of removing his clothes when he saw his tzitzit and immediately froze. The courtesan asked him what the matter was, and he told her about the tzitzit, saying that the four fringes had become accusing witnesses against him for the sin he was about to commit. The woman was so impressed by the power of this simple command that she converted to Judaism.

We sometimes fail to understand the connection between religion and morality. Dostoevsky is reputed to have said to have said that if God did not exist, all would be permitted.[6] This is not the mainstream Jewish view. According to Rabbi Nissim Gaon, the moral imperatives accessible to reason have been binding since the dawn of humanity. [7] We have a moral sense. We know that certain things are wrong. But we also have conflicting desires. We are drawn to do what we know we should not do, and often we yield to temptation. Anyone who has ever tried to lose weight knows exactly what that means. In the moral domain, it is what the Torah means when it speaks of "straying after your heart and after your eyes, following your own sinful desires." (Numbers 15:39)

The moral sense, wrote James Q. Wilson, "is not a strong beacon light radiating outward to illuminate in sharp outline all that it touches." It is, rather, "a small candle flame, casting vague and multiple shadows, flickering and sputtering in the strong winds of power and passion, greed and ideology." He added: "But brought close to the heart" it "dispels the darkness and warms the soul." [8]

Wittgenstein once said that "the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders." [9] In the case of Judaism the purpose of the outward signs – tzitzit, mezuzah and tefillin – is precisely that: to assemble reminders, on our clothes, our homes, our arms and head, that certain things are wrong, and that even if no other human being sees us, God sees us and will call us to account. As a result of recent research, now have the empirical evidence that reminders make a significant difference to the way we act.

"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who shall know it?" said Jeremiah. Jeremiah 17:9

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One of the blessings and curses of human nature is that we use our power of reason not always and only to act rationally, but also to rationalise and make excuses for the things we do, even when we know we should not have done them. That, perhaps is one of the lessons the Torah wishes us to draw from the story of the spies. Had they recalled what God had done to Egypt, the mightiest empire of the ancient world, they would not have said: "We cannot attack those people; they are stronger than we are." (Num. 13:31) But they were gripped by fear. Strong emotion – fear especially – distorts our perception. It activates the amygdala, the source of our most primal reactions, causing it to override the prefrontal cortex that allows us to think rationally about the consequences of our decisions.

Tzitzit, with their thread of blue, remind us of heaven, and that is what we most need if we are consistently to act in accordance with the better angels of our nature. [5775]

[1] Chen-Bo Zhong, Vanessa K. Bohns, and Francesca Gino, Good Lamps Are the Best Police: Darkness Increases Dishonesty and Self-Interested Behavior, *Psychological Science* 21 (2009), pp. 311–314.

[2] This and the following paragraphs are based on Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*, Princeton University Press, 2013, pp. 13–54.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[4] Voltaire, *Political Writings*, ed. David Williams (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 190.

[5] Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, p. 39.

[6] He did not say these precise words, but said something similar in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

[7] Commentary to Brachot, introduction.

[8] James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense*, Free Press, 1993, p. 251.

[9] *Philosophical Investigations*, §127.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

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"And the Lord spoke to Moses saying 'send forth for yourself men to explore the land of Canaan...' (Numbers 13:1-2)

The great sin of humanity was Adam's disregard of God's command not to eat the fruit of knowledge; the great sin of Israel was the Israelites' disregard of God's command to conquer the land of Israel. The result of both rebellious actions was Paradise lost; redemption unrealized.

A proper understanding of the sin of the scouts will serve to illuminate our true mission in the world, and the role played by Torah and the land of Israel in fulfilling that mission.

First, three questions: (1) If indeed the sending out of the spies was to result in such a disaster, why was it initially commanded by God? (2) Rashi links the sin of the scouts to the last incident of last week's Torah portion when Miriam slandered her brother Moses for sending away his wife Zipporah, for which she was punished by leprosy. What does the sin of

the Scouts have to do with the sin of Miriam? (3) How is the commandment of the ritual fringes at the end of our portion connected to the sin of the scouts?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that Miriam was upset with Moses for divorcing Zipporah after the Revelation at Sinai, because she thought he was disobeying God's command to all of the Israelites to "return to their tents" (Deuteronomy 5:30); that is, to resume their usual sexual relationships. Miriam and Aaron both maintained that this command applied to everyone, including the prophets, because, as they both said, "Was it only to Moses that God communicated? Did he not communicate to us as well?" (Numbers 12:2)

But Miriam and Aaron were wrong. Moses is a qualitatively different prophet than they or any other prophets were or will be. God speaks to Moses "mouth to mouth... in a clear vision, not in riddles: he gazes upon the image of the Lord" (Numbers 12:6-8). And indeed, God Himself tells Moses not to return to his tent with the rest of Israel, but rather to express his unique prophetic status by always being "on call" to receive God's words: "Let the rest of the Israelites return to their tents and wives) but you (Moses) are to remain standing here with me..." (Deuteronomy 5:30; see Maimonides, *Laws of the Foundations of Torah* 7:6 and Avishai David, *Discourses*, Shelah, p.317).

Miriam did not recognize the uniqueness of Moses' prophecy, and the scouts did not recognize the uniqueness of the Land of Israel. The mission of Israel is to be God's witnesses (Isaiah 55); and God communicated His word to all of Israel at Sinai and through Israel (eventually) to the entire world.

But God still had an exclusively and uniquely intimate relationship with Moses. God loves the entire world and He created every human being from His womb (Job 31:15); but nevertheless, He enjoys an exclusive relationship with Israel – His witnesses, the carriers of His Torah.

Similarly, God's command, "you shall love your friend, created – like you – in the Divine Image, as you love yourself," (Leviticus 19:18) still allows for a unique and exclusive relationship between husband and wife. According to the Talmud, this emanates from the very same verse (BT Kiddushin 44a).

This combination of universal love and exclusive intimacy applies as well to the land of Israel. "The earth and its fullness belongs to the Lord" (Psalms 24:1), but there is a unique portion of the earth, the land of Israel, which must express the will of God in its very earth (shmitta), in its produce (tithes, pe'ah), in the teachings of peace and redemption for all humanity which will emanate from the Jerusalem Temple at the end of the days.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

God told Moses to "explore" the land, not to spy it out (le'ragel). The Hebrew word used to explore is la-tur. Tur means to love, even to lust after, as we learn from the command of the ritual fringes (Num.15:37-41). Just as the Talmud teaches that a man must first see his bride before becoming engaged to her so that he may be certain that he loves her (BT Kiddushin 41a), so must Israel the people see and love Israel the land (even through the eyes of their agents, the tribal princes) before conquering it, before becoming engaged and wed to it. The desert generation did not understand God's command.

Our task is to make earth a sanctuary for God's Presence, so humanity will finally accept God's definition of good and evil rather than humanity's subjective and self-serving self-justification. Heaven kissed Earth when God uniquely informed Moses of His will, Heaven kissed Earth when God chose Israel as His agents; Heaven will kiss Earth eternally when Israel lives on its land and builds a sanctuary to encompass all of humanity and God together, "His house a House of Prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7). We must strive for Paradise to be regained, for the great and sacred marriage between God and the world to be consummated.

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### **The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

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#### **Caleb at the Crossroads**

Imagine standing at a crossroads. We have all been there. We have all experienced moments in our life's journey when we had to make a crucial choice and decide whether to proceed along one road or along another. (Except for Yogi Berra, of course, who famously said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it.")

We have all also experienced moments much further along in our journey, often many years later, when we reflected back upon our decision and wondered what would have been if we had pursued the alternative road.

Now imagine standing at a crossroads together with a close friend. Both of you face an identical choice, either this road or that. One of you chooses one road, and the other decides differently and selects the other road.

Each would have an intriguing tale to tell if, after many years, they had to meet and have the opportunity to compare the results of their different decisions.

Throughout my adult life, I have been fascinated by the experiences of survivors of the Holocaust. Whenever I have been fortunate enough to have the time to engage in conversation with one of them, I listened eagerly to their stories. When they permit, and they do not always, I ask them questions not just about their experiences, but about their choices and decisions.

I especially remember the discussions I had with one of them—let us call him Mr. Silver. He often would tell me about the hellish years he spent fleeing and fighting the Nazis in the forests of Poland. He had a companion then—let us call him Simon. Mr. Silver and Simon were boyhood friends who together witnessed the murder of their parents, and who together managed to escape and join the partisans. Eventually, they were both caught and incarcerated in prisons and concentration camps.

In his story, Mr. Silver compared his attitude throughout those horrific times with the attitude of his friend Simon. “You know me,” he would say, “and you know how I’ve always seen the bright side of things, the hopefulness of every situation, however dire.” Indeed, I assured him that I could vouch for his consistent optimism.

“As much as I was an idealist,” he would continue, “so was Simon a hard-core realist. He saw things as they were and dealt with them accordingly. He had no illusions whatsoever of hope.”

Many years after my conversation with Mr. Silver, I finally met Simon and, together with him, was able to compare the life he led subsequent to the Holocaust, and subsequent to his crossroad decisions, with the life of Mr. Silver. Simon, after the war, chose not to marry and chose to live in a rather remote American community with little contact with other Jews. Mr. Silver married, raised a large family with numerous grandchildren, and was very much involved with Jewish causes, and eventually chose to live out his final years in the state of Israel.

Two individuals at the same crossroads, making different decisions, with starkly different life outcomes.

This week’s Torah portion, Shelach, gives us the opportunity to witness individuals at the crossroads. Individuals who make radically different decisions and whose lives thereby played out very differently.

Let us focus, for example, on the personalities of Nachbi ben Vofsi, prince of the tribe of Naphtali, and of Caleb ben Yefuneh, prince of the tribe of Judah. Up until the dramatic moment described in this week’s parsha they led almost identical lives. They both experienced the Exodus from Egypt, the miraculous splitting of the Red Sea, the revelation at Mount Sinai, and opportunities for leadership of their respective tribes.

They were both assigned to spy out the land of Canaan, and they both crisscrossed the Promised Land and returned to give their reports. But then we read (Numbers 13:30-31), “Caleb...said, ‘Let us by all means go up, as we shall gain possession of the land, and we shall surely overcome.’ But the men who had

gone up with him (one of whom was Nachbi) said, ‘We cannot attack that people, for they are stronger than we.’”

Two individuals, at this very same crossroads in their lives; one full of hope and trust and confidence, and the other frightened, albeit very realistic.

How differently their lives played out from this point forward. Nachbi perished in ignominy in the desert while Caleb remained a prince, enhanced his reputation, and was granted his reward, the city of Hebron.

We all face crossroads in our lives; some of great significance, and some seemingly trivial. Our choices can be Nachbi-like—practical and safe, but ultimately cowardly. Or they can be informed by hope, trust, and confidence, and ultimately be brave and heroic.

The choice is ours, and so are the consequences for the rest of our lives.

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#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

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##### **Sipur and Dibur in Saying Lashon HaRah**

Rashi quotes a Gemara (Sotah 35a) that the Spies—as punishment for their negative report about Eretz Yisrael—died in a plague: Rav Shimon ben Lakish states they died an unusual death (misah m’shuneh). Rav Chanina bar Papa elaborated, based on an exposition by Rav Sheila, that when they died their tongues became elongated and stretched to their navels, and worms started crawling back and forth between their tongues and their navels.

Rashi says they suffered a “midah k’neged midah” (“measure for measure”) punishment. The simple reading of Rashi is that they sinned with their tongues (through speech), and therefore their punishment involved this grotesque distortion of their tongues. We might wonder, however, why would it not have been sufficient to punish them midah k’neged midah by having their tongues fall out or somehow become paralyzed so that they could not speak anymore? What is this business of having their tongues become elongated and stretched all the way down to their belly buttons? Why is that too part of the midah k’neged midah?

This is a question asked by the Tolner Rebbe, who provides a lengthy and beautiful exposition to answer this question. I will only be sharing brief parts of his much longer Dvar Torah. In order to answer this question, he calls to our attention—as is his holy style—three very interesting stylistic inferences (diyukim) that appear in the pesukim of our parsha.

Diyuk #1: Upon return of the Spies from their mission, the pasuk says, “They went and came to Moshe and to Aharon and to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, to the Wilderness of Paran at Kadesh, and brought back the report to them (va’yasheevu osam davar – literally ‘they returned their answer’)

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...” (Bamidbar 13:26). However, the next pasuk says: “They reported to him and they said (va’yesapru lo va’yomru lo), ‘We arrived at the Land to which you sent us, and indeed it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.’” (Bamidbar 13:27). The Tolner Rebbe asks—and this is really the question of the Ohr HaChaim haKadosh—why the change in expression from va’yasheevu osam davar to va’yesapru lo va’yomru?

Diyuk #2: When pasuk 26 originally says they came back with their report, it says they reported to “them”. Who is “them”? Moshe, Aharon, and Klal Yisrael. But in pasuk 27, it suddenly says they told “him”. Who is “him”? Moshe Rabbeinu. Why did they switch? What are they telling Moshe Rabbeinu that they are not sharing with Aharon and the rest of Klal Yisrael?

Diyuk #3: Sefer Devorim is known as Mishna Torah. The first several parshiyos of Sefer Devorim are really just a synopsis of what happened to Klal Yisrael in the Midbar. Listen to how the pesukim there describe the incident of the Spies (Devorim 1:22 – 25): “All of you approached me and said, ‘Let us send men ahead of us, and let them spy out the Land for us and bring word back to us—the road on which we should ascend and the cities to which we should come.’”; “They took in their hands from the fruit of the Land and brought it down to us; they brought back word to us and said, ‘Good is the Land that Hashem, our G-d gives us!’” Up until that point, Moshe Rabbeinu does not say anything bad about them! That is not the story of the Meraglim! Eventually, Moshe tells the rest of the story, that the people were too frightened to go into the Land. But that is not the real story. The real story was that the Spies themselves had scared the people with their slanderous report of Eretz Yisrael.

In order to answer the three questions raised by these “diyukim,” the Tolner Rebbe explains that the answer lies in the first diyuk – the connotation of the difference between “va’yasheevu osam davar” and the word “va’yesapru”.

“Va’yasheevu osam davar” means I send you on a mission, I ask you to get the facts, you ascertain the facts, and you report the facts as they are—without editorial comment—just the cold hard facts; no assessment, no elaboration, just the things as they are.

Va’yesaper implies Sipur—the telling of a whole elaborate story. We are familiar with the mitzvah of Sipur Yetzias Mitzrayim. The mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus is not to sit down at the Seder and say to your children: “We were slaves, the Ribono shel Olam took us out of Egypt, let’s eat.” Sipur implies questions and answers, beginning with “Gnus” and ending with “Shvach”—telling over the whole story. There is a difference



between a report which is just the facts and a story which embellishes the dry facts.

The Ramban writes that the aveyra of the Meraglim was precisely the fact that they went beyond merely reporting facts. They did not stop at the “Va’yasheevu osam davar” but rather they went into their own editorial comment called “Va’Yesapru lo”. The Ramban gives an example: Moshe Rabbeinu asked them to report back about the land—whether it was fertile (shmeinah) or infertile (razah), whether it had trees or not. They answered affirmatively to each of those questions. The land was fertile, it had trees, and they brought back fruit to demonstrate this. There was nothing wrong, likewise, in reporting that the inhabitants lived in fortified cities. All this was true and is accurately described in Sefer Devorim, as explained in diyuk #3. However, their aveyra was in the word “Efes...” (But all that is worthless) “...for the nation there is strong.” That is editorial comment. It is Sipur. Nobody asked them for that. That was not their mission.

Now, says the Tolner Rebbe, we understand the change in language. First the Torah says that they gave their report – va’yasheevu osam davar. Perfect. No aveyra there. They gave this report to everyone. But then... va’yesapru lo. The Tolner Rebbe quotes the sefer Arvei Nachal, who ties in the second diyuk. He says that they went over to “him”—specifically to Moshe—and whispered something into his ears. When the nation sees the Spies whispering something into Moshe’s ears, what does that encourage? “What’s the rest of the story?”

The Arvei Nachal says that this was part of the plot. The Spies told Moshe alone, in order to pique the curiosity of the rest of the people: “Hey, what are they whispering to him? Is there something that he knows that we don’t know?” The people then pressed the Spies for this “privileged information” and they let word of their editorial comments get out among the people.

Now we understand, says the Tolner Rebbe, the midah k’neged midah of the punishment mentioned in the Gemara in Sotah. Their tongues became elongated—indicating their sin was that they spoke too much! They spoke too much, so they wound up with too much tongue!

The Gemara in Eruchin 15b contains a lengthy passage detailing the evils of Lashon HaRah. The verb used in describing someone who speaks Lashon HaRah is invariably not haMedaber Lashon HaRah, as we might expect, but rather haMesaper Lashon HaRah. Engaging in slander always involves ‘story telling’. When someone tells the ‘cold facts’ (e.g., this fellow went bankrupt), he is engaging in dibur (speech). But when he starts elaborating and building it up into story content (e.g., you will never guess what I

know about this fellow... do you want the scoop why he went bankrupt?), that is being MeSaper Lashon HaRah. It is the process of adding the salt and pepper to the dry facts, revealing the “secret” behind the facts. That is the real aveyra of Lashon HaRah. We are not saying that someone who is Medaber Lashon HaRah (sticking to the basic uncomplimentary facts) is a Tzadik. But someone who elaborates and makes it into a juicy story, he is the real MeSaper Lashon HaRah that the Talmud is discussing.

#### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

What is the Torah’s antidote to an inferiority complex? In Parshat Shelach Lecha, we are told how the meraglim, the spies, returned from the Promised Land. Ten out of twelve of them delivered an evil report; they said (Bamidbar 13:33), “Vanehi be’eyneynu kechagagim vechain hayinu b’eyneyhem.” When we saw the tall people living in Chevron, we appeared to ourselves as if we were grasshoppers and that’s also what they thought of us.”

Now it’s one thing for them to describe how they were feeling but to presume that the inhabitants of Chevron viewed them as being like grasshoppers – how were they to know that? It’s obviously because they felt totally inadequate and inferior at that time.

On this passage the Kotzker Rebbe remarks that they shouldn’t have bothered about what the Canaanites were thinking of them. They should have concentrated on their own values and strengths. Let us actually look at the text: let’s see what Yehoshua and Calev, the two righteous meraglim (spies) said. First of all they said to the nation, “Tovah haaretz meod meod!” – “This land is very, very good!”

They didn’t just say ‘tovah’ – good, or ‘tovah meod’ – very good, but ‘tovah tovah meod’ – very, very good! Their attitude was to look on the bright side, to be positive, to look at the blessings that Hashem had given them. In addition they said to the people, “Im chafeitz banu Hashem heivi otanu,” – “It’s Hashem Who wants to bring us into the land.”

Their implication was: let’s trust in Him. They continued, “ki lachmeinu hem,” – “they are our bread.”

Today we might say, ‘they’re toast!’ meaning: we can devour them. We are strong. We have power.

So therefore here we have the Torah’s four key points as it offers an antidote to an inferiority complex.

First of all, don’t be bothered by what you think others are thinking about you.

Secondly, be positively minded.

Thirdly, recognise your own strengths and abilities.

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Finally, always trust in Hashem.

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### **Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

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#### **Self-Esteem in Judaism**

In this week’s Torah portion, the spies demonstrate that they possessed such low self-esteem. They not only expressed that *they* felt like grasshoppers (small in size compared to the Canaanites). These ten men, chosen because they were supposed leaders and men of standing in the community, continue expressing their feelings of inadequacy and state “that this is how we were also perceived in their (Canaanites’) eyes (Numbers 13:33). How could these Jew possibly know how they were thought of by the local people? They felt so “little,” that they assumed and felt that they were perceived as small grasshoppers. This is very low indeed. The spies transferred their feelings of “smallness” to the strangers they met. In reality, the Canaanites were truly afraid of the Jews, as we learn from the words of Rachav 38 years later (Joshua 2:9-11). But perceptions can be formed without any connection to reality, and it was with the spies. How does Judaism view self-esteem, and how can Jews prevent themselves from feelings of low self-esteem?

Self-esteem is a term that reflects a person’s overall evaluation or appraisal of his or her own worth. Self-esteem encompasses beliefs (for example, “I am competent”, “I am worthy”) and emotions such as triumph, despair, pride, and shame. It is a self-concept, a self-evaluation of what we think about ourselves. It is often not based on facts, but on how each person views himself or herself. In an age where more people (particularly children and adolescents) think less and less of themselves, achieving proper self-esteem is important for each person. Feeling good about oneself helps each person become happier and achieve success (even by any self-standard) in life. But how is self-esteem achieved? How can a person who has low self-esteem be convinced of his or her own greatness? What messages within Judaism can help each person feel good about himself or herself?

#### **The Importance of Each and Every Person In The World**

- Traditional Jews realize that there is a piece of God, as it were, inside every human being (Genesis 1:26-27). That is what makes man special as a species, and it makes each member of the human race a unique and important individual as well. The Godliness inside every person gives him or her enormous value as, according to the Talmud, each person has incalculable worth, regardless of his or her identity or level of intelligence and accomplishment, since a single individual has the value of an entire world (Sanhedrin 37a). This general awareness knowledge should help every person think better of himself or herself. King David wrote (Psalms 8:5-6) that each individual is so special that he or she is just a little lower than the angels. But just one verse before this, he wrote that man is “nothing.”

This seems to be a contradiction. The Midrash explains (Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 14a) that when people have either a low or proper level of self-esteem, they should know that they have achieved a status so high that only angels are higher. But if a person has excessive self-esteem and as a result thinks too highly of himself, God (and King David) tells this person not to “think you are so great” since God created the mosquito before you, so you are not really all that special.

That each person has a bit of God inside him or she is itself a level of greatness and should give each person a feeling of self-worth. But the Mishna states (Mishna Avot 3:14) that an even greater feeling of well-being is achieved in that man can be aware of how special he or she is. It is one thing to be special. It is quite another to realize and be conscious of that unique situation and use that specialness to maximize one's potential.

Maimonides adds to this notion by saying (Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuva 5:1) that man should realize how lucky he is to be part of a species that is so unique. He is the only creature in the world who can truly distinguish between right and wrong, as animals do not have this gift. And because animals are pre-programmed at birth, they have very few choices about what to do with their lives. But man has infinite choices before him and can use his or her life to accomplish whatever he or she desires, without anyone forcing him or her to choose any particular path. That free choice by man in every sphere is a great gift that people should appreciate and take full advantage of. Thus, Judaism teaches that every person is so special and important that he or she is considered at the center of the world. It is proper to say to oneself and believe that the entire world was created for “me and my needs. (Sanhedrin 37a)”

Jews should feel especially lucky and blessed and should feel particularly good about themselves. Because of the rich heritage passed down to every Jew, all Jews, says the Mishna, should feel like the son or daughter of a king, part of royalty (Mishna Shabbat 14:4). For all these reasons, Jews should realize that they are great – in other words, they should feel extremely good about life and about themselves.

**The Individuality of Each Jew** - Along with that infinite value, the same Mishna reveals another secret about each person in the world (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5). Each person should feel special about his or her infinite worth, and it is also true that each person has equal value before God (since everyone came from the same man, Adam). On the other hand, God made all (normal) people similarly to somewhat resemble each other, with two eyes, ears, lips, arms, and legs, and one nose, mouth, head, etc. Yet, God also created each person unique, with a distinct personality and talents, as well as distinctive physical features such as

fingerprints, voice prints, iris scans, footprints, etc. This uniqueness of each person also makes him or her special, knowing that there is no one in the entire world quite like them. The Talmud specifically says that each Jew's mind and personality is as unique as his or her face (Berachot 58a). It is incompatible with Jewish thought to compare students to each other, to teach everyone in the same manner, and to hold all children to one standard.

Each individual has his or her unique mission in life, as is recited in the Rosh Hashana prayers (Musaf Service for Rosh Hashana). Finding one's special purpose and goal, which combines one's talents, environment, and all other factors, can be difficult. But once a person discovers that mission, he or she should try to maximize efforts and maximize potential in fulfilling that goal in life. The path to discovery of that mission, says Rabbeinu Yonah (Rabbeinu Yonah, Shaar HaAvoda 1), is to know oneself very well, to understand one's strengths and weaknesses, and to come close to God by fulfilling that mission. This will give a person great self-esteem, as long as the individual does not attempt a task greater than was meant for his or her talents and abilities.

### Helping Yourself Feel Better About Yourself

- One of the most important aspects of helping any person do better, feel better and realize his or her great potential, is to know that he or she is not alone. In addition to help from family and friends, there is always another area each person can count on for help – God. The Midrash promises that if a person makes even a small effort to make himself a better person, God will do the “heavy lifting” and help with the rest (Midrash Rabbah, Shir HaShirim 5:3). The phrase in the Midrash is “you open up a small hole the size of a pin needle, and God will make that opening the size of a hall.”

Judaism stresses in many places that feeling good about oneself and how a person is judged (and should judge oneself) is a function of effort, and not an accomplishment. A Jew should not feel diminished in any way if he or she does not accomplish as much as he or she wants, or even by how much is expected, as long as he or she tried maximally and gives all possible effort. That is why the Talmud specifically states that achieving more or achieving less in any realm is not the main goal or way to judge a person (Berachot 5b). (The context there was Torah study, one of the highest values in Judaism.) Rather, a person is judged by how much effort was exerted in the endeavor. Therefore, to feel better about oneself, a person has to answer one simple question from a Jewish perspective: did you try your best? If the individual did, then the achievement is secondary and even unimportant. Interestingly, it is specifically at a ceremony of achievement of Torah study that this concept is highlighted by the Rabbis, in the wording of the text that a Jew recites upon completion of a Talmud tractate. In differentiating between non-Jewish values and

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Jewish values, that text says (Text from the ceremony upon completion of a Talmud tractate) that non-Jews run to non-Torah-related pursuits and Jews run to Torah-related pursuits. Then it says that both non-Jews and Jews put in the effort. But non-Jews are not rewarded for the effort alone, but only for how much was accomplished (as this is the standard in the world at large), while Jews are rewarded for effort alone. Therefore, a person should feel great if he gives his or her all, even if nothing or very little was achieved.

In addition, it is natural that everyone has bad or evil thoughts that are never acted upon. People with low self-esteem often punish themselves for these thoughts. Judaism, in general, believes that a Jew is judged by what he or she does, and not one's thoughts, according to the Talmud (Kiddushin 39b). After an evil action, the thoughts are added to the sin. However, thoughts alone rarely indict a Jew and are not considered culpable. Therefore, a person should never put himself or herself down for just bad thoughts. In addition, a person should be honest about his or her potential, as part of the prohibition not to lie to oneself. People with low self-esteem often think that they have limited potential and feel inadequate in a particular area. But by the very fact that each individual was born a human being, they automatically have enormous potential, as opposed to the life and nature of animals, who have very little potential to grow (in a non-physical sense) after they are born (Maharal, Drush on the Torah 9b, 11b). Each person, knowing that he or she has unlimited potential, should help every individual dream big and try to accomplish that dream. Even if the accomplishment falls short, that should not minimize any person's self-esteem. Yet, every human being should understand the unlimited potential given to him or her by God, and this should help a person think better of himself or herself.

Low esteem can have life-changing consequences for the worse. In our Parsha, the spies had such low self-esteem - as we know all imagined - that they could no longer say anything positive about their experience or the Land of Israel as a place that God would help them conquer. So, it was low self-esteem that turned these experienced leaders into scared individuals that changed Jewish history (for the worse) forever. We can learn from this that only if a person feels himself or herself to be worthy will he or she indeed become that worthy person.

**It Is Truly Up To Us** - Maimonides stresses a similar idea in another context. He says (Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuva 5:2) many foolish people in the world believe that their destiny is already decided for them and that their future is not up to them, as many people with low self-esteem believe. Maimonides points out that what each person does with his or her life is totally up to him or herself. If a

person wants to achieve the greatest heights (however that person defines it), it is possible if a person has the proper self-esteem and puts in the maximum effort to achieve. Each person can be as great as Moses or the opposite. But no one should think that it is not up to them.

Knowing and doing are two different things. An individual can understand intellectually how to achieve strong self-esteem, but doing it is a much harder task. How does a person go from knowing to acting upon that knowledge? Each person has to find his or her way. The Rabbis give one suggestion: help others with their self-esteem, and yours will come. Rabbi Yochanan says that every person should try to make others smile and try to help others to feel important (Ketuvot 11b). That will help you achieve a sense of self-importance and healthy self-esteem. That is also why it is a Jewish law that a very poor person who subsists only on donations is, nevertheless, obligated to give some of what he or she has received to another poor person, even poorer than he or she is (Maimonides, Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 7:5). Why? The knowledge that someone is worse off than you and that you can help them always enhances a person's dignity and self-esteem.

\* This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at [nachum@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)

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#### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

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##### Navigating by the longing of the heart Rabbi Baron Dasberg

We are always on the lookout for a "compass". In a world of infinite options and unceasing dilemmas, we are in need of a moral compass that will guide us in our decision making and help point us in the direction of truth and sincerity.

But the portion of Shelach-Lecha is somewhat challenging in this regard. Seemingly, Moshe and the People of Israel do the right thing by sending out worthy men to go and inspect the Land and gather vital information before big decisions – which will affect the entire nation – are made.

However, we know all too well how the story ends. And the message rings loud and clear: Divine instruction is a far more accurate compass than any human report or analysis.

The end of the portion takes us in a completely different direction:

The key word in the story of the spies is based on the Hebrew root תָּוַר [tet vav reish] denoting a wandering in search of something. This root appears again at the end of the parsha in the following verse (Bamidbar 15, 39): "... so that you stray not [taturu] after your hearts and after your eyes...". The verse focuses on

the individual, and cautions us about "the spies sent out by our own body" (i.e., our eyes), which can easily lead us astray, turning us away from God's commandments.

This is all the more challenging in our own times, when there are no prophets to guide us. We sometimes get the feeling that "... they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Amos 8, 12). In other words, the word of the Lord has become elusive, another item on that long list of options and dilemmas. If this be the case, how can we find the "compass" we seek?

One possibility is to follow our good reason and intellect. Another – to follow our heart. Oftentimes, these are the only tools at our disposal, and, interestingly, both are mentioned in the verse mentioned above: "... so that you stray not [taturu] after your hearts and after your eyes...". Our feelings and thoughts are, only too often, influenced by our lusts, our prejudices and other distractors – all of which cause the needle of the compass to deviate off course.

Let's mention another tool that can help us.

Rabbi Kook (following the example of R' Chasdai Karakash) elaborates on human will, and says that it belongs to one of the deepest points of the soul, the part in man which connects him to God: "This is the point of good will, of clarity and holiness. In this sense, man is likened to his own Creator, in the free will he possesses, and the boundless desire he has..." (Shemonah Kevatzim 3, 51). Although we have no prophets in our times, our deepest wants and wills are still connected to the word of God.

How, then, can we distinguish between profound wills and short-lived cravings? How do we tell the difference between our deepest desires and social pressures or prejudices that shape our consciousness?

There are many answers to these questions, but I will expand on one.

During the first convention of the Association of the Lovers of the Hebraic Language [Chovevei Sefat Ever], which took place in Moscow in the month of Iyar 1917, Chaim Nachman Bialik wrote:

"There is a great force in the world, and it is called 'longing'. It is this force that gives man the ability to walk millions of miles; it is this force that paves roads in the desert and splits seas, enabling one to get a little closer to his beloved, or catch a glimpse of a dear face, smell a familiar scent, find comfort in an embrace..."

What a beautiful description of the power of longing. See how much effort we are willing

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to invest just for the sake of giving expression to a concealed point in our heart, an emotion lying for years on end in the depth of our being, waiting to simply be experienced.

Bialik takes this idea further and talks of longing that also exists on the national level:

"We do not know what mysterious hand it was that led us on the four-thousand-year-old winding path of history paved with trials and tribulations; a road oh so convoluted and bumpy. And it was this mysterious hand that turned us into a symbol unto the nations."

The People of Israel long and yearn for the Land of Israel. Even after thousands of years in exile, there is a feeling of longing in the heart of every Jew, even those who have never stepped foot in the Land. It is a deeply embedded yearning. It is an inherent will and want.

The longing for the word of God, for the Torah, for the Land of Israel, for the People of Israel – all of these are the compass pointing the way to our most profound desires.

God's word should have been the guiding star of the Israelites in the desert, in much the same way that the longing for the resurrection of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel must serve as our compass today. If only we could always navigate by the compass concealed deep inside of us.

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#### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

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##### Rabbi Michael Rosensweig Consolation, Chastisement, and Illumination in the Aftermath of the Meraglim Episode

In the aftermath episode of the meraglim, one of the most consequential and transformative national infractions that delayed entry into Eretz Yisrael for a full generation, the Torah articulates two seemingly random imperatives - the requirement of nesachim (solet, shemen, yayin) accompanying an olah and zevach korban, and the mitzvah to separate challah - that are contingent upon Klal Yisrael's ultimate presence in the national homeland. What did the Torah intend to convey by this intriguing juxtaposition?

Many mefarshim (Rashi, Ramban and others) contend that focusing specifically on the concrete details of mitzvot which entail an Eretz Yisrael component at this moment of uncertainty and disappointment constituted an act of consolation - nechamah. It established that notwithstanding the generational delay and the doubts it may engender, the ultimate destiny of the nation remained secure. Moreover, the ingredients that are prominent in nesachim and challah (dagan, tirosh, ve-yitzhar) embody the full blessings of a thriving Eretz Yisrael (see Rosh Bamidbar 15:2 and Panim Yafot op cit based also on Bava Basra 60b, Shabbat 33b, Yechezkel 44:30). Concentrating on these mitzvot reinforced the

aspiration of a vibrant and flourishing national legacy, notwithstanding the cataclysmic setback of the meraglim transgression. Repentance was not only possible, but capable of ensuring an impressive physical quality of life, and by extension, elevation of the spiritual standing of Klal Yisrael. In this respect, cheit ha-eigel could become a catalyst to greater attainment.

It is conceivable that the linkage of the meraglim transgression to nesachim and challah also illuminates an important dimension of the infraction itself. The meraglim's posture highlighted a flawed narrow and functional perspective on the role of Eretz Yisrael in halachic life. Instead of appreciating that Eretz Yisrael, the national headquarters of Am Yisrael is an indispensable factor defining and projecting the corporate status of Klal Yisrael (see Horayot 3a, Sifrei Ekev), they seem to have perceived it simply as a venue that enabled several additional specific mitzvot which are soil-bound (mitzvot ha-teluyot ba-aretz, chovot karka - Kiddushin 36b). Accordingly, they weighed accessing the opportunity to execute further mitzvot against the risk of war and loss. They deemed the payoff insufficiently compelling to promote the agenda of immediate ascension. Kalev, in sharp contrast, may have comprehended the transformative impact of the Eretz Yisrael factor in Jewish national and personal life. He was likely sensitive to the broader ramifications conferred upon the entirety of Am Yisrael, and thereby its constituent members. This appreciative posture accounts for his sense of urgency reflected by his impassioned conviction and stirring plea (13:30), "va-yahas Kalev et ha-am: va-yomer-aloh naaleh ve-yarashnu otah; ki yachol nuchal lah" (see also Rashi, citing Sotah 35a - "afilu ba-shamayim", in light of Devarim 30:12- "lo bashamayim he", in light of Erubin 55a - "she-ilu haytah ba-shamayim hayita tzarich laalot achareha u-lelomdah").

The fact that entry into Eretz Yisrael affects the requirement of nesachim in conjunction with certain korbanot, absent any technical connection to the soil or chovat karka, attests to a much broader motif and specifically underscores the expansion of national or collective standards even vis-a-vis personal avodat Hashem. While there is some debate about the precise parameters of the innovation - if nesachim were already mandated in the midbar for korbanot tzibbur (see Sifrei, Ramban, Malbim and other mefarshim on Bamidbar 15:1-3) - entry into Eretz Yisrael expanded what had been a requirement hitherto possibly exclusive to the collective korban tamid (see Ramban) to personal korbanot, as well.

In a similar vein, challah is hardly a typical soil-bound mitzvah. Indeed, the obligations and status of challah are triggered by the processing (lishah, afiyah) rather than simply the growth of the produce. The imperative of

challah is atypical relative to standard mitzvot hateluyot baaretz in that it is initiated immediately upon entry into Eretz Yisrael, prior to the fourteen years of conquest and division. The requirement of "biat kulchem" (see Ketuvot 25a) that underscores the unique interface between the nation and its homeland is, according to most authorities (with prominent exception of Rambam Hilchos Terumot 1:26) exclusive to challah!

In this respect, the halachic response to the meraglim transgression integrates chastisement, illumination, and consolation. It reveals the meraglim's fatal diminished appreciation for the role of Eretz Yisrael in the personal and collective life of the nation, even as it communicates that high spiritual aspiration will forever define Am Yisrael's legacy and destiny.

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#### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

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##### **Responsible**

This shall be fringes for you, and when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of HASHEM to perform them, and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray. So that you shall remember and perform all My commandments and you shall be holy to your G-d. (Bamidbar 15:39-40)

and you shall not wander after your hearts: The heart and eyes are the spies for the body. They are its agents for sinning: the eye sees, the heart desires and the body commits the transgression. – Rashi

Now here is a puzzle. The verse versus Rashi! The Torah tells us, and we say this every day, not to go exploring after the heart and the eyes. Rashi spells out the anatomy of a sin and outlines the dynamics of the process. First the eye sees and then the heart desires, and after that the body is drawn into the grip of sin. The verse cautions against going after the heart first and Rashi starts with the eyes. Who's right? What's right? Who is the criminal in this case? Which is to blame? Is the heart the instigator or are the eyes the troublemakers?

The Sifri, which is the Midrash on Bamidbar gives a definitive answer. It lays the responsibility directly at the feet of the heart. The heart in the Torah lexicon does not refer to that organ in the center of our chest that pumps blood throughout our body. It means the mind! LEVAV...with a double BEIS is both intellect and emotion combined. The Midrash tells us that the heart is responsible for having sent the eyes to spy. If the heart doesn't want it the eyes won't see it.

A young Frum woman in Lakewood was amazed by the scene she witnessed while checking out of a grocery store. The lady in front of was obviously or apparently not Jewish and she had her child sitting in the grocery store wagon as her order was being

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

processed at the register. At one moment the child started to agitate and reach for a chocolate bar or a bag of chips that had been placed strategically in the impulse buying section. "I want it! I want it!" The mother told her, "It's not Kosher!" In the parking lot the Frum woman asked her politely, "I am curious, do you keep Kosher? Are you Jewish?" "No!" replied the lady, "I see that it works for you people!"

Once a Jewish child realizes it is not Kosher, he doesn't want it. It's like he doesn't see it. It's not for him. We can wire our brains and our feelings accordingly. I was working in a school for a number of years with older teenage girls. Now, every job has its occupational hazards and I realized that I needed to make some boundaries in my mind. I decided in one clear moment that I would never look at any of these girls any differently than I would look at my own daughters, and I never did. Not once! The secretary would complain to me, "Did you see how so and so was not dressed appropriately today?" Then she would say, "You don't see it because you're a man but Rabbi Ploney can't teach the class because of the way she's dressed. I'll speak to her!" I understand why this one cannot teach. It makes perfect sense and for that reason we have standards for modest dressing but it is possible not to see.

I would ask kids who were sent to my office for fighting or using bad language why they did it. It was always because somebody said or did something to them. So, I would ask them a series of follow up questions. "Who gave you permission to hit him?" The shoulders would shrug and the questions would continue. Who thinks in your mind? Who speaks out of your mouth? Who moves your hands? Once they agreed that the answer to those three questions is "ME!", then I could explain to them what the Mishne in Bava Kama says, "Adam Muad L'Olam! – A person is responsible for what he does!"

Everything we do flows from thought to speech into action. Even in the world of thought, there is the thought of thought and the speech of thought and the action of thought. That is where actions, whether for good or bad, are planted and nourished. The difference between a crazy person and everyone else is that crazy people say what others might only be thinking and they act out what others would only say. The filter between the thought speech and action is broken. When those boundaries are established in the mind, then then nothing gets past the thought of thought or the speech of thought without permission. This is the way of responsibly establishing and maintaining healthy filters. Because we can, we are responsible.



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Parshas Shlach Moshe Was Confident that Calev's Wife Would Set Him Straight print

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1253 – Carrying Nitroglycerin on Shabbos for Heart Patient / Candy for Diabetic? Mutar or Asur Good Shabbos!

There is a famous question asked in this parsha. We suggested numerous answers over the years. This year, we will present two new approaches suggested by Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in his sefer.

The pasuk says that Moshe changed the name of Hoshea bin Nun to Yehoshua (Bamidbar 13:16), invoking (according to Rashi) a prayer by Moshe on Yehoshua's behalf that Hashem should save him from the scheme of the Meraglim (Spies). All the meforshim ask why Moshe was more concerned about Yehoshua than he was about Calev.

Earlier in the same perek (Bamidbar 13:4-15), when the Torah lists the various Meraglim by tribal affiliation, the Ramban and other meforshim are troubled at the sequence with which these individuals are listed. Their names don't appear to be listed in any particular order.

The Ramban notes that the names are not enumerated by flag configuration, nor by size, nor by birth order. The Ramban suggests that perhaps they are ordered by the prestige of each individual, rather than his shevet (tribe). In other words, maybe they are listed in order of their personal importance, rather than by the significance of the shevet they represented. According to the Ramban's theory, Rav Yaakov points out that Shamua ben Zachur and Shafat ben Chori would have been greater in prestige than Calev ben Yefuneh and Yehoshua bin Nun. This is difficult to accept because we never hear from Shamua ben Zachur or Shafat ben Chori again.

Rav Yaakov himself explains the order of the listing of the Meraglim in a different fashion: The first two Meraglim listed represented respectively Reuven and Shimon. That makes perfect sense. Levi is not mentioned because Shevet Levi (the Tribe of Levi) did not send a representative. That we understand as well. Next, we would expect Shevet Yehudah to be listed and indeed that is the case: Calev ben Yefuneh, the third spy listed, is from Shevet Yehudah. So far, so good. Then, however, the next pasuk lists

Hoshea bin Nun, who was from Shevet Ephraim, one of the youngest shevatim. Why?

Rashi comments (Devarim 1:22) that they approached Moshe Rabbeinu b'iruvya (in a tumult). He saw the youngsters pushing away the elders. He saw the pushing and shoving and lack of any appropriate order. Moshe Rabbeinu invoked something here that I am sure everyone who has ever been a parent has said sometime in his life when confronted by such situations: "This is not going to end well!" In other words, when Moshe saw this iruvya of the youngsters pushing away their elders, he said "Uh-oh. This is not being done the way Jews should behave and the way Jews should act." Therefore, at this point in time, Moshe Rabbeinu was inspired to say to his disciple: "May Hashem save you from the scheme of the Spies."

Up until this point, things were going according to the proper sequence: Reuven, Shimon, Yehudah. All was fine. But when Moshe saw this situation, where the "ne'arim" (youth) were pushing aside the "zekainim" (elders), he saw that this mission was not being undertaken for the sake of Heaven. This is not the way things are supposed to be done. Earlier in the narration, when Calev was mentioned, there was not yet a need to invoke the prayer "May Hashem save you from the scheme of the Spies" because at that point, everything was still going properly.

Rav Yaakov gives a second answer to his question of why Moshe gave Yehoshua a bracha, and not Calev. This answer contains a tremendous truth within it. He says the reason Moshe felt compelled to give Yehoshua a bracha and not Calev is that Calev was married to a righteous woman (Miriam haNeviah). Certainly, Calev would therefore not fall prey to the evil schemes of the Meraglim, and so Calev was not in need of a blessing. At the time, Yehoshua was still single. Calev, who was married to a tzadekes, had a spiritual anchor. Therefore, Moshe could be confident that Calev would not "get caught up" in the plan of the Meraglim.

Rav Weinberg used to advise unmarried young men who were contemplating going to graduate school (whether it be law school, medical school, dental school, or whatever) that they should not start graduate school until they were married. "Yes, you can go to graduate school, but you should be married first." When someone is in Yeshiva, even if he is going to college on the side, the Yeshiva is his anchor. But when someone goes to graduate school and is in school full-time, all day, he is in a world which presents its own set of nisyonos (spiritual tests). A person needs an anchor. He needs the anchor of a home and the anchor of a wife.

That is why, Rav Yaakov explains, Calev did not need Moshe's bracha. It was because he was married to Miriam. When someone is married to a woman like Miriam, he has a solid anchor. Yehoshua was not married at this time, and therefore Moshe had to pray for him: "May Hashem save you from the scheme of the Spies."

**A Person Hears What He Wants To Hear**

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky's other observation is on the pasuk, "In this wilderness shall your carcasses drop; all your counted ones in any of your numberings, from twenty years of age and above, whom you provoked against Me." (Bamidbar 14:29) The only ones who died in the midbar were people who were between twenty and sixty years old. People who were either younger than twenty or past the age of sixty at the time of the census did not die as part of the collective punishment for the aveira (sin) of the Meraglim.

Rav Yaakov asks a very practical question: Does this imply that no one over sixty, without exception, went along with the Meraglim and believed their negative report? How can the Torah make such a statement?

Rav Yaakov shares a very interesting idea, which teaches us an important lesson. He says the people who were over sixty did not believe the Meraglim. The reason they didn't believe them is that the people over sixty were past the draft age. They knew that they were not going to need to fight. The Meraglim's pessimistic report centered around the fact that the Canaanim (Canaanites) were stronger than the Jews. "We are not going to be able to fight them; we are not going to be able to defeat them. They are too strong for us, therefore let us not go into Eretz Yisrael."

For people who were of draft age and who were destined to need to take part in such a war, this was a message that resonated with them. "I don't want to fight. I don't want to be drafted. I don't want to take part in such a war." Such a person was ready to listen to the message of the Meraglim. But a person over sixty, who was not going to go into the army anyway, was able to look at what the Meraglim were saying objectively: "On the one hand, the Ribono shel Olam is saying 'We can go in and win'; on the other hand, the Meraglim are saying 'No. We can't defeat them.'" The people who were not directly affected were prepared to believe Calev and Yehoshua and rely on the promises of the Ribono shel Olam.

A person without negiyus (personal motivation) can listen to a message and judge its merits without bias. All those people who believed the Meraglim did so because they had an agenda. Their agenda was "I don't want to fight." It is the old maxim "We hear what we want to hear and we believe what we want to believe."

Spending a Minute in the Beis HaMikdash Is All It Takes

The pasuk says, "And Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh from those who spied out the land (ha'tarim es ha'aretz) tore their clothes." (Bamidbar 14:6) I saw the following observation in the sefer Darash Mordechai: The term ha'tarim es ha'aretz is noteworthy. At this point in time, we already know that they were among the ones who "spied out the land." What then is the need for the Torah to again spell out the fact that they were "ha'tarim es ha'aretz"? We know all that already!

The Darash Mordechai relates this question to a very famous vort of the Ponevezher Rav. He tells the story of Yosef Meshisa. The pasuk says that when Yitzchak smelled the garments of Eisav (Vayarach es begadav) (Bereshis 27:27), the Medrash expounds: "he smelled the rebellious within him" (Vayarach es bogdav). Yitzchak even had nachas ruach (spiritual pleasure) from those people who were the traitors and rebelled against Hashem.

The Medrash then gives an example of such a rebellious person: Yosef Meshisa. He was a traitor to his people at the time of the destruction of the Second Bais Hamikdash (Temple). He went over the side of the Romans. The Medrash says that when the Romans destroyed the Beis HaMikdash, they went to Yosef Meshisa and (as a reward for his services to them) told him to go inside the Beis HaMikdash and take for himself whatever he wanted.

He went into the Beis HaMikdash and took out for himself the Golden Menorah. The Romans saw that and told him that this was too big of a gift. They then told him to take something else. The Menorah, they said, was fit for a king, not a commoner like himself. At that point, Yosef Meshisa refused. They urged him to go back and pick something else and he again refused.

To make a very long Medrash short, they tortured him and eventually killed him, but he still refused to go back and take a personal gift from the Beis HaMikdash's property.

The Ponevezher Rav asked a question: What happened to Yosef Meshisa? Previously, he was a traitor to his people. He was willing to walk into the Beis HaMikdash and take the Menorah for himself. That he was happy to do. No compunctions. Then, suddenly he is told, "No. You can't take the Menorah. That is not right for you to take." Suddenly, he became a Ba'al Teshuva? These are the bogdim (traitors) from whom Yitzchak Avinu received nachas ruach.

How did Yosef Meshisa turn around like that? The Ponevezher Rav explained that what happened to Yosef Meshisa was that he spent a minute in the Beis HaMikdash. When a person spends a minute in the Beis HaMikdash, it changes his life. The kedusha of the Beis HaMikdash was such that Yosef Meshisa was never the same. After that one minute in the Beis HaMikdash, he could not rebel ever again.

Such is the power of being exposed to the makom hamikdash. It is like radiation. A person can be exposed to radiation for literally ten seconds and it can have a profound effect on him. Such is the power of radiation, and l'havdil, such is the power of kedusha as well.

The Darash Mordechai concludes: Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon are crying, maybe the Meraglim will change their minds, maybe they will do teshuva. At that point, Yehoshua and Calev are described as those "who spied out the Land" (ha'tarim es ha'aretz). They gave up hope on the Meraglim doing teshuva. They realized: These people were in Eretz Yisrael. They were exposed to its holy sanctity. If after being exposed to Eretz Yisrael, they can still talk this way ("they are stronger than us, etc."), then Moshe Rabbeinu and Aaron, we hate to say this but nothing is going to help them. Your tefillos now will not save them either. They therefore tore their garments because they saw that the other Meraglim were hopeless and would never retract their report.

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**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman's Weekly Chumash Shiur**

1 – Topic – A Thought from Sefer Pachad Yitzchok

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Shelach. Parshas Shelach always brings out in Klal Yisrael a reminder of a need to have a true Ahavas Eretz Yisrael. The Nashim who had a true Ahavas Eretz Yisrael were not Nichshal in the Cheit of the Meraglim, Mashe'ain'kein the males of Klal Yisrael. I would like to talk a little about a Yesod from one of the Baalei Mussar.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1809 - 1883) had B'ikkur three Talmidim. It is well-known that there were three major Talmidim. The Alter of Slabodka who went on to found the Yeshiva of Slabodka, the Alter of Kelm who founded the Yeshiva in Kelm, and the lesser known Reb Yitzchak Blaser or Rav Izele Peterburger (1837 - 1907) as he was known who went on to move to Eretz Yisrael and become one of the Gedolim of the old Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael. There is a Yesod that I would like to share with you from Rav Izele Peterburger. This is found in the "Mamarei" Pachad Yitzchok in the Pesach volume, Maimar Nun Vav (page 211). It is a very fascinating Yesod. He says there are times that a person does something because it is Ratzon Hashem and nevertheless is supposed to do it reluctantly, Derech Siruv. One example of this would be where a person finds himself Rachmana Litzlon forced to be Mechaleil Shabbos, so of course he is supposed to be Mechaleil Shabbos in a reluctant way and not in an eager joyous way. The idea of Hanhaga Derech Siruv is found in the story of Eliyahu in Har Hacarmel.

As you know, Eliyahu at Har Hacarmel performed an experiment or a test with the Ovdei Ha'bal in which both Eliyahu and the Kohanei Habal each brought their own Par, their own Korban, and there were two identical oxen. When one was chosen to be the ox of the Bal, the Gemara tells us that it was reluctant to go. It didn't want to go and it stood in its place. It told Eliyahu, the other ox and I are identical why should I be the one that is offered to the Bal. Eliyahu said between the two of you there will be a Kiddush Sheim Shamayim. Go! Yet the ox didn't go. The Posuk says that Eliyahu had to lift it up and carry it over to the Ovdei Habal. The question is, do you think the ox didn't trust the Psak of Eliyahu Hanavi?

So Rav Izele Peterburger sees in this a lesson. The Pesukim here in this very strange episode are coming to teach us something. Even though it was Ratzon Hashem for this animal to be brought as a Korban to the Bal,



nevertheless when it comes to it, the behavior should be a behavior Derech Siruv, a reluctant behavior. A person should not go to a situation that is a B'dieved situation, it is a situation that is not ideal, and in such a situation even though one is obligated to do it a person is supposed to do it B'derech Siruv, in a reluctant manner.

An example to this would be someone who has to discipline a student. If you remember, those who are my age or older, the old European Rabbeim who got a real gusto in giving a Patch to a Talmid. That behavior is not the behavior that we recommend. If someone has to give a Patch to a Talmid, it should be B'derech Siruv, it should be reluctantly. It shouldn't be done eagerly even though it is a Mitzvah for him to do it. The Rebbe decided that this is what the Talmid needs. Still it should be done reluctantly. Hanhaga B'derech Siruv.

We find that if someone asks you to be a Chazzan, you should say no once or twice before going up. Even though it is just a formula, to be reluctant to go up once or twice. Since you are going and taking the honor for yourself it should be Hanhaga, a behavior B'derech Siruv.

Rav Hutner sees in this Yesod an explanation of the behavior of Moshe Rabbeinu at the Sneh. Moshe Rabbeinu at the Sneh, first he asked HKB"H for directions. He asked what should I respond when they ask me who sent you. After receiving the directions, then he said as is found in Shemos 4:13 (שְׁלַח-נָא, בְּיָד-הָשִׁלָּח). Send with somebody else, don't send me. Is that the behavior that HKB"H says go and the response is don't send me? It is very difficult to understand. The answer is that it is a Hanhaga Derech Siruv. It is a B'dieved behavior and since it is a B'dieved to go instead of Aharon and it is B'dieved to take the Kavod for yourself. Moshe Rabbeinu understood that he had to do it, but even when you have to do it, you are supposed to do it with a Hanhaga that is Derech Siruv. A reluctant type of a Hanhaga.

Rav Schwab used to repeat the story that occurred with him when he was learning in Mir and he needed money to travel home back to Germany for Bein Haz'manim. He borrowed money from Rav Yechezkel Levenstein the Mir Mashgiach. When Rav Schwab came back for the new Zman and paid back the Mashgiach he thanked Rav Yechezkel. Rav Chatzkel told him, it is Ribbis Devarim. A person is not supposed to say thank you for a loan. The next time there was a Bein Haz'manim he again borrowed money to go back to Germany and brought money back when he came for the new Zman. This time he did not say thank you. Rav Chatzkel asked him, where is the thank you? Rav Schwab said I am very confused. What does the Mashgiach mean where is the thank you, I was told that it is Assur to say thank you for a loan? Yes, but I don't see you struggling to hold yourself back from saying thank you. You are not supposed to say thank you, however, it should be done with reluctance. This is the Yesod.

I once heard a similar episode from Rav Pindrus who is one of the Roshei Yeshiva in Ohr Sameach. He was a Talmid of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. He told me that once there was a family need and he had to travel home in middle of the Zman. He asked Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz for Reshus. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz said to him in Yiddish, Ir Tut Nit Gain, you are not allowed to go. He said, okay. If that is the Psak I won't go. Then he called him back and he said, Ir Muz Gain, you have to go as your family needs you. He asked make up your mind. He said no. You have to go as your family needs you, but you should know when you go that Ir Tut Nit Gain, you are not supposed to be going. Then you can go.

Why do I mention all of this on the Shabbos of Parshas Shelach? I mention it because Klal Yisrael is in Galus. We have been in Galus for a very long time. We sometimes forget that Galus is a B'dieved. Galus is an Onesh. Galus is not where we belong. We belong in Eretz Yisrael. Those who make Galus into a Lechatchila, like the Meraglim they are Mevazeh Eretz Yisrael. People who go for vacation, they go to Europe, they go to Switzerland, they go to England, they go to Paris or London. What are they doing going to these places? They are Mevazeh Eretz Yisrael. There is no Cheishek, there is no Teshuka, there is no feeling. Now it may be, that in your life or my life it's the right thing to do, it is the Ratzon of Hashem. Our families are here, our Parnasa is here, our learning is here. Nevertheless, being in Galus has to

be a Hanhaga Derech Siruv, it has to be a B'dieved. If every moment in Galus you think of yourself as a B'dieved, then when the opportunity comes, Eretz Yisrael beckons, it calls you. Even when it doesn't come, the Ahavas Eretz Yisrael is there.

The Meraglim were not Mechavevai Eretz Yisrael. They didn't see the need to be in Eretz Yisrael. We could serve HKB"H where we are. It lacked a love, a feeling, that it was a B'dieved. Even to be a Dor Midbar eating Man, and surrounded by Ananei Hakavod, and being taught by Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohen, it is a B'dieved. You belong in Eretz Yisrael. That feeling is lacking. That feeling in our generation is missing. We need to have that Hergish we are in Galus, it is not where we belong. And that is an important thought that is very appropriate to review on Parshas Shelach. 2 – Topic – A Thought on what was done with the Fruit that the Meraglim brought back

Let me share with you something that a dear friend had sent me. The Meraglim brought from Eretz Yisrael grapes, a pomegranate and a fig. What did they do with it? He mentioned in the name of Rav Chaim Kanievisky in Taima Dik'ra. I believe that it is something that was said in one of these Shiurim a number of years ago, that the grapes that came back were used for the Nisach Hayayin, for the pouring of the wine on the Mizbaich, and they brought every morning with the Korban Tamid the Nisach Hayayin, the Nesachim of wine. Rav Chaim in Taima Dik'ra says that these were Peiros of Eretz Yisrael. They were gigantic. They had enough wine to last for all the years in the Midbar to be used for the Nisach Hayayin. Well, that is a very holy use of the grapes. The question then became what about the pomegranate and the fig that came. What became of them? That is the question that I was asked.

I found in the Otzar Hachochmah B'sheim the Chiddushei Harim, that the fruits were brought as Bikkurim. An offering of Bikkurim for the Mizbaich. So that, at least some of the grapes, pomegranate and fig were brought to be Mekayeim the Mitzvah of Bikkurim. There is a beautiful Remez to this in the first Mishnah of Perek Gimmel of Maseches Bikkurim. There is says (כיצד מפרישין את הביכורים: יורד אדם לתוך שדהו, ורואה תאנה שביכרה, אשכול שביכר, רימון (שביכר; וקושרו בגמי ואומר, הרי אלו ביכורים). It mentions only three of the seven Minim. Of course it means all of them, however, the three that are brought as an example guess what they are? (תאנה) the fig, (אשכול) the cluster of grapes, (רימון) the pomegranate. No coincidence that it mentions only these three. This is because these three are brought forever as a Tikun for the Cheit Mergalim and it is possible going with the idea that the grapes are used for a Mitzvah, that here too, the Chiddushei Harim says the fig and pomegranate were brought as Bikkurim and it was a Kiyum Mitzvah of Bikkurim once it returned. This serves to remind us once again that the Meraglim were great people that were Nichshal and did a terrible Aveira, but they were Baalei Madreiga.

And so, with this I wish everybody a wonderful Parshas Shelach, a meaningful Shabbos. I am hoping next Shabbos to be in Eretz Yisrael and looking for someone to Lain the entire Parshas Korach for me by Mincha so that I won't miss a Parsha. I haven't missed a Parsha on Shabbos Boruch Hashem in decades and I hope not to. HKB"H will send me the right Shaliach. Wishing everyone a wonderful Shabbos. Halevai all of Klal Yisrael should be in Eretz Yisrael next Shabbos and all the Chutz L'aretz people will be Laining Parshas Korach along with Parshas Chukas. A Gutten Shabbos to one and all!

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

date: Jun 15, 2023, 6:40 PM

OU Torah Rabbi Weinreb on Parsha

**Shelach: The Blue Above the White**

**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

It may not sound like much of a story to you, but to me it was meaningful at many levels. I've heard the story three times now, each time from a different person. Each of the three went through a remarkably similar experience and

shared their story with me. I'd like to share the story with you, but some background will be necessary.

You must already have guessed that the background will derive from this week's Torah portion, Parshat Shelach (Numbers 13:1-15:41). At the very end of the parsha, we read:

"The Lord said to Moses, as follows: Speak to the people of Israel and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout all their generations; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe; look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them, so that you do not follow your heart and eyes... Thus you shall be reminded to observe all My commandments and to be holy to your God..." (Numbers 15:37-40).

The Torah's word for "fringes" is tzitzit. This mitzvah is punctiliously kept by observant Jews to this very day, consistent with the verse's insistence that it is a practice mandated for "all their generations." The mitzvah entails affixing strings to four cornered garments, so that the strings hang loose. Jewish men wear these garments, and the stringent view, codified by the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 8:11), requires that the garment be worn above one's other clothing "so that one will constantly look at the tzitzit and thereby remember the commandments."

More lenient views allow the garment to be worn under one's other clothing, but still encourage the practice of letting the strings themselves protrude from one's clothing so that the wearer can see them, reflect upon them, and call to mind the Almighty's commandments. This is the practice of very many observant Jews nowadays.

Now we come to the story told to me by three young men who had identical experiences with these strings while wearing them in their everyday business settings. To my knowledge, these three men do not know each other and indeed dwell and work in communities geographically distant from each other.

Each of them approached me with his story, convinced that I would be especially interested in what had occurred to them. Each of them was approached, and I should emphasize respectfully approached, by a non-Jew, and each of them was asked if there was any significance to the strings protruding from their sweaters or shirts. Each of them replied that the strings had religious significance and that they wore them in keeping with a biblical command.

Each of them was surprised when the non-Jew immediately understood that this practice traced back to the Bible; in his words, to the Old Testament. Two of them even knew the chapter and verse of the passage in the Bible, quoted above. "Of course," they said, "these strings are the 'fringes' which must be attached to your garments."

All three "storytellers" were similarly taken aback by the expertise shown by their non-Jewish acquaintances and by their familiarity with "our" Bible. But none of the three stories ends quite here.

All of the three non-Jews then persisted to ask, "But where are the blue strings? Doesn't the Bible prescribe that a blue cord be attached at each corner? Where are your blue cords?"

The Torah's word for the "blue cord" is tekhelet. In Biblical times, and for centuries thereafter, one of the cords, and according to some opinions two of them, were dyed blue before being attached to the four-cornered garment. The dye was extracted from a sea creature known as the chilazon. Over the course of Jewish history, this practice was discontinued. It became difficult to procure this specific dye, and eventually the precise identity of this sea creature became unknown.

Two of my "storytellers" were able to share the reason for the absence of the blue cord with their non-Jewish questioners. One had to simply admit that he did not know why he did not keep the precise biblical command in his personal practice.

Permit me now to briefly tell you another story; namely, the story of the discovery of the identity of the sea creature, the recovery of the knowledge necessary to extract the dye from that creature, and the renewed ability to observe this mitzvah exactly as prescribed by the Torah, in the portion we

read this Shabbat. The story begins in the late 19th century with the efforts of Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner to travel to the museums and aquariums of the Mediterranean coast in search of the chilazon. He identified the creature as a subspecies of a squid, and his followers to this day derive the blue dye from this creature and color their tzitzit with it. However, rabbinic authorities of that time disagreed with this rabbi's opinion.

Closer to our time, the late Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Isaac Herzog, wrote his doctoral thesis on the topic of the identification of this sea creature and brilliantly defended his thesis: The chilazon was not a type of squid, but was rather a type of snail, known scientifically as the *murex trunculus*.

Even closer to our time, barely two decades ago, a group of Israeli scholars found a source in the ocean near Israel for this snail, and through a fascinating process too long to describe here, began to produce the dye and made tzitzit dyed blue available to the public. Nevertheless, a great number of rabbinic scholars remain unimpressed by these discoveries.

For a full description of this entire topic, one should consult the following website: [www.tekhelet.com](http://www.tekhelet.com).

What was my response to the three "storytellers" and their tale? I chose not to share with them my own private reflection to the effect that had these three non-Jews met me, they would have found the blue cord of which they were informed by their own biblical study. Rather, I chose to share with the storytellers one of the explanations given for the blue cord.

This explanation is to be found in a book entitled *Sefer HaChinuch*, written by a medieval rabbi whose identity is uncertain. The book is an enumeration of all 613 Torah commandments, with an explanation given about the "root" of each command. By "root" he means, in contemporary terminology, the symbolic significance of the commandment. Here is what the author writes, in my own admittedly free translation:

"The underlying reason for this mitzvah is apparent. What can be a better reminder of God's commandments than an appendage attached to one's everyday apparel? But more than that, let us analyze the colors of the cords: blue and white. White is symbolic of the body, which our tradition (see Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 3) teaches us was primordial created from the snow, which is white. Note too, that the body in its early embryonic stage resembles intertwined cords or strings (see Tractate Niddah 25b). The blue cord is reminiscent of the blue sky, of heaven, and is symbolic of all that is spiritual about mankind. Therefore, the blue cord is wound around the white to emphasize that ultimately, the soul is above, and the body is below; the soul is primary, and the body but secondary."

For those of us who wear tekhelet nowadays, and I am proud that I am among them, a powerful image that comes to our mind's eye every time we gaze upon our tzitzit is the image of a blue cord wound around a white one, and it is a constant reminder that our "white body" is best enveloped by our "blue soul," that our earthly selves must be subservient to our heavenly spirit.

Will the beautiful explanation given by the *Sefer HaChinuch* convince those who do not yet wear tekhelet to begin to do so? Perhaps not. But perhaps you, dear reader, with the addition of so many similar rabbinic passages available on the [tekhelet.com](http://tekhelet.com) website, will be convinced to add this new spiritual dimension to this important everyday mitzvah.

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb is Executive Vice President, Emeritus of the Orthodox Union, following more than seven years as Executive Vice President. In that role, he combined the skills of pulpit rabbi, scholar, and clinical psychologist to provide extraordinary leadership to the organization and to Orthodox Judaism worldwide...

From: Torah Lectures <[torahlectures@blog.wixnotifications.com](mailto:torahlectures@blog.wixnotifications.com)> Sent: Thursday, June 8, 2023 Subject: New post in Torah Lectures

**Parshas (B'haaloscha) Shelach 5783**

**A short message from Rav Elimelech Biderman Shlita**

A Guttan Erev Shabbos Parshas Shelach!

In this week's Parsha, when the spies returned, they said as follows ו we felt like grasshoppers compared to them – the giants, and the giants too viewed us as grasshoppers. The Midrash says, that Hashem said that for I can



forgive, but for – that the giants viewed you as grasshoppers, for that I won't forgive. Why? Because maybe I made you seem like angels in the eyes of the giants.

The Sfias Emes asks on this, that the Gemara in Sotah (35a) which Rashi brings down states, that they spies heard the giants talking amongst themselves saying little creatures are strolling in the vineyard). If so, why did Hashem expect them to assume that the giants viewed them as angels when they heard directly from the giants how they viewed them?

The Sfias Emes answers a fascinating answer: The way people view a person, is dependent on how that person feels about himself. If a person holds himself to be a grasshopper, then that's how others will view him and that's what he'll hear others saying about him, and therefore they only heard the giants saying that they're grasshoppers because that's how they viewed themselves.

To understand this better, let's say over a story: A Yungerman was learning in Kollel, and he felt that no one would come over to him to speak in learning; and with mundane matters too, he wasn't included in the conversation. And the same was outside in the street, no one ever approached him to ask for directions, and no child asked him to cross him the street. And in his apartment building too, while by the staircases no neighbors would speak to him. Even in his own house, his family just wouldn't talk to him. One day, he saw an advertisement that they're selling hats. His hat already saw generations of Tzadikim... So, he decided to go there and buy a new hat. When he came in, they told him that it costs a lot, but he agreed to pay whatever it costs. They measured him, and found him a beautiful hat. He paid for it, and thought to himself, "instead of carrying the new hat home in the box, let me leave my old hat behind, and start wearing the new hat already"; and that's what he did.

Wondrously, he stepped out into the street, and someone approaches him and asks "How do I get to this-and-this Shul?" A block down, a child came over to him and asked him to cross him the street. He came into his building, and the neighbors greet him warmly and ask him "What's doing?" He comes into his house, and his family jumps to greet him, asking him "What's going on?" So, he pointed upwards intending to show them his new hat, but they didn't understand what he's saying. He pointed again, but they still didn't understand. When he pointed a third time, they started pointing to their foreheads saying "something's off..." Until he finally explained to them that he got a new hat. They reply "we don't see any new hat!" He removes his hat, and behold it was his old one. He had in mind to leave his old hat behind and wear the new one, while by mistake he left the new hat behind and wore his old hat. Nevertheless, everyone began talking to him! What changed? You know what changed? Not his hat, but his head, his mindset. Thinking that he's wearing a new hat, he felt good about himself, and others felt it too, and that's why they began talking to him.

The Possuk in this week's Parsha says Vayivchu Ha'am Ba'laila Ha'hu and Chazal tell us, that because they cried a senseless cry on that night, therefore that night was established as a "night of crying". The Imrei Emes says, that the lesson from this is, that if a senseless cry causes crying for generations, then surely being happy for no reason causes happiness for generations! What's the meaning of being happy for no reason? Just being happy by strengthening oneself with faith in Hashem!

For a conclusion: The Possuk says in this week's Parsha Vayikra Moshe Li'Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua. Explains the Rebbe R' Heinoch, that Moshe Rabbeinu saw this Yungerman who constantly cried out to Hashem for all of his needs, for money, Chavrusos, health and so on; so, Moshe Rabbeinu said Vayikra Moshe Li'Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua. – The person who constantly calls out to Hashem for salvations, Ye'Hoshua – he will surely merit a salvation. This, he says, is a piece of advice for every Jew, to train himself that whenever he needs something, he should cry out to Hashem. One doesn't have to be isolated and adorned with Tallis and Tefilin to do this, rather even in the street, after making sure that the place is clean and pure, when he cries out to Hashem he will surely be helped! Have a joyous Shabbos!

To subscribe, for more information, and for sponsorship opportunities, please email: DevorimKetzorim@gmail.com, or send a text to (845) 502-6117.

from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoa.org> date: Jun 15, 2023, 7:02 PM  
subject: Tidbits for Parashas Shelach  
In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz z"l

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Tamuz. Rosh Chodesh is on Monday and Tuesday, June 19th and 20th. The molad is Sunday afternoon at 3:36 PM and 15 chalakim.

Eretz Yisrael remains one Parashah ahead and will lein Parashas Korach this week.

The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Wednesday night, June 21st.

The final opportunity is late Sunday night, July 2nd at 3:37 AM EDT.

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Gittin 31 • Yerushalmi: Demai 48 • Mishnah

Yomis: Yoma 6:7-8 • Oraysa: Rosh Hashanah 7b & 8a

בְּמִסְפַּר הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־תֵּרְתֶּם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם לִשְׁנָה יוֹם לִשְׁנָה תִּשְׁאוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנוֹתֶיכֶם  
שָׁנָה אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה Like the number of the days that you spied out the land, forty days, a day for a year, a day for a year, you shall bear your iniquities forty years (Bamidbar 14:34)

Bnei Yisrael were punished with wandering in the desert for forty years, corresponding to the forty days that the Meraglim traversed the land and returned with a bad report on Eretz Yisrael. Although the lashon hara spoken against Eretz Yisrael was certainly wrong, it was spoken only upon their return. Why, then, was the punishment correspondent to the days they spent within Eretz Yisrael?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz z"l answers that we learn from here that not only is lashon hara forbidden in speech, it is even forbidden to think and contemplate negative thoughts about a fellow Jew. Rashi (13:26) writes that the Meraglim's negative intentions were present from the time they entered the land. Therefore, the sin of lashon hara in the form of negative thoughts was in fact present for all forty days. Rav Elya Baruch Finkel z"l expounds further with the words of the Chofetz Chaim who writes that the underlying sin of lashon hara is the ayin ra - an evil eye with which one views his fellow negatively. This negative outlook is what causes one to develop negative views regarding a fellow Jew. The noted mechaneches, Reb. B. David a"h, would tell her students that our hashkafos and feelings are also "lemaysa" and practical in nature, as they guide our actions and practice. One must be careful about thoughts in mind and heart in order to cultivate positive words and deeds.

#### Haftorah Commentary Parshas Shlach Rabbi Dovid Siegel

<rdsiegel@torah.org> Thu, Jun 15, 5:31 PM (7 hours ago)

Yehoshua 2:1 This week's haftorah reveals to us the power of perfect faith and the miraculous events that can result from such inner strength. The haftorah begins with Yehoshua, the newly appointed successor to Moshe Rabbeinu, sending two special individuals on a secret mission to investigate the land of Israel. The Jewish people were situated directly outside the Promised Land and Yehoshua wished to determine the most strategic point from which to enter the land. The mission was quite dangerous being that the Canaanite inhabitants were well aware of the impending Jewish threat on their land.

Yehoshua instructed the spies to survey all of Eretz Yisroel, placing special focus on the entry point of Yericho. The spies crossed over the Jordan River and proceeded directly to the first inn inside the city's wall, the house of Rachav. Their entry was immediately discovered by the King of Yericho who sent a strong message to Rachav demanding the surrender of the intruders. Out of the goodness of her heart, Rachav responded to the king's request by engaging herself in a remarkable act of heroism. She quickly concealed the spies and then persuaded the king's messengers that the spies had left her house and exited the city. When the messengers were totally out of sight she immediately revealed to the spies that the inhabitants of the land were awestricken by the anticipated invasion of the Jewish people. She

added that she personally believed Hashem to be in absolute control of the entire universe and that he could easily defeat all who stand in His way. Our Chazal (Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua 8) reflect upon this most unusual experience and its stark contrast to the disheartening experience of the spies in this week's parsha. This week we read about ten of the Jewish people's greatest men who went on a similar mission to survey Eretz Yisroel. Yet the results of their mission were quite different and ultimately persuaded the Jewish people to seriously reject Eretz Yisroel. Chazal point to the fundamental distinction between these two groups of spies. They explain that the spies in the time of Yehoshua were totally devoted to their mission and therefore met enormous success. This implies that the spies in the days of Moshe Rabbeinu were remiss in their perfect commitment to their mission. Due to this weakness their perception regarding the land was prone to be subjective and they were naturally overwhelmed by their awesome experiences in the land. Conversely, the spies in Yehoshua's times were totally committed to their mission and were therefore amply prepared to overcome any obstacle in their way.

In truth, the land of Israel presented extraordinary challenges for the Jewish people. The inhabitants of the land were far from friendly to their Jewish invaders and it was evident that nothing short of an open miracle could secure the safety of the Jewish nation. The spies in Moshe's times displayed grave concern over this dangerous plight. They observed the towering stature of the giants in the land and the total preoccupation of its inhabitants in eulogies and funerals. Unfortunately, the original spies succumbed to their well-grounded fears and eventually forfeited their privilege to enter the land. The second group of spies however possessed perfect faith and total commitment. With such inner strength they were not influenced by any of their frightening experiences and faithfully fulfilled their mission. This stark contrast serves as a profound lesson in perfect faith and trust in Hashem. From a practical standpoint Yehoshua's spies had no realistic chance to succeed and faced almost immediate guaranteed death. The Jewish nation had been camped within earshot of Eretz Yisroel and a secret mission like theirs was prone to be discovered. Although our Chazal (see Yalkut Shimoni ibid.) do tell us that the spies disguised themselves as travelling salesmen it is quite difficult to fathom that such pious men could truly pass as Canaanites. The only real thing they had going for themselves was their steadfast faith and trust in Hashem. They bravely entered the "lion's den" and decided to lodge in the home of Rachav, a dear contact of all of the country's highest ranking officials. She was fondly known throughout the land and enjoyed a warm personal association with all the authorities. In fact, the results were exactly as could be predicted and the spies were immediately detected upon entry.

However, when one possesses perfect faith in Hashem the events which follow are far from predictable. Our Chazal (see Yalkut ad loc. 9) reveal to us a most startling demonstration of Divine Providence and inform us that Rachav, unbeknown to the spies, had recently embraced the Jewish religion. In fact, Hashem had actually directed the spies to the only Jewish soul in the entire land of Canaan. The faith of the spies proved rewarding and instead of surrendering the spies to the king, Rachav extended herself in every way to assist her newly embraced Jewish brethren. She greatly encouraged them with her profound statements of faith and actually became a catalyst for the deliverance of the Promised Land directly into Jewish hands. The Yalkut informs us that Rachav was favorably rewarded for her heroism and merited to marry the Jewish nation's leader Yehoshua and became the forebear of many Jewish prophets and priests. Instead of almost guaranteed death for the spies their perfect faith produced a most successful mission resulting in the deliverance of the land of Canaan into Jewish hands. This is but a sample of the incredible results of perfect faith and total commitment to Hashem. From here we see that when one follows the path of Hashem with perfect faith and trust there is no limit to the unpredictable results and success that Hashem brings about. Let it be the will of Above that our constant strides in faith and commitment serve as the special merit for us to finally return to our homeland in peace and harmony very soon.

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from: Torah Musings <[newsletter@torahmusings.com](mailto:newsletter@torahmusings.com)> via date: Jun 8, 2023, 11:03 AM subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 06/08/2023

### **Tzitzit and Spies** **by R. Gidon Rothstein**

Parshat Shelach

Seeing tzitzit will remind a Jew of all the mitzvot of the Torah, the verse says, without explaining how. Kli Yakar offers two options, each interesting. His first requires two pieces of background, one better known than the other. The Similar Colors of Tekhelet, Sea, and Sky Menachot 43b more famously says tekhelet—the bluish string we are to include with the white ones, whose identity was lost for centuries but, thank God, seems to have been found in our times—is similar to the sea, the sea to the sky, the sky to the kisei ha-kavod, I think usually translated as Throne of Glory.

Kli Yakar dismisses the possibility these colors fully match, because tekhelet certainly doesn't match the sky exactly, although I don't know how he was so sure. My guess is he was more confident the sea wasn't sky-blue, it was reminiscent of sky blue. Similarity draws our attention to those parts of the world; looking at tekhelet turns our attention to the sea, from there to the sky, but so what?

The Sea and the Sky, Serving God in Fear and Love

He offers another Midrash to explain. Sifrei, also cited in Yalkut Ha'azinu 542, envisions Hashem having Moshe tell the people to look at the sky Hashem had created to serve them. It never changes its dimensions, the sun never rises in the west. The Midrash quotes a verse to show the sky is happy to do it.

The sea also sticks to the realms given it, only here tradition inferred submission to a Greater Will, staying in its area out of yir'a, fear or awe. If they do so, when they have no deep understanding, all the more should we, the Midrash says.

As we look at our tekhelet, Kli Yakar thinks the two sources teach us, we remember the sea, remember to serve God out of fear, instilling a deep care and concern with not going wrong. From there, we move to thinking of the sky, serving out of love (a service Kli Yakar says will translate into enjoying the component actions of service, not only the avoidance of doing or going wrong).

From those two, we progress to thinking of God directly, fear and love reading us for the highest service. A process sparked by the tekhelet's blue. Mitzvot Bring on Mitzvot

Alternatively or perhaps additionally, tekhelet might remind us of mitzvot based on Kohelet 9;8's metaphor of clothing for our mitzvah observance. Most garments need many strings woven together, says Kli Yakar, but a "garment" for the soul can start with just one string, one mitzvah.

Avot 4:2 says mitzvah goreret mitzvah, one mitzvah causes another, a phrase Kli Yakar is sure indicates a covenant, by which I think he means something metaphysical, God has guaranteed us that taking on one mitzvah will put us on a path to more. Adding to his claim, he says the one performance, since it has the potential to expand, counts as if the Jew has already fulfilled them all, at least in terms of the experience of seeing the tekhelet string.

The one string alerts us to the power of every mitzvah, any one able to move us from being spiritually bare to being fully clothed, one bringing all, in potential.

Two ways the tekhelet starts us on the road to all the mitzvot, the "reminder" Kli Yakar takes the verse to intend.

When and What God Forgave

After the sin of the spies, God commits to forgiving kidvarekha, as Moshe had said; Chatam Sofer relates it to a discussion of Tosafot Yevamot 72a. The Gemara there said the Jews did not merit the healing north wind (and did not circumcise their children) all the time in the desert because they were

nezufim, shunned/excommunicated from God. Rashi says the sin of the Golden Calf led to this state, surprising Tosafot, because God seemed to forgive the Jews.

They instead argue the Jews were shunned after the sin of the spies, in our parsha.

The Meaning of “Lekha, To You”

Of course, Chatam Sofer points out Hashem actually did say *salachti kidvarekha*, like your words, in our parsha, Bamidbar 14:20. Chizkuni argued Hashem was here forgiving the sin of the Golden Calf fully, without explaining why Hashem would refer back to that sin. Chatam Sofer has a theory.

Moshe defended the Jews in our parsha by arguing that punishing them as they deserved would backfire, would sacrilege God’s Name by giving the impression God had taken the Jews out of Egypt only to destroy them, “unable” to follow through on the promise to bring them to Israel.

The theory founders on first words of our parsha, *shelach lekha*, understood to mean Hashem made it Moshe’s choice, God was neither commanding nor prohibiting, leaving no way to “blame” it on God. On the other hand, perhaps *lekha* is just how the language works, in which case the Jews would be again safe.

Unfortunately, Moshe had previously protected the Jews from the full consequences of the sin of the Golden Calf with that very argument. According to Shemot Rabba 47:9, Moshe had said the Jews could not be blamed for worshipping the Golden Calf because the Aseret Ha-Dibberot said *lo yihye lekha*, you shall not have, a word Moshe argued applied to him alone.

*Salakhti kidvarekha*, Chatam Sofer suggests Chizkuni would read, means I forgave the sin of the Golden Calf based on your reading of *lekha*, it means you alone. Applied to *shelach lekha*, means it was the Jews’ choice, and there can be no worry for *chillul Hashem*. Tosafot could say they were *nezufim*, in excommunication, because of the sin of the spies, despite God’s apparent statement forgiving them.

Some sin of the Jews left a mark throughout their time in the desert. For Rashi, it was the Golden Calf, despite Hashem having them build the Mishkan and enshrining the Divine Presence there. For Tosafot, it was the spies, because, says Chatam Sofer, *lekha* is “to you,” God having in no way endorsed sending them.

Or, It’s the Difference Between Natural and Not

Ha’amek Davar offers another way to deal with “*lekha*.” He starts with the insistence *shelach* must mean a command. Yet Moshe presents the story in Devarim as if it was the Jews’ initiative, so Ha’amek Davar needs to reconcile the two.

Ramban starts him off, by articulating a valid reason to send spies, the ordinary human need to know how to conquer a land most effectively (the version in Devarim does not have the Jews asking whether the land is good or not, Ramban pointed out, it asked for the ways and routes to take to conquer the land). Such information is indispensable if the Jews are conquering Israel naturally (with God’s help, but within the laws of nature). Were the Jews going to continue to enjoy supernatural protection from God, as they had throughout their time in the desert, the spies would be unneeded. Ha’amek Davar thinks the last three stops on the Jews’ travels had daunted them, made them aware of their precarious situation, how any time they complained against or about God it would be directly in His ears, as it were, could bring immediate and serious punishment. Unable or unwilling to bear the pressure, they chose to shift to natural conquest, needing spies.

He adds an idea I find very intriguing. Moshe had told the people God spoke to them *panim be-panim*, literally face to face, but Netziv says it also means God promised to deal with them the way they chose. They could choose more direct providence, with its advantages and dangers, or the natural version of providence.

Tzitzit take us in a good direction, in one of two ways, and there were two possibilities about how the *lekha* of the second word of the parsha shaped

our understanding of the sin of the spies, sandwiching this parsha with insight of Kli Yakar, Chatam Sofer, and Ha’amek Davar.

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org> date: Jun 15, 2023, 10:44 AM subject: Two Kinds of Fear 🦋 (Shelach Lecha)

## Two Kinds of Fear

### SHELACH LECHA

NOTE: Israel’s Torah reading cycle is currently one week ahead of the rest of the Jewish world. If you are currently residing in Israel, and wish to receive the emails according to Israel’s Torah reading cycle, please update your preferences using the bottom of this email, or email us to let us know.

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives. “I have loved the Torah of R’ Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah.” – Rabbi Sacks

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One of the most powerful addresses I ever heard was given by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, on this week’s parsha: the story of the spies. For me, it was nothing less than life-changing. He asked the obvious questions. How could ten of the spies have come back with a demoralising, defeatist report? How could they say, we cannot win, the people are stronger than us, their cities are well fortified, they are giants and we are grasshoppers?

They had seen with their own eyes how God had sent a series of plagues that brought Egypt, the strongest and longest-lived of all the empires of the ancient world, to its knees. They had seen the Egyptian army with its cutting-edge military technology, the horse-drawn chariot, drown in the Reed Sea while the Israelites passed through it on dry land. Egypt was far stronger than the Canaanites, Perrizites, Jebusites, and other minor kingdoms that they would have to confront in conquering the land. Nor was this an ancient memory. It had happened not much more than a year before.

What is more, they already knew that, far from being giants confronting grasshoppers, the people of the land were terrified of the Israelites. They had said so themselves in the course of singing the Song at the Sea: The peoples have heard; they tremble; Pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; Trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; Because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone.

Ex. 15:14-16 The people of the land were afraid of the Israelites. Why then were the spies afraid of them?

What is more, continued the Rebbe, the spies were not people plucked at random from among the population. The Torah states that they were “all of them men who were heads of the people of Israel.” They were leaders. They were not people given lightly to fear.

The questions are straightforward, but the answer the Rebbe gave was utterly unexpected. The spies were not afraid of failure, he said. They were afraid of success.

What was their situation now? They were eating manna from heaven. They were drinking water from a miraculous well. They were surrounded by Clouds of Glory. They were camped around the Sanctuary. They were in continuous contact with the Shechinah. Never had a people lived so close to God.

What would be their situation if they entered the land? They would have to fight battles, maintain an army, create an economy, farm the land, worry about whether there would be enough rain to produce a crop, and all the

other thousand distractions that come from living in the world. What would happen to their closeness to God? They would be preoccupied with mundane and material pursuits. Here they could spend their entire lives learning Torah, lit by the radiance of the Divine. There they would be no more than one more nation in a world of nations, with the same kind of economic, social and political problems that every nation has to deal with.

The spies were not afraid of failure. They were afraid of success. Their mistake was the mistake of very holy men. They wanted to spend their lives in the closest possible proximity to God. What they did not understand was that God seeks, in the Hasidic phrase, “a dwelling in the lower worlds”. One of the great differences between Judaism and other religions is that while others seek to lift people to heaven, Judaism seeks to bring heaven down to earth.

Much of Torah is about things not conventionally seen as religious at all: labour relations, agriculture, welfare provisions, loans and debts, land ownership and so on. It is not difficult to have an intense religious experience in the desert, or in a monastic retreat, or in an ashram. Most religions have holy places and holy people who live far removed from the stresses and strains of everyday life. There was one such Jewish sect in Qumran, known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls, and there were certainly others. About this there is nothing unusual at all.

But that is not the Jewish project, the Jewish mission. God wanted the Israelites to create a model society where human beings were not treated as slaves, where rulers were not worshipped as demigods, where human dignity was respected, where law was impartially administered to rich and poor alike, where no one was destitute, no one was abandoned to isolation, no one was above the law and no realm of life was a morality-free zone. That requires a society, and a society needs a land. It requires an economy, an army, fields and flocks, labour and enterprise. All these, in Judaism, become ways of bringing the Shechinah into the shared spaces of our collective life. The spies feared success, not failure. It was the mistake of deeply religious men. But it was a mistake.

That is the spiritual challenge of the greatest event in two thousand years of Jewish history: the return of Jews to the land - and State - of Israel. Perhaps never before and never since has there been a political movement accompanied by so many dreams as Zionism. For some it was the fulfilment of prophetic visions, for others the secular achievement of people who had decided to take history into their own hands. Some saw it as a Tolstoy-like reconnection with land and soil, others a Nietzschean assertion of will and power. Some saw it as a refuge from European antisemitism, others as the first flowering of messianic redemption. Every Zionist thinker had his or her version of utopia, and to a remarkable degree they all came to pass. But Israel always was something simpler and more basic. Jews have known virtually every fate and circumstance between tragedy and triumph in the almost four thousand years of their history, and they have lived in almost every land on earth. But in all that time there only ever was one place where they could do what they were called on to do from the dawn of their history: to build their own society in accord with their highest ideals, a society that would be different from their neighbours and become a role model of how a society, an economy, an educational system and the administration of welfare could become vehicles for bringing the Divine presence down to earth.

It is not difficult to find God in the wilderness, if you do not eat from the labour of your hands and if you rely on God to fight your battles for you. Ten of the spies, according to the Rebbe, sought to live that way forever. But that, suggested the Rebbe, is not what God wants from us. He wants us to engage with the world. He wants us to heal the sick, feed the hungry, fight injustice with all the power of law, and combat ignorance with universal education. He wants us to show what it is to love the neighbour and the stranger, and say, with Rabbi Akiva, “Beloved is humanity because we are each created in God’s image.”

Jewish spirituality lives in the midst of life itself, the life of society and its institutions. To create it we have to battle with two kinds of fear: fear of

failure, and fear of success. Fear of failure is common; fear of success is rarer but no less debilitating. Both come from the reluctance to take risks. Faith is the courage to take risks. It is not certainty; it is the ability to live with uncertainty. It is the ability to hear God saying to us as He said to Abraham, “Walk on ahead of Me” (Gen. 17:1).

The Rebbe lived what he taught. He sent emissaries out to virtually every place on earth where there were Jews. In so doing, he transformed Jewish life. He knew he was asking his followers to take risks, by going to places where the whole environment would be challenging in many ways, but he had faith in them and in God and in the Jewish mission whose place is in the public square where we share our faith with others and do so in deeply practical ways.

It is challenging to leave the desert and go out into the world with all its trials and temptations, but that is where God wants us to be, bringing His spirit to the way we run an economy, a welfare system, a judiciary, a health service, and an army, healing some of the wounds of the world and bringing, to places often shrouded in darkness, fragments of Divine light.

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net> date: Jun 15, 2023, 3:45 PM subject: Dance to the Beat of Creativity - Essay by Rabbi YY  
Dance to the Beat of Creativity

### **Why Were the Spies Condemned for Reporting the Facts?**

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

The difficult we do immediately; the impossible takes a little longer. --  
General Montgomery

#### **The Hole in the Roof**

A rabbi stands before his congregation and reports to them that a massive hole has been found in the roof of the synagogue.

"Now I have good news and bad news for you," the Rabbi continues. "The good news is that we have the money to repair it; the bad news is that the money is in your pockets."

#### **If We Win?**

It's an old anecdote. Years ago, the Israeli parliament, or Knesset, convened an emergency session to figure out a solution for the Israeli economy.

One brilliant minister said, "Let's declare war on the U.S., and then, in the wake of the utter destruction America will bring upon us, we will receive billions of dollars for reconstruction, like Germany and Japan."

"Sounds great," responded another member of the Knesset. "One problem: What will we do if we win the war?"

#### **Twelve Jews on a Mission**

This week's portion, Shlach, tells the story of 12 men who were dispatched by Moses from the desert to go and survey the Land of Canaan and its inhabitants. The purpose of their journey was to prepare the Jewish people for the subsequent conquest and settlement of the Land.[1]

Upon discharging the spies on their mission, Moses presented them with a list of questions they needed to answer. "See the Land," Moses said to them. "How is it? And the nations that dwell in it—are they strong or weak? Are they few or numerous? And how is the land in which they dwell—is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they dwell—are they open or are they fortified?"

When the twelve spies returned from their 40-day tour of Israel they presented to the people a report of their findings.

"We arrived at the Land to which you sent us," the spies said, "and indeed it flows with milk and honey and this is its fruit. But the people that dwell in the land are powerful, the cities are greatly fortified and we also saw the offspring of the giants. We cannot ascend to that people for it is too strong for us," they proclaimed.

The report demoralized the Jewish nation and drained it of the motivation to enter the Land. As a result, the spies died, and much of the generation died in the desert, never making it into the Promised Land. Only 39 years later, in the year 1276 B.C.E., did the children and grandchildren of this generation cross the borders and settle in the Promised Land.

Kill the Messenger?

One of the many questions raised by biblical commentators [2] concerns the reason for the spies being condemned to punishment. Moses gave them a detailed list of questions about the Land; he instructed them to make their own observations as to what will await the people upon their arrival. This is exactly what the spies did. They came back with an answer to all of Moses' questions and reported what they perceived to be the reality. If Moses expected them to cover up their observations -- that the Land was inhabited by mighty men and its cities were greatly fortified -- he should have never sent them in the first place!

Why were the men faulted for relating what they had seen? Is this not a case of "kill the messenger?"

Introducing Paralysis

The answer is that if the spies had merely related to Moses and to the people the reality of the situation as they saw it, everything would have been fine. But they did more than that. They used the difficulties they observed as an excuse to capitulate in the face of fear.

Had the spies returned and said, "Hey guys, we have seen a mighty people and well-protected cities in the Land, so now we need to devise an effective strategy of how to go about our challenging mission," they would have fulfilled their task flawlessly. The moment they responded to the obstacles by saying "We cannot do it anymore," they swayed an entire people to abandon their G-d-given destiny.

The spies are condemned for substituting the legitimate and important question "How will we do it?" with the despairing and helpless conclusion, "We can never do it!"

Conquering Your Darkness

Each of us has a domain in our life that needs to be conquered, a terrain that needs to be transformed into a "holy land." Some of us need to confront trauma, fear, insecurity, temptation, addiction, or shame. We must confront challenges within our psyches, our marriages, and our families. Since the challenges that lay in recovery's path are at times frightening, we are naturally tempted to believe that we are incapable of overcoming our darkness and we surrender to the obstacles.

The feeling is understandable, but if you surrender to it, it will rob you of the opportunity to liberate your life and arrive at your personal "Promised Land." The option of resignation compels you to remain stuck in a barren desert made up of the stuff of shame and despair.

The question ought not to be, "Can I do it?" Because that's the question coming from my inner sense of incompetence. G-d conceived you in love, and the day you were born is the day He declared that the world is incomplete without you. As the saying goes, sometimes when you find yourself in a dark place you think you've been buried, but you've actually been planted. The resources to repair the "hole in our personal roof" are present. I am empowered to leave my wilderness and discover my light, joy, and wholeness. G-d has sent me into each of my life's journeys with the power to bring light into my darkness and discover my own inner infinity, as a Divine ambassador of love, light, healing, and hope.

The story of the spies is our personal story. My trauma tells me, "I can't," and I have all the emotional evidence and data to support my conclusions. But with lots of empathy and faith in my inner Divine self, I can discover a deeper untarnished, unfearful core that has the power to say: I can, and I will; now let me figure out how. I want to dance to the beat of creativity and connection, not despair to the beat of survival and loneliness.

Ask not "whether," but rather "how." [3]

[1]Numbers chapters 13-14. [2] Nachmanides in his commentary on the opening verses of the portion. [3] This essay is based on an address I heard from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbos Parshas Shlach, 21 Sivan, 5749 (June 24, 1989), published in Sefer Hasichos 5749 vol. 2. Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 13 pp. 39-41. For other answers to the above question, see Likkutei Sichos vol. 18 Shlach 1, and many references that are noted there.

Fw from Hamelaket@gmail.com

**TORAH SHORTS:** Shelach 5783 Weekly Biblical Thoughts Commentary based on the Bat Ayin

By **Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz** Choosing Yokes (Shelach) The more you depend on forces outside yourself, the more you are dominated by them. - Harold Sherman Moses sends twelve princes of Israel to spy out the land of Canaan, the land God promised to the nation of Israel. Ten of the twelve spies come back with a frightening, negative report that sows panic amongst the people. God is furious with this development and tells Moses he will destroy the nation and start anew with just Moses and his descendants. Moses successfully intercedes and God diminishes the decree from outright destruction to instead have the cowardly, faithless population wander in the desert for forty years. The next generation will be the ones to conquer Canaan. The Bat Ayin on Numbers 14:17 explains that part of the failure of the generation of the desert was their lack of faith in God. They believed in the superficial strength of their enemies and did not believe in the supernatural powers that God had already demonstrated with the ten plagues of Egypt, the splitting of the sea and the numerous other miracles they experienced in the desert. By accepting and fearing the mundane reality of the physical strength of their enemies, they in a sense neutralized God's possible intervention. The Bat Ayin explains that the converse is also true. By accepting God's strength, God's power, God's desire and ability to intervene in our lives, by accepting what the Sages call "the Yoke of Heaven," we neutralize and overcome our mundane, physical adversaries. By becoming full-fledged subjects of God's monarchy, we throw off the yoke of earthly monarchies and overlords. Not only are political rulers nullified, but somehow even the chains and burdens of a livelihood are lifted. The dictum of the Sages states: "Whoever accepts upon themselves the yoke of Heaven, they have lifted from them the yoke of rulers and the yoke of livelihood." The Bat Ayin adds that a particularly strong expression of accepting the Yoke of Heaven is by keeping the Sabbath, based on the liturgy: "They will be joyous in Your Kingship, the keepers of the Sabbath." Keeping the Sabbath is a clear and obvious demonstration of one's fealty to God and His directives. By choosing God as our ultimate and only ruler we may free ourselves from the clutches of political rulers and economic control. May we remember who is the One that is really in charge. Shabbat Shalom, Ben-Tzion Dedication In memory of Ori Yitzhak Iluz, Ohad Dahan and Lia Ben Nun who were killed on the Egyptian border. May God comfort their families among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. -----

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Fw From [Hamelaket@gmail.com](mailto:Hamelaket@gmail.com)

from: **Ohr Somayach** <ohr@ohr.edu> date: Jun 8, 2023, 11:00 AM

Torah Weekly - Parshat - Shlach Lecha

by **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair** - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)

PARSHA OVERVIEW At the insistence of the Bnei Yisrael, and with G-d's permission, Moshe sends 12 scouts, one from each tribe, to investigate Canaan. Anticipating trouble, Moshe changes Hoshea's name to Yehoshua, expressing a prayer that G-d not let him fail in his mission. They return 40 days later, carrying unusually large fruit. When 10 of the 12 state that the people in Canaan are as formidable as the fruit, the men are discouraged. Calev and Yehoshua, the only two scouts still in favor of the invasion, try to bolster the people's spirit. The nation, however, decides that the Land is not worth the potentially fatal risks, and instead demands a return to Egypt. Moshe's fervent prayers save the nation from Heavenly annihilation. However, G-d declares that they must remain in the desert for 40 years until the men who wept at the scouts' false report pass away. A remorseful group rashly begins an invasion of the Land, based on G-d's original command. Moshe warns them not to proceed, but they ignore this and are massacred by the Amalekites and Canaanites. G-d instructs Moshe concerning the offerings to be made when the Bnei Yisrael will finally enter the Land. The people are commanded to remove challah, a gift for the kohanim, from their dough. The laws for an offering after an inadvertent sin, for an individual or a group, are explained. However, should someone blaspheme against G-d and be unrepentant, he will be cut off spiritually from his people. One man is



found gathering wood on public property in violation of the laws of Shabbat and he is executed. The laws of tzitzit are taught. We recite the section about the tzitzit twice a day to remind ourselves of the Exodus.

PARSHA INSIGHTS Double Agents in a Minyan This week's Torah portion teaches the grave sin of the meraglim, the spies. Their evil report about Eretz Yisrael still echoes today, with the repercussions continuing to be felt. Of the twelve spies sent, only two remained loyal to Hashem: Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh. The other ten chose to slander Eretz Yisrael, consequently suffering immediate and terrible deaths. Due to their vile report, the Jewish people was forced to remain in the desert an additional forty years, and eventually die out, before the children ultimately were allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. Hashem called this rogues' gallery of spies an eidah, literally a congregation. The gemara derives from this incident that the minimum requirement for a minyan is a quorum of ten men, since there were ten turncoat 'double-agents' who were contemptuously called a congregation. If ten men can get together to conspire and hatch malevolent schemes, then ten men can assemble to form a congregation for devarim shebekedusha, matters of holiness. This exegesis is duly codified in halacha, and all because of the dastardly deeds of ten misguided men. © Ohr Somayach International - all rights reserved

From: **Michal Horowitz** <contact@michalhorowitz.com>  
 Thu, Jun 15, 11:02 AM  
 Parshas Shelach: Tourists or Spies?

In this week's sedra (in Chutz la'Aretz), Shelach, we learn of the infamous sin of Cheit Ha'Meraglim. On the cusp of entry to the land of Israel, just over a year after leaving Egypt, Moshe sent twelve scouts, one man from each tribe, to investigate the Land of Israel. The pasukim tell us: And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: **שְׁלַח-לְךָ אֲנָשִׁים, וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי נֹתֵן, לְךָ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ** – send for yourself men, and they shall scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel, send one man each for his father's tribe; each one shall be a prince in their midst (Bamidbar 13:1-2)... **אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-שְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה** – these are the names of the men that Moshe sent to scout out the land (v.16), **וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה לְתוֹר אֶת-הָאָרֶץ כְּנָעַן**, and Moshe sent them to scout out the land (v.17).

He gave them specific instructions as to what they should look for: And see the land, what is it? Are the people strong or weak? Are they few or many? And what is the quality of the land? And what about the cities within her? And you shall take of the fruit of the land... **וַיַּעֲלוּ וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ**, and they went up and they scouted out the land (v.18-21).

Four times in this passage, we are told that the men were sent la'tur es ha'Aretz – to tour and scout out the Land! Four times in a Torah that does not waste even one word! It is, therefore, compelling and interesting to note that the Torah tells us they were sent to scout out the land, la'tur es ha'Aretz, while when referring to the sin, we call it the Chait Ha'Meraglim, the (Infamous) Sin of the Spies.

What is the meaning of 'to scout out the land' vs. 'to spy out the land'? Why does the Torah call them 'tourists' and we call them 'spies'? What do we learn from this difference and what practical mussar ha'skel, lesson, can we take for ourselves?

In his sefer, Eretz Yisrael in the Parashah, R' Moshe D. Lichtman writes, "Rabbi Shmuel David Lutzato (known as the Shadal, 1800-1865) notes that there is a difference between tur (a tourist) and meragel (a spy). A person who tours a certain place, or new land, seeks out the good that can be found in that place. As the pasuk says (in last week's sedra, Behaaloscha): **וַיֵּצְאוּ מִן-הָאָרֶץ** – and the Ark of Hashem's covenant traveled before them a distance of three days, to scout and search out a resting place for them (10:33).

"The opposite is true of a spy and his mission and purpose. A spy looks for the bad in a place, as Yosef said to his brothers (when he accused them of coming to Egypt with sinister intentions): **מִרְגָּלִים אַתֶּם, לְרַאוֹת אֶת-עֶרְוַת הָאָרֶץ** – You are spies! To see the nakedness (weak points) of the land you

have come! (Bereishis 42:9)... Similarly, **אֶל-אֲדֹנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ** – He slandered your servant to my lord the king (Shmuel II 19:28)... They all mean a revealing of someone or something's disgrace and evil. [See also Vayikra 19:16, **לֹא-תִלְךָ רֵכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ**, with Rashi, for another powerful illustration of this idea.]

"Now, Moshe Rabbeinu did not send the twelve men out of necessity, as is well known. After all, G-d said that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. In addition, what difference does it make if the nation dwelling there is strong or weak, seeing that Hashem will fight on behalf of Am Yisrael? Rather, Moshe sent them la'tur es ha'Aretz, to tour the Land, to see its goodness and tell the people of its glory, in order to encourage them to follow after Hashem. They, however, acted corruptly, plotting an abominable scheme and overturning Moshe's intentions.

"Therefore, we refer to them as meraglim, spies, even though the Torah – at the outset of their mission – refers to them as tarim, tourists. Indeed, in the book of Devarim (1:24) [which is always read erev Tisha b'Av, the day the spies returned and the nation sat to cry] the Torah there – 39 years after the sin of the spies occurred – uses a lashon that accurately reflects their intentions and disaster they wrought: **וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-נַחַל אֲשַׁפְלִי; וַיְרַגְלוּ, אֶת-הָאָרֶץ** – and they turned and they went up the mountain, and they came to Nachal Eshkol, and they spied it out.

"They acted like spies, not tourists or scouts, even though they were sent to tour and not spy" (Eretz Yisrael in the Parashah, p.258).

From here we learn an important lesson. Whether we are blessed to live in Eretz Yisrael, or are zocheh to visit her holy soil from time to time (with the hopes and dreams of one day settling there), we must always approach the Land with eyes of tayarim, tourists, looking to see the excitement, beauty, holiness, goodness and blessings that can only be found in the Land. The set of glasses we choose to wear when viewing Eretz Yisrael – those of tayarim or those of meraglim, c'v – will shape our mission and our experience with the Land.

On the occasion of his 10th "Aliyaversion", David Olivestone recently wrote: "One erev yomtov, as I paid for my challot and rugelach at the bakery counter, the assistant – a man without a kippah – wished me chag samayach. He said he looked forward to seeing me during chol ha'moed. 'No,' I said, 'I have all I need for the whole chag as we won't be having any guests.' 'Perhaps,' he answered, 'Eliyahu ha'Navi will come?'" (Jewish Action, Summer 2023, p.112).

As Eretz Yisrael is the Land that Hashem seeks out – **אֲשֶׁר-הִיא אֶלֶּיךָ דֹּרֵשׁ** – (Devarim 11:12) – we would be wise to remember that the Land that Hashem loves is His gift to the nation that He loves. If His eyes are upon it from the beginning to the end of the year, to seek its good and beauty, we must make sure we share His vision, longing and love for the Land.

Perhaps then, the sin of the spies will be rectified and repaired, and as the assistant in the bakery said: Maybe, just maybe, Eliyahu ha'Navi will come. בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום,

Fw from Hamelaket@gmail.com  
**Not Off Script Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**  
 June 7, 2023

I cannot say that it was exactly congruous, but during the indescribable Adirei HaTorah event, a thought passed through my mind.

I was sitting together with 25,000 others – some talmidim, some alumni, some tomchim of Bais Medrash Govoah, some rabbonim, some simple Jews who knew that they had to be part of this massive outpouring of love and kavod for the Torah, and, in the words of the Paterson rosh yeshiva, those who are clothed in the Torah and become its corporeal existence through their learning.

We were inspired together by the words of roshei yeshiva and gedolei Yisroel who graced us with their presence. We sang together, we danced together, and we connected as one.

But when Rav Meir Tzvi Bergman spoke, something crossed my mind. Having learned in Ponovezh close to fifty years ago, I remember the rosh yeshiva and his children, as they were so often in the proximity of Maran Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach. When I sat shivah for my father zt"l, he came to our home to be menachem avel our family. His divrei Torah and chiddushim are so enlightening, and the mere sight of him at the event made an indelible roshem upon me.

When he spoke about the concept of yedidim, and how the bnei Torah and the tomchim personify the beloved moniker that the Torah bestowed upon their forebears, I felt uplifted.

And then, the rosh yeshiva suddenly shifted gears. It showed his endless commitment to Klal Yisroel as a whole, as the pain in his heart flooded the entire room and pierced the hearts of the more than 25,000 gathered to raise the keren haTorah.

And when he started speaking what seemed totally off topic, my mind switched gears as well. I thought of a scene I had watched originally in a museum in New York many years ago. I'll describe it: It was the Yiddishe wedding of the century: The daughter of Rav Chaim Elazar Shapira, the illustrious Munkatcher Rebbe, was to marry the son of the Rebbe of Partzov. Both Chassidic dynasties were royal, aristocratic, and majestic. And the ceremony was to be equally regal. The chosson and kallah would ride in opulent carriages, drawn by four white horses. The wedding meal was so large that every needy member of the community would be allowed to partake. It was the Jewish event of the century!

I have to assume that in its day, the event, although celebrating a personal simcha, was something akin to the glory and majesty of the Adirei HaTorah event.

There was no Matzav.com or Yeshiva World back then, but there was so much excitement that an actual secular news crew came to film the wedding. The footage would be incorporated as part of the pre-feature newsreels shown at American movie theaters across the Atlantic. "Imagine!" thought the reporters. "This would attract hundreds of Jewish people who had roots in Europe into the theater!" The difficult part was to convince the Munkatcher Rebbe to speak for the cameras. The rebbe vehemently opposed the frivolities and wanton ideas of the cinema, and would not participate in a film. The producer assured the rebbe that only his voice, not his face, would be presented to the large audiences.

"Rebbe, this is a wonderful opportunity for you to talk about the Chassidic court of Munkatch! Imagine how many Jews would be fascinated by your life's work. It would also be a wonderful opportunity to send personal wishes to all your followers who have left Europe to come to America."

Finally, the rebbe consented. He would speak, but not be filmed. But the producer lied and we have the film of the rebbe speaking before the microphones and the camera that was obscured from his view. He was very brief. He did not sound buoyant, but the producers probably had no idea what he said. In fact, he seemed pained. Tearfully, he repeated his message a few times and then turned his head and stopped talking.

The American crew was excited. They were going to present the wedding with its entire mystique and majesty to American audiences. They would get the official tearful "Mazel tov, thank you for coming," that they believed the rebbe had said.

However, when the wedding film was shown in American theaters, the scene of the pomp and circumstance of the ceremony was a stark contrast to the interview with the rebbe. They did not see a jubilant rebbe toasting the large audience upon the joyous occasion. Instead, they saw the rebbe pleading tearfully on the silver screen, "Yidden, heet der Shabbos! Jewish brothers, keep the Shabbos!" Those were the only words he said. Then he turned his face and wept. Those were the only words that the rebbe chose to speak.

I know that Rav Meir Tzvi spoke more than just the ending words, but when he turned his attention, in front of thousands of yeshivaleit and bochorim, and spoke about the pain of those who are looking for their zivug, and for those girls who are not yet zocheh to be "natri l'guvrayhu d'asi m'bai rabbonon, to wait for their husbands who return home from the bais

medrash," I was in awe. The rosh yeshiva pained himself to repeat in English the segulah that was transmitted from Rav Shach, to bentch every word from a siddur or bentcher and not say the words by heart.

I heard the pain cry out, the same way the Munkatcher Rebbe cried about Shabbos. He may not have screamed it aloud, but it reverberated just as powerfully to every person in the room and the tens of thousands watching on video.

Gedolei Yisroel throughout the generations go off script for Klal Yisroel.

Rav Aharon Kotler would cry for Chinuch Atzmai during Lakewood Yeshiva events. Rav Pam would cry for Shuvu even at gatherings that were not apropos for the occasion. Rav Elya Svei would cry for the Russian talmidim and Sinai Academy even at Philadelphia Yeshiva parlor meetings. There is no script. There is no one occasion. There is Klal Yisroel, Kudsha Brich Hu, and the Torah. It is all one. And every element of them, from Klal Yisroel's growth, physically, spiritually or familially, is all the same. It is the script of gedolei Yisroel. There is nothing beneath them and there is no language barrier. It is all kavod haTorah. It is all Adirei HaTorah.

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**PARSHAT SHLACH**

What was so terrible about the sin of the "meraglim"? After all, they were instructed to report the facts, and that's exactly what they did! Furthermore, even if we consider their report as deliberately slanted, why was the entire nation punished so harshly for being misled by a small group?

Finally, even if the people's initial reaction was improper, immediately afterward they repent by declaring their willingness to take the challenge of conquering the Land! Shouldn't this repentance have been accepted?

Why then is "dor ha'midbar" [the generation of the desert] punished so severely? Why must Am Yisrael wander for forty years until they perish! This week's shiur examines this tragic event in an attempt to understand why.

**INTRODUCTION**

Before we begin our study, an important point of nomenclature. Although this event is commonly referred to as "chet ha'meraglim" - the sin of the SPIES, in Parshat Shlach they are NEVER referred to as such! Nevertheless, for the sake of convenience, our shiur will continue to refer to them as the "meraglim", even though their mission (as we will show) involved much more than just 'spying out the land'.

To understand the 'sin of the spies', we must first ascertain what their mission was. Therefore, our shiur begins with an attempt to identify its precise purpose by noting how the Torah describes this mission.

**TOURISTS OR SPIES**

In describing the mission of the meraglim, the Torah uses the verb "la'tur" (see 13:2,17 & 25). This verb can be translated as 'to tour' or 'to scout'. However, to arrive at a more precise understanding of what they were supposed to do, we must take a closer look at the psukim that describe their mission:

"And Moshe instructed them saying:  
 And you shall see the LAND, WHAT IT IS -  
 Are the people who live in STRONG or WEAK, FEW or MANY?  
 Is the Land GOOD or BAD?  
 Are the towns OPEN or FORTIFIED?  
 Is the SOIL RICH or POOR? Are there TREES?  
 [if so,] bring back samples of the fruit.. (13:17-20)

Clearly, these instructions entail more than a spy mission. Note as well that we find TWO categories of questions that the meraglim must answer:

- 1) Concerning the NATURE OF THE LAND -  
 i.e. to find out whether the Land is good or bad, the soil rich or poor, the trees fruitful, etc.
- 2) Concerning the FEASIBILITY OF CONQUEST -  
 i.e. to find out if the enemy is strong or weak, if the cities are fortified or open, etc.

These two categories show how this mission entails much more than the collection of military information. In fact, these questions seem to be describing a 'fact finding mission', much more than a 'spy mission'. Let's explain why:

A 'spy mission' is initiated when a military commander needs to acquire information (to prepare a battle plan). When doing so, usually a small group of men are sent secretly, and hence report back only to the military commanders (and certainly not to the entire nation).

Clearly, the mission of the meraglim in Parshat Shelach is quite different. These twelve men (a representative from each tribe) are sent publicly, by the political leadership to gather information for the entire nation. This information will help Bnei

Yisrael plan not only the conquest of the land, but also how to establish Eretz Canaan as their homeland.

[To support this point, simply compare Bamidbar 13:1-17 with 34:16-29, noting the textual similarities!]

**REALISTIC NEEDS**

To better appreciate the necessity of this mission, let's consider the realities that face Bnei Yisrael at this time.

Recall that the nation numbers over two million individuals. [This approximation is based on the extrapolation of the census figure of 600,000 men above age 20 (see Bamidbar chapter 26).] This nation, living in camp formation for the last year and a half, has been able to survive the difficult desert conditions only with God's providence, i.e. His miraculous daily supply of food and water. However, these special conditions were only temporary.

Even though God had promised to bring them to a land 'flowing with milk and honey', their existence in this 'promised land' will no longer be supported by God's daily miracles. Instead, they will have to till the soil and work the land for their food. [See Devarim 8:1-10, re: the purpose of the manna!]

Similarly, when Bnei Yisrael will enter the land, they will have to fight their battles through natural means. Surely, God will assist them; but they will now have to undertake their own initiatives. [See Devarim 11:22-25.]

Therefore, at this time, Bnei Yisrael must not only prepare themselves to conquer that land, but they must also make the necessary preparations for all aspects of the establishment of their new national homeland.

Taking this into consideration, it only makes sense that it would be necessary to send a 'national fact finding' mission to help plan not only how to conquer the land, but also how to establish its borders and partition, as well as its economy and agriculture etc. Hence, the meraglim are instructed to scout the land to determine not only the feasibility of its conquest, but also how to prepare the land for its two million new inhabitants!

To support this explanation, note how the Torah describes a similar 'appointment of officers' (forty years later, when the next generation prepares to enter the land):

"And God spoke to Moshe: These are the names of the men through whom the land shall be apportioned - Elazar the Kohen and Yehoshua bin Nun. And one NASI, one NASI from each tribe... and these are their names..." (see Bamidbar 34:16-29, note obvious parallels with 13:1-16)

**UNDERSTANDING THE MISSION**

Based on this introduction, we can better understand the opening pasuk of the Parsha:

"And God spoke to Moshe... send one man from EVERY TRIBE, each one a chieftain among them... all the men being LEADERS of Bnei Yisrael." (13:1-3)

Due to the nature of this mission, it is necessary to send a senior representative from each "shevet" (tribe). Similarly, this explains why the meraglim report back not only to Moshe, but to the entire public. [See 13:26.]

Had they been military spies, they would report ONLY to Moshe (or to the military commander), but definitely NOT to the entire nation! Furthermore, had they been military spies, there would be no reason to publicize their names, and certainly no reason to send tribal leaders. Quite the opposite! It is because they comprise a FACT FINDING MISSION - specifically a group of national leaders are sent, who later report back to the entire nation (see 13:26).

**A PROOF FROM SEFER YEHOSHUA**

To clarify this distinction between 'spies' and a 'commission of inquiry' it is helpful to compare these meraglim to the meraglim sent by Yehoshua [see this week's Haftarah]:

"And Yehoshua bin Nun SECRETLY sent two SPIES from Shittim saying: Go scout out the land and the area of Yericho..." (Yehoshua 2:1)  
 "... and the two men returned... and they told YEHOSHUA concerning what happened to them." (2:24)



Note that in Sefer Yehoshua the spies are actually referred to as MERAGLIM. These meraglim are sent SECRETLY (we are not told their names) to SPY out the city and report back ONLY to Yehoshua. Clearly, their mission was purely military.

To highlight this contrast, the following table summarizes the differences between these two missions:

sent by Moshe	sent by Yehoshua
=====	=====
12 men	2 men
Tribal leaders	unnamed
publicly	secretly
"la'tur" (to tour)	"l'ragel" (to spy)
the type of land,	only military information
[its fruit, its cities etc..]	

Yehoshua's meraglim serve as military spies to help him plan HOW to conquer Yericho. Moshe's meraglim serve as an inquiry commission, sent to provide the people with information to help them plan the establishment of an entire nation with all its institutions.

### ONE REPORT / TWO OPINIONS

Now that we have clarified the nature of the mission of Moshe's meraglim, we are ready to evaluate their report in order to determine what they did wrong.

Note that when the meraglim return, their report correlates perfectly with the double nature of their mission:

"and they returned to Moshe & Aharon and the ENTIRE NATION... and showed them the fruits of the land saying... it is indeed a LAND FLOWING WITH MILK & HONEY. Alas, for the people who live in that land are MIGHTY, and the cities are FORTIFIED... the Amalekites guard the south, the Chittites and Emorites control the mountain range, and the Canaanites command the planes..." (13:26-29)

Based on their findings, in regard to (1) the nature of the land, - the meraglim conclude that the land is SUPERB:

"and they showed them the fruits of the land saying... it is indeed a land flowing with milk and honey..." (13:26-27);

However, in regard to (2) the feasibility of its conquest, the meraglim conclude that conquering the people of Canaan appears to be almost impossible:

"Alas, for the people who live in that land are MIGHTY, and the cities are FORTIFIED... the Amalekites guard the south, the Chittites and Emorites control the mountain range, and the Canaanites command the planes..." (13:28-29).

These conclusions reflected the commission's MAJORITY opinion. However, Kalev and Yehoshua presented an opposite conclusion. Based on the same findings, they conclude that conquest of the Land is possible: "it is indeed FEASIBLE to conquer the Land..." (13:30)

Up until this point, it appears as though this commission is quite objective; they report the facts as perceived. All twelve members concur that the land is good, yet the enemy formidable. However, two opinions exist in regard to the feasibility of its conquest: The majority opinion concludes that it is futile to even attempt to conquer the land (see 13:31), while the dissenting opinion, presented by Kalev, argues that conquest is achievable (see 13:30).

The majority opinion appears to be logical and quite realistic. Why then is God so angered?

It is usually understood that the meraglim's sin stems from their lack of belief in God. After all, had they believed in Hashem, they would have arrived at the same conclusion as Kalev and Yehoshua. However, this understanding may be overly simplistic. Is it possible that ten out of the twelve tribal leaders, after witnessing the miracles of the Exodus and their journey through the desert, do not believe in God and His ability to assist His nation in battle?

### NO FAITH IN WHOM?

There can be no doubt that the tribal leaders and the entire nation as well, believe in God and the possibility of Divine assistance. Unfortunately, they are also well aware of the possibility of Divine punishment. Let's explain why:

Throughout their journey, not only had God intervened numerous times to help them; He had also intervened numerous times to PUNISH them. However, the meraglim are also aware that to be worthy of Divine assistance Bnei Yisrael must remain obedient at all times. This precise warning had already been raised at the conclusion of Parshat Mishpatim:

"Behold I am sending a 'malach' to lead into the Land... Be careful and listen to his voice, do not rebel against him, FOR HE WILL NOT PARDON YOUR SINS, for My Name is with him. For IF you will listen... and do everything that I command you, THEN I will help you DEFEAT and conquer your enemies..." (Shmot 23:20-25)

This warning clearly states that God's assistance is totally dependent on Bnei Yisrael's behavior. Should they not listen, they will fall before their enemies.

[Note how the story of Achan in Yehoshua 7:1-26 proves this assumption. There we find that the mere sin of one individual led to the defeat of the entire nation in battle.]

One could suggest that the conclusion of the meraglim is based on their assessment that Bnei Yisrael are not capable of retaining the spiritual level necessary to be worthy of miracles while conquering the Land. Realizing that the conquest would only be feasible with Divine assistance, they concur that conquest is impossible. In other words, the meraglim are not doubting God's ability to assist them in battle, RATHER they are doubting their own ability to be WORTHY of that assistance.

So what's so terrible? Is it not the job of leadership to realistically evaluate all of the relevant factors?

### DIBAH - THE CHET OF THE MERAGLIM

It is precisely in this type of situation where leadership is critical! Ideal leadership should have challenged the nation to raise their spiritual level - to become worthy of Divine assistance - to rise to that challenge! The meraglim take a very different approach. Instead of rallying the nation to fulfill its destiny, the meraglim hide their spiritual cowardice behind a wall of hyperbole!

To support this point, note their reaction to Kalev's 'dissenting opinion' (in 13:30), for it sheds light on their true character:

"But the people who went up with him said: We cannot attack that people for it is stronger than we. And they spread DIBAT HA'ARETZ among Bnei Yisrael saying: The land which we visited is one that DEVOURS ITS INHABITANTS, ALL the people who we saw there are GIANT... we looked like GRASSHOPPERS to ourselves, and that is HOW THEY SAW US." (13:31-33)

These are not the objective statements of a 'fact finding mission'! Rather, they comprise a presentation of hysterical exaggerations made in a desperate attempt to shape public opinion. A land does not 'devour' its inhabitants, nor is it likely that the Canaanites perceived them as 'grasshoppers'! It is precisely this rebuttal that the Torah refers to as "dibah" - SLANDER. Let's explain why.

Instead of confessing their true fear and lack of confidence in the nation's ability, they over-exaggerate the seriousness of the situation. Rather than encourage the people to prepare themselves for the task, they prefer to utilize populist politics and create fear in the camp.

Finally, note how the word "dibah" is central when the Torah summarizes their punishment:

"And those men - MOTZIEY DIBAT HA'ARETZ RA'AH - died in a plague before God." (see 14:37)

In contrast, Kalev and Yehoshua exhibit proper leadership, as exemplified in their rebuttal of this argument. Note once again

how the entire argument hinges on Am Yisrael's special relationship with God:

"im chafetz banu Hashem" - If God truly wants us [to be His nation], surely He will bring us into the land... only YOU MUST NOT REBEL against God, and you should not FEAR the people of the land for they are our prey... for GOD WILL BE WITH US - [hence] do not fear them." (14:8-9)

Unfortunately, the argument of the meraglim was more convincing, and the people concluded that attacking Eretz Canaan at this time would be suicidal (see 14:1-4). Considering that staying in the desert was no better of a long-term option, the nation concludes that their only 'realistic' option is to return to Egypt (see 14:3-5). The attempt of Yehoshua and Kalev to convince the people otherwise was futile (see 14:6-9). Bnei Yisrael prefer returning to Egypt instead of taking the challenge of becoming God's special nation in Eretz Canaan.

Based on our explanation thus far, only the meraglim should have been punished, for it was they who led the people astray. Why does God punish the entire nation as well?

To answer this question, we must return once again to an overall theme in Chumash that we have discussed in our shiurim on Sefer Shmot (see TSC shiurim on Va'era and Beshalach) and in last week's shiur on Parshat Bhaalotcha.

### THE LAST STRAW

One could suggest that the people's preference of adopting the conclusion of the meraglim reflected their own spiritual weakness as well. Undoubtedly, the slanted report presented by the meraglim had influenced their decision. However, since the time of the Exodus and throughout their desert journey, the people had consistently shown a lack of idealism. (Review once again Yechezkel 20:1-11 and our shiur on Parshat Va'era.)

Had the Land of Israel been offered to them on a silver platter, Bnei Yisrael most likely would have been delighted to accept it. However, once they realize that conquering the Promised Land requires commitment and dedication, the nation declines. This entire incident only strengthened God's earlier conclusion that Bnei Yisrael were not yet capable of fulfilling their destiny.

To support this point, note how the Torah describes God's decision to punish the nation in both 14:11-12 and 14:21-24:

"And God spoke to Moshe - 'ad ana y'naatzuni ha'am ha'zeh...' - How long will this people continue to defy Me, and how long will they have no faith in Me, despite all the signs (miracles) that I performed in their midst..." (14:11-13)

And several psukim later:

"For all those men who saw My Glory and My signs in Egypt and in the desert, and they have tested my TEN TIMES, yet they did not listen to My voice. If they will see the land that I promised to their forefathers... [However] My servant Kalev will see the land, for he had a different spirit..." (see 14:21-24, read carefully)

Clearly, Bnei Yisrael's punishment is not based solely on this specific sin of the meraglim, but rather on their overall behavior since the time they left Egypt.

This also explains the obvious parallel between Moshe's prayer in the aftermath of this event and his prayer in the aftermath of "chet ha'egel". Then as well, God wished to destroy the entire nation, opting to make a nation out of Moshe instead; but Moshe petitioned God to invoke His "midot ha'rachamim" (attributes of mercy). This time as well, Moshe beseeches God in a similar manner; however the sin of the "meraglim" was more severe, and hence it is impossible to reverse the "gzar din" (verdict). Instead, it could only be delayed over forty years so not to create a "chillul Hashem".

Due to "chet ha'meraglim", God is convinced that "dor ha'midbar" would never be capable of meeting the challenges of conquering and establishing a 'holy nation' in the Promised Land. They are to perish slowly in the desert, while a new generation will grow up and become properly educated.

Based on this interpretation, we can explain why God was not willing to accept the repentance of the "ma'apilim" (see 14:39-45). Even though their declaration of: "we are prepared to go up and conquer the place that God has spoken of, FOR WE WERE WRONG" (see 14:40) may reflect a change of heart, it was too late. Had this been Bnei Yisrael's only sin, then most likely their repentance would have sufficed. However, "dor ha'midbar" had suffered from an attitude problem since the time of the Exodus (see Tehilim 95:8-11, Shmot 6:9-12, and Yechezkel 20:5-9).

Even after they received the Torah and built the Mishkan, their continuous complaining was inexcusable. "Chet ha'meraglim" was not an isolated sin; rather it became the 'straw that broke the camel's back'.

Bnei Yisrael may have been more than happy to accept the privileges of becoming an "am segula", yet they were not prepared to accept its responsibilities. God decided that it was necessary to educate a new generation instead.

It is not often in Jewish History when the opportunity arises for Am Yisrael to inherit (or return) to its homeland. The implication of such an opportunity is far greater than simply the fulfillment of "mitzvot yishuv ha'aretz" (the commandment to settle the Land), for it relates to the entire character and destiny of the Jewish people. When such opportunities arise, spiritual weakness should not be allowed to hide behind subjective pessimism. Rather, Jewish leadership must gather strength and assess the realities objectively while rising to the challenges idealistically.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

=====

### FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. Note the parallel account of this event in Sefer Dvarim (1:22-24). There, they are called "meraglim" and only the military aspect of their mission is detailed. Relate this to the purpose of Moshe's speech in the 40th year and the fact that Bnei Yisrael are about to cross the Yarden and begin conquest of the Land. See also Ramban (Bamidbar 13:1), note how he attempts to combine both accounts.

2. All said and done, the obvious question remains, why does God command Bnei Yisrael to undertake a mission which may fail?

One could suggest that even though God has promised the land to Bnei Yisrael, He prefers that its conquest follows a natural sequence of events. Even though Yisrael enjoyed a supernatural existence in the desert, as they prepare for entering the land, they must begin to behave in a natural manner, as this will be the mode of life once they conquer the land. Now there is value in the fact that Bnei Yisrael participate actively in the process of "kibush ha'aretz", and begin to live like any normal nation by making decisions on their own.

This could be compared to a 'first step' towards national maturity. Just like a child's needs are first taken care of by his parents, and slowly he must begin to take on his own responsibilities, so too Bnei Yisrael at this stage. Unfortunately, it seems that this 'weaning' process began a bit too soon. Bnei Yisrael were as yet not ready.

3. Recall from last week's shiur that in the overall structure of Sefer Bamidbar, parshiot of mitzvot which would appear to belong in Sefer Vayikra often 'interrupt' the ongoing narrative 'challenging' us to find a connection. Review the mitzvot in 15:1-41 and try to find a thematic connection to the story of the meraglim.

1) The mitzvah of "minchat n'sachim" to be brought with korbanot Olah or Shlamim;

2) The mitzvah of taking challah;

Note that both these mitzvot begin with the phrase "ki tavou el ha'aretz" (when you come in the Land);

3) Avodah Zara of the tzibur and the necessary korban chatat (should entire nation sin);

4) Chillul Shabbat and its punishment;

5) Mitzvat Tzitzit

- a. Attempt to relate these parshiot to chet ha'meraglim?  
(Compare both thematically and linguistically.)
- b. Where in Sefer Vayikra does each mitzvah belong?
- c. Recall the various mitzvot which chazal equate with keeping the entire Torah:
  - 1) Eretz Yisrael
  - 2) Avodah Zarah
  - 3) Shabbat
  - 4) Tzitzit

Could you conclude that Chazal based these Midrashim on the special structure of Sefer Bamidbar?

4. Note 15:22-23. Why is this pasuk referring to the transgression of all the mitzvot of Torah, while the chazal explain that it refers specifically to avoda zarah.

(Relate your answer to the previous question.)  
How is chet ha'meraglim thematically similar?

## Parshat Shelach Lecha

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

**Parashat Shelach reports the well-known, tragic story of the meraglim, the scouts sent by Bnei Yisrael to gather information (and fruit) from the Land of Canaan. We will not deal with all of the questions below, but they are all worthy of attention.**

1. Since Hashem has promised Bnei Yisrael that He will help them defeat the powerful Canaanites, why do they need to send scouts at all? What difference does it make whether the Canaanites are "strong or weak," or whether the cities are "encampments or fortifications," since no matter what the obstacle, Hashem will help them overcome it?

2. Furthermore, since Hashem has described Canaan to these people as a land "flowing with milk and honey," why does Moshe, in his instructions to the scouts, entertain the possibility that the Land is "ra'a," "bad," or "raza," "poor" or "thin"?

3. When Moshe gives the scouts their marching orders, he places a strange emphasis on one particular element. What is this element, and why does he keep repeating it?

4. On their return, most of the scouts report that the Land is unconquerable despite Hashem's assurances. In what will become a dreaded refrain as we move through Sefer BeMidbar and its many crises, Hashem becomes infuriated and threatens to destroy Bnei Yisrael and replace them as His nation with Moshe and his descendants. Moshe urgently pleads for mercy. Of course, we have seen this before: when the people worship the Egel (golden calf), Hashem threatens to kill them and replace them with Moshe's descendants, but Moshe defends the people. But there are important differences between these two events.

a. Here, **Moshe leaves out some of the key arguments he offers to Hashem after the Egel. What are those missing arguments, and why are they missing?**

b. Back in Shemot, Moshe first 'convinces' Hashem to spare the lives of the people, and then daringly and stubbornly engages Hashem in a campaign to achieve complete forgiveness for the people. But here **in Shelach, Moshe seems to give up after securing merely the people's survival. Why not go for complete forgiveness?**

5. **Moshe and Aharon react dramatically to the evil report delivered by the majority of the scouts. What do they do -- and what do they \*not\* do? Why?**

6. **Analyze Hashem's decree of the people's fate carefully. It seems highly repetitive. What are the different points Hashem is making in each of the similar phrases He uses?**

7. After Hashem's punishment is announced, the people realize they have made a mistake. They try to restore the situation to what it was before, but Hashem rejects their efforts and does not accompany them as they try to break into Eretz Canaan. Without His help, they are beaten back by the Canaanite nations. Why does Hashem reject their repentance? Isn't teshuva a fundamental concept in the Torah's theology?

8. **Just after the defeat of the people who attempt to enter the land, Hashem delivers to Moshe a series of mitzvot. Several of these mitzvot begin with introductions like, "When you come to the land that I have promised to give to you . . . ." How are we to understand what these mitzvot are doing here, especially with this sort of introduction, in light of the fact that the people being addressed have just been told that they will die in the desert and never see "the land that I have promised to give to you"?**

9. **What is the mitzvah of tzitzit doing at the end of the parasha?**

10. **As is the case with many stories told in Sefer BeMidbar, this story is repeated by Moshe several decades later, in Sefer Devarim. And, as is often the case, there are crucial discrepancies between the two accounts. What are the discrepancies, and how would you explain them? (This last question includes two questions: first, what**

really happened, and second, why does each sefer tell the story the way it does?)

#### PARASHAT SHELAH:

Sefer BeMidbar is the sefer of lost opportunity. The sefer opens up with great promise, as the nation's infrastructure begins to take shape in concrete ways:

1. Its needs for defense and aspirations for conquest are embodied in its army, supported by Hashem.
2. Its need for authority is supplied by Moshe, Aharon, the tribal leaders, the Elders, and the judges who share judicial authority with Moshe.
3. Its need for religious focus is answered by the Mishkan, and its need for a 'professional' religious class is answered by the Kohanim and Leviyim.
4. Finally, the nation's raison de etre is the Torah and the destiny it promises the nation.

But all of this promise is soon disappointed. Moshe urges the people to "aim high" and actualize the transcendent goals of "mamleket kohanim ve-goy kadosh" ("a kingdom of priests and a holy/dedicated nation") -- the slaves are to transform themselves, looking above mundane matters and dedicating themselves to moral and spiritual goals. But the people see another set of goals for themselves: they do not trust the invisible God as Moshe does, and they do not trust the miraculous environment which supports them. For example:

1. The Revelation of the Torah at Sinai certainly impresses and frightens the people, but the impression it creates is ephemeral. Forty days later, the people violate the commandments they have heard by crafting an idol and worshipping it.
2. The people do not want the miraculous "manna" -- they want regular, natural food: meat, fish, the vegetables they remember from Mitzrayyim. The supernatural bread adds to the unfamiliarity of their environment, compounding their feeling of insecurity.
3. They are relieved, even awed, when the sea splits and drowns their enemies, but they do not process this event on the deepest intellectual and psychological levels. It does not convince them that they can depend on this Benevolent Power and believe in His promises. So when the "mon" indeed comes, they violate Hashem's instructions and gather more than they need for that day -- because they are not truly certain that the food will be there tomorrow.
4. The people are happy to have an authority structure, but they see this structure in pedestrian terms and its representatives as pedestrian in their motivations and ambitions. **Moshe, in their eyes, is not the Adon Ha-Nevi'im, the Master of Prophets, the Divinely appointed leader; in the eyes of many of the people (as we will see in Parashat Korah), he is a power-hungry egotist who has seized the reins of control for his own benefit! Similarly, Aharon is not the holiest of the holy, he is the simply the one who has successfully promoted himself by riding the idea of a holy class, an idea endorsed by his brother.**

**Moshe, as we discussed last week, is beginning to understand where the people stand.** The incident in which the people demand meat -- and begin to cry for it like babies -- leads Moshe directly to the image he later uses to describe the people, that of the "yonek," the infant suckling. In this posture, Moshe is sympathetic to the people's needs not because he sees their demands as reasonable, but because he sees the people as deeply immature. You wouldn't explain to a suckling why crying for food is inappropriate, and Moshe doesn't try.

But as time goes on and the people begin to turn against Moshe himself, Moshe becomes bitter; his sympathy dissolves and his patience turns to angry frustration. It is at this point, we will see, that Hashem tells him that he is no longer fit to lead the people into the land of Canaan.

#### THE SPIES:

Let us briefly summarize the parasha's account of the story of the spies:

1. Hashem tells Moshe to send spies to the Land.
2. Moshe chooses spies and gives them instructions.
3. The spies return and make their report, convincing the nation that conquest of Cana'an is impossible. Yehoshua and Kalev attempt to counteract the effect of this report, but they are unsuccessful.
4. The people conclude that they cannot conquer the Cana'anite nations and begin making plans to return to Egypt.
5. Hashem threatens to kill the people for their rejection of His promises, but Moshe saves their lives.
6. Hashem decrees that all of the people of military age will die in the desert.
7. The people realize their error, try to enter the land, and are beaten back.

#### **VERSION 2:**

Let us now briefly compare this account to the story in Devarim (chap. 1), noting only those points which are discrepant with the account in Shelah:

1. The people -- not Hashem -- propose sending spies, and Moshe agrees.
2. There is an explicit rationale to the mission: to find the best way to go up to the Land and the right cities to attack.
3. The spies themselves report only that the land is good, and seem to commit no crime. Instead, the people are blamed for rebelling against Hashem. The spies' report of the strong cities and giant people appears only in the complaining words of the people.
4. Moshe himself responds to the people's rejection of Hashem's guarantees, scolding them for their lack of trust in Hashem and offering examples of situations in which Hashem has supported them.

**The fact that there are discrepancies suggests two questions: What really happened? And why does the Torah tell the story one way in one place and another way in another place? How does the way the Torah tells each story reflect the theme of each book?** For now, we will hold these questions.

#### **COMPARE TO THE CALF:**

If we go back to the story of the Golden Calf, we notice a striking contrast between Moshe's behavior in that story and in our story.

When Hashem threatened to kill all of the people after their worship of the Egel, Moshe responded with three arguments (you might also read this as two arguments).

1. Relationship: he emphasized that Hashem had already established a relationship with these people by saving them from Egypt and performing miracles for them.
2. Reputation: he **asked rhetorically what the "public relations" effect on God's reputation would be if He destroyed the people** He had identified as His. Part of the goal of the Exodus was not just to save this particular nation, but also to introduce Hashem to the world and communicate His omnipotence and benevolence. His failure to successfully lead His own nation to freedom would throw His power (and goodness) into question in the mind of the nations.

**3. Commitments: Moshe focused on the promises Hashem had made to the Avot, Avraham, Yitzhak, and Ya'akov. Even if the present people deserved nothing, a commitment had been made to their predecessors to give their descendants the land of Israel; if God killed their children here, that promise would remain unfulfilled.**

**In contrast, Moshe here (in the aftermath of the spies' debacle) employs only one argument -- the public relations angle.** Why does he leave out the argument from relationship and the argument based on the promises? For now, we will hold this question as well.

#### **THE WHOLE NINE YARDS:**

Another question is also relevant here: **Why does Moshe go only so far as to convince Hashem to spare the people's lives, and not attempt to convince Him to forgive them completely?** A few months ago, when we discussed the aftermath of the Egel, we spent a lot of time looking at the extended and contentious conversation between Hashem and Moshe; Hashem would offer some sort of compromise to Moshe, and Moshe would refuse to accept anything less than Hashem's complete forgiveness of the people. In the final scene, Moshe is successful: Hashem agrees to completely forgive the people. As far as Moshe is concerned, continuing the journey through the desert was meaningless unless Hashem accompanied them on the way; until He agreed to to this, Moshe stood his ground.

On the other hand, in our story, once he saves the people's lives, Moshe makes no further effort. He seems to have no response to Hashem's decree that the entire generation of fighting men who compose the current army will die in the desert and never see the land promised to their fathers. Is this the same Moshe we know from Sefer Shemot? Where is the stubborn defender of the people, the implacable Moshe?

#### **PLAY IT AGAIN, MOSES:**

Another issue also seems troubling in our parasha. When Hashem announces His decree against the people who have chosen to believe the scouts' evaluation over His own promises to help them conquer the land, there seems to be much too much text!

#### **BEMIDBAR 14:21-35 --**

"However, as I live, and as the glory of Hashem fills all the earth, indeed, all the men who have seen My glory and My signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested me these ten times, by not hearkening to My voice: if they shall see the land about which I swore to their fathers! All that have scorned me shall not see it! But as for my servant, Calev, because there was another spirit in him and he followed Me fully, so I will bring him into the land that he is about to enter, and his seed shall possess it. Now, the Amalekite and the Canaanite are settled in the lowlands; tomorrow, face about and march into the wilderness, by the Reed Sea Road."

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying: "Until when for this evil community, that they stir up grumbling against Me?! The grumbings of the children of Israel that they grumble against Me -- I have heard! Say to them: 'As I live' -- says Hashem -- 'if not as you have spoken in My ears, thus I do to you! In this wilderness shall your corpses fall, all those of you counted, including all your number, from the age of twenty and upward, that have grumbled against me. If you shall enter the land over which I lifted My hand to have you dwell in it! Except for Calev son of Yefunneh and Yehoshua son of Nun. Your little ones, whom you said would become plunder -- I will let them enter; they shall come to know the land that you have spurned. But your corpses, yours, shall fall in this wilderness, and your children shall wander in the wilderness for 40 years; thus shall they bear your unfaithfulness, until your corpses come to an end in the wilderness. According to the number of days that you scouted out the land, 40 days -- for each day a year, each day a year, you are to bear your iniquities, forty years. Thus you will come to know my hostility! I am Hashem, I have spoken: if I do not do this to this whole evil community that has come together against Me! In this wilderness they shall come to an end, there they shall die.'"

(Whew!)

Now, **exactly how many times does Hashem have to tell Moshe that the people will never make it to the land?** That their "corpses" will "fall in this desert"? That their children will wander for forty years? **Hashem's speech seems highly repetitive.** Doesn't Moshe get the message after just one or two times? Won't the people understand without a half-dozen repetitions of their fate? Let us now take a closer look at these pesukim.

First, just after telling Moshe that he has forgiven the people and has agreed not to destroy them, Hashem makes an important caveat: none of those who left Egypt and saw all of His miracles -- and yet chose to test Him and refused to place their trust in Him -- will live to see the land. But Moshe, it seems, has no comment.

Then, as if he has not just told Moshe all of this, Hashem seems to repeat the entire story: the Torah introduces Hashem's statement with another, "And Hashem spoke . . .", as if He had not already been speaking! Hashem then tells Moshe to tell the people that indeed, their fate will match their own predictions: they will die in this desert. And their children, on the contrary, will not die with them, and instead will take their places as the heirs of the land. Again, Moshe seems to have no comment.

Then Hashem repeats again that the people's bodies will fall "in this desert." And Moshe has no comment.

Hashem then repeats that their children will wander in the desert for forty years, until "All of your corpses are finished in the desert." Moshe has no response.

Then Hashem actually does the math for us, telling Moshe first the formula -- that they will wander one year for each day of spying -- and then giving him the grand total: forty years. Moshe has no response.

Hashem seals this decree with the final-sounding, "I am God, I have spoken," and then, for good measure, repeats once again (!!!) that their bodies will drop "in this desert" and that they will all perish here. Moshe, finally, has no response.

**Why so silent, Moshe? Why does Moshe ignore all of Hashem's hints for him to take the role of defender as he used to?**

#### **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER:**

It seems to me that all of our questions so far point to the convergence of several phenomena in one tragic incident, exemplified by the snapshot of Hashem's conversation with Moshe.

After the Egel, Moshe faced Hashem as the bold defender, audacious and daring in defending his people, refusing to accept Hashem's proposal that he separate himself from them, obstinate and implacable in his single-minded insistence that Hashem forgive the people and return His presence to them (centered in the Mishkan). At that time, Moshe's energy was high and the people were relatively innocent newcomers to freedom and to monotheism. Moshe was sure that the people had the potential to make the jump from their current weakness to the lofty goals they had been called upon to meet; their idolatry was a moment of understandable weakness, a temporary lapse.

But by now, the situation is different.

**Moshe has lost his bold edge, beaten down by the people's repeated demonstrations of pettiness. Moshe no longer believes in them as fully as he did at Sinai. He is no longer confident that this people can form themselves into Hashem's special nation, that it can successfully shoulder all of the responsibilities such a task implies. He has not yet written them off, but the doubts are beginning to nag at him, as he witnesses their persistent concern for such lofty matters as "Give us meat! We're bored of just manna!" and their apparent blindness to the transcendent goals before them.**

**We know that before this sefer comes to a close, Moshe will have become so frustrated with these people that he will begin to call them names -- "rebels" -- and that his anger at them will so overtake his judgment that he will disobey Hashem and strike the rock. It is this incident in particular which leads to Moshe's replacement as leader**



by Yehoshua; it is not, as one might understand, simply because he disobeys Hashem that he loses the right to enter Eretz Yisrael at the head of the nation, but because his act reveals just how alienated from and frustrated with the people he will have become by then. Moshe could no longer lead the people because he had lost his faith in them; he had written them off in bitter disappointment, never understanding why their dedication did not equal his, why they could not trust Hashem as he did.

In our parasha, Moshe does not defend the people beyond saving their lives, does not insist that Hashem allow them to continue their journey to the land, because he has lost a great deal of faith in their potential to meet the spiritual rigors of this mission. He could defend the people only when he believed in them, but once his faith had weakened, it was all he could do to save their lives.

Moshe had indeed agreed to the people's request to send spies, especially after receiving Hashem's approval, because he saw it as an opportunity to increase the people's excitement about the land. If we look back to Moshe's instructions to the spies, he repeats one element again and again: "U-ma ha-aretz," "How is the land"; in truth, Moshe only gestures at real concern with the nature of the people inhabiting the land, the strength of their cities. He really wants to hear glowing reports about the land flowing with milk and honey, and for this reason he commands that the spies bring back with them some of the land's fruit. Although the people's motivation in sending the spies is military, Moshe sees only "The land." "Tell us about the land, about how wonderful it is! Bring back reports which will build our excitement and anticipation, which will reinforce our gratitude to Hashem!" Unsuspecting, he gives his nod to the plan to send spies, and appoints representatives of each tribe. The parasha begins in classic Sefer BeMidbar style, with a list: the list, in precise administrative order, of the names of the spies and the tribes they each represent.

**Moshe is completely blown away by the spies' report: he never imagined that events could take such a wrong turn.** But his silence in response to their defamation of the land is not simply a manifestation of shock, but an indication of his utter disappointment in the people. **Moshe falls on his face, the Torah tells us, and he has nothing at all to say.** Calev momentarily quiets the despondent, panicking crowd and directs its attention towards Moshe, but Moshe remains silent; Calev himself must deliver the pep talk he expected Moshe would deliver: "Let us go up, for we can certainly be victorious!" Moshe remains silent.

Moshe musters the strength to bestir himself and speak out when Hashem threatens to destroy the people, but this is all he can manage. Of course, the reason **Hashem tells Moshe about His plans is so that Moshe can intervene and "dissuade" Him from carrying them out. But Moshe plays the game only for its first round. When Hashem delivers the harsh decree, stating that all members of this army who rejected his promises will die in the desert, Moshe does not take the "bait."** Hashem begins again, repeating the entire story -- several times, as we saw above. But, in just another instance of the lost opportunities of this book, Moshe lets all of these invitations slip by. That he does not invoke the promises made to the Forefathers is no surprise, both because the promise will be fulfilled through the next generation, and because Moshe can hardly attempt to hold Hashem to the promise of giving the land to the very people who have rejected it. A look at the account in Devarim shows that Moshe does indeed respond, after a fashion, to the spies' evil report: he says, "Do not fear them," do not fear the powerful nations. But Sefer BeMidbar leaves this out completely, for it is such a feeble attempt to strengthen the people that it is as if unsaid. Instead, the Torah makes it sound as if Moshe maintains silence, and the only voice heard is that of Calev, who offers powerful encouragement, if in vain.

**One of the things the Torah teaches us here is a critical lesson about leadership, especially religious leadership: no one can be a leader if he or she does not believe in the people being led.** Moshe falters here, and eventually stumbles in the story of the hitting of the rock, because his faith in the people crumbles and his patience runs out. Moshe no longer believes that this people can achieve the mission assigned to them, so he can no longer insist that Hashem allow them to continue their journey. As we will see, Hashem's decree that Moshe will not lead the people into the land is not so much a punishment for his misbehavior as it is a recognition of a state of affairs: at that point, Moshe could no longer effectively lead, and there was no other alternative than to retire him. (The same, you may recall, happens to Eliyahu/Elijah: once his frustration with the people reaches the point where he considers himself the only one left who is faithful to Hashem, Hashem "retires" him and instructs him to appoint Elisha in his place as the next prophet. There, too, Hashem offers Eliyahu an opportunity to reconsider, just as Hashem offers Moshe opportunities here, but neither of them is able to take those opportunities and rejuvenate their leadership. Both are forced to retire and eventually appoint

successors.)

May we merit to have leaders of faith and patience, faith in our potential to meet the challenges facing us and patience with us when we stumble; and may we be worthy of their faith in us.

Shabbat Shalom

[note: emphasis added]

# Parshas Shelach: A Weeping for Generations: The Spies and Tish'a B'Av

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

## I. TWO VERSIONS

As the Rishonim point out at the beginning of our Parashah, there are two different stories about the “spies” sent by Mosheh. The bulk of our Parashah (Chapters 13-14) is devoted to one story, whereas Mosheh’s “version”, at the end of the first chapter of D’varim, tells a different story:

Compare:

Send men to search out the land of K’na’an, which I am giving to the Israelites; from each of their ancestral tribes you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.” So Mosheh sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of YHVH, all of them leading men among the B’nei Yisra’el. (Bamidbar 13:2-3)

With:

All of you came to me and said, “Let us send men ahead of us to explore the land for us and bring back a report to us regarding the route by which we should go up and the cities we will come to.” (D’varim 1:22)

In D’varim, the idea of sending spies to check out the land was the people’s – acceded to by Mosheh. In our Parashah, it is a direct command of God.

In the D’varim version, the nation requests “men” to spy out the land. It would be reasonable to assume two or three men, since the goal was to “explore (spy out) the Land”; it would not be productive to send a stately entourage to accomplish this goal. God’s command, on the other hand, includes twelve “leading men”, one from each tribe (except Levi).

Another difference, one which helps us reconcile some of the others, is the verb used to describe the mission. In D’varim, the people want men to “explore” (\*lach’por\*) the Land. The implication is one of a military reconnaissance mission. In our Parashah, the verb used is \*latur\* (to visit/look over) – which implies much more of a “diplomatic mission” than an undercover job.

Indeed, if the sole purpose of this mission – as is commonly assumed – was to spy out the land in preparation for military action, there are a few components in Mosheh’s charge to the twelve princes that are unclear:

Mosheh sent them to spy out the land of K’na’an, and said to them, “Go up there into the Negev, and go up into the hill country, and see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land.” Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes. So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to R’hob, near L’vo-hamath. (Bamidbar 13:17-21)

Why would they need to walk the length and breadth of the Land? (L’vo Hamath is in the north – far from their planned entry point into the Land). Why would they need to describe the Land – besides in military terms (e.g. “whether the land they live in is good or bad”) and why would they have to bring back fruit?

These questions become strengthened against the backdrop of Yehoshua’s spy mission into Yericho (Yehoshua Ch. 2 – this week’s Haftarah). He sent two men, who stealthily entered and exited Yericho, hid in the hills for three days and then returned with their report. The text does not identify them as “leaders”, they are not sent to walk the Land and to bring back fruit – and there are only two of them! What then do we make of this odd spy mission, described in our Parashah and in Parashat D’varim?

## II. TWO MISSIONS

In a beautiful essay (Megadim 10 pp. 21-37), R. Ya’akov Meidan explains the two versions of the story as follows:

There are two independent missions presented here. In Parashat D’varim, Mosheh recounts that the people were

motivated (probably by fear) to send spies – and, as the text there indicates – they were concerned only with identifying the best military tactic for taking the first city in the Land (akin to Yericho 38 and a half years later).

In our Parashah, on the other hand, God sends princes in order to stake a first claim to the Land – or, perhaps (as R. Meidan suggests) to begin dividing up each tribe's portion of the Land (thus explaining why Levi, who received no land, sent no representative). R. Meidan suggests that the flow of the four chapters leading up to our Parashah [the celebration of the Pesach (9:1-14), the descriptions of the Cloud of Glory (9:15-23), the description of their travels (10:1-28), the interaction with Yitro/Hovev (10:29-34), the mention of Mahn and quail (11:1-15), the introduction of support for Mosheh's leadership (11:16-35) and the ultimate statement about the singularity of Mosheh's prophecy (12:1-16)] suggest a strong parallel to the sections in Sh'mot leading up to the stand at Sinai. As such, he suggests, the forty days of the Divine mission to the Land parallel the forty days during which Mosheh was atop Sinai (perhaps the clearest parallel is the grievous sin of the people at the end of the forty days, followed by Mosheh's plea for forgiveness). Just as Mosheh stood atop Sinai for forty days in order to bring the Torah to the people, similarly, these princes went up to Eretz Yisra'el for forty days in order to bring the Land back to the people (thus explaining their bringing representative clusters of fruit).

R. Meidan goes on to explain that Mosheh combined these two missions (which, he suggests, may have been the reason that God disallowed him from entering the Land – see D'varim 1:37). As such, the twelve princes were sent to walk the length and breadth of the Land, to stake our claim to the Land and to each tribe's portion and to report back about the beauty of the Land. At the same time, they were to check out the defenses of the first route of military conquest and the first city they would conquer.

This explains Kalev's role in the mission – since he was the representative of Yehudah, he was the only one with any business in Hevron from the perspective of the Divine mission. All of the other spies went to Hevron in order to check out its defenses, as it was the first fortified city to be conquered – but Kalev went there in order to fulfill the mission of claiming it for the tribe.

[This is, of course, just a thumbnail sketch of the main points in his essay; R. Mordecai Breuer (Pirkei Mo'adot II pp. 409-456) adopts the same general approach, but develops the story and themes in a different manner]

### III. THE “MA’PILIM”

Picking up on R. Meidan's thread, I would like to raise another issue. The reaction of the people is hard to understand; indeed, they seem somewhat fickle.

When the spies/travelers reported the strength of the local inhabitants, the people wept, complained (again) about having left Egypt – and then utter words they had never before said: “...let us appoint a captain and return to Egypt.” (14:4). Their fear and despondency led them to consider a plan to return to the slavery of Egypt (which, as R. Meidan points out, is a total rejection of “I am YHVH your God who took you out of the land of Egypt”). In other words, even though God had promised them this good land, they rejected it out of fear of the military conflict. Yet, when Mosheh recounts their punishment to them (14:28-35), they react in the opposite manner: “Let us go up to the place of which YHVH has spoken, for we have sinned” (14:40). This failed attempt on the part of the \*Ma’pilim\* is hard to decipher – when God commanded them to conquer, they ran away in fear; yet, when God decreed 40 years of desert-wandering, they suddenly became courageous and prepared to fight!?

In order to understand this, we have to go back to last week's Parashah and address a seemingly unrelated issue.

### IV. THE ‘ANAN

In Parashat B'ha'alot'kha, we are given a detailed description of the Cloud of Glory that rested on the Mishkan:

On the day the Mishkan was set up, the cloud covered the Mishkan, the tent of the covenant; and from evening until morning it was over the Mishkan, having the appearance of fire. It was always so: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, then the B'nei Yisra'el would set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the B'nei Yisra'el would camp. At the command of YHVH the B'nei Yisra'el would set out, and at the command of YHVH they would camp. As long as the cloud rested over the Mishkan, they would remain in camp. Even when the cloud continued over the Mishkan many days, the B'nei Yisra'el would keep the charge of YHVH, and would not set out. Sometimes the cloud would remain a few days over the Mishkan, and according to the command of

YHVH they would remain in camp; then according to the command of YHVH they would set out. Sometimes the cloud would remain from evening until morning; and when the cloud lifted in the morning, they would set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they would set out. Whether it was two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud continued over the Mishkan, resting upon it, the B'nei Yisra'el would remain in camp and would not set out; but when it lifted they would set out. At the command of YHVH they would camp, and at the command of YHVH they would set out. They kept the charge of YHVH, at the command of YHVH by Mosheh. (Bamidbar 9:15-23)

In this description, we are told about the Cloud resting at one place "...for two days, or a month or a year...". Note, however, that this description is presented not only before the story of the spies and the consequent decree of forty years' wandering – it is also presented before the \*Mit'onenim\* and \*Mit'avim\* (beginning of Ch. 11). Up until that point, as is clear from the Torah's description of our travels (see Rashi on Bamidbar 10:33), the Divine plan was to bring us directly from Sinai into the Land – without stopping, resting or setting up camp. Why does the Torah describe setting up/breaking down the camp and the Mishkan – and why does it describe resting in one place for as long as a year?

## **V. THE ORIGINAL PLAN – FROM SINAI TO K'NA'AN**

Our question is predicated on an assumption which is borne out of the evolution of events in our history – but was not necessarily the original Divine intent.

According to the original Divine plan, as can be seen from our Parashah, the B'nei Yisra'el were to enter the Land directly through the Negev. Instead, as a result of the decree recounted in our Parashah, they were to wander for forty years. Ultimately, they crossed into the Land through the Jordan river. This crossing is clearly symmetrical to the crossing of the Reed Sea – where the \*'Anan\* (Cloud) first showed up. In other words, by dint of our entering the Land via the Jordan, the "Desert Experience" was bookended by these two "crossings-on-dry-land", such that the \*'Anan\*, which guided us to the Sea and through the desert, no longer led us once we entered the Land.

This was, however, not the original plan. The Torah tells us that: "the Ark of the covenant of YHVH traveled before them, three days' journey, to scout out \*Menuchah\* (a resting place); and the \*'Anan\* of YHVH was over them by day as they traveled from the camp." (Bamidbar 10:33-34). The Ark and 'Anan worked in tandem; the Ark being carried ahead of the camp, followed by the 'Anan – all to find "Menuchah". What is the meaning of "Menuchah"? As the Gemara in Zevachim (119a) explains, Menuchah refers either to Shiloh (the first place where the Mishkan was set up in a quasi-permanent fashion) or Yerushalayim. In other words, the 'Anan was not originally intended to lead us only into the Land; rather, it was to lead us while we encamped in the Land while fighting for conquest, which would certainly entail encamping at one place or another for longer than a few days.

This explanation of the "downturn" in our fortunes demands clarification.

## **VI. THREE LEVELS OF SHEKHINAH-INTENSITY**

When the Mishkan was dedicated, we entered into a relationship of intensity and intimacy with the Divine Presence (\*Shekhinah\*) that evoked that experienced in the Garden of Eden: Just as God is described as "walking in the Garden" (B'resheet 3:8), similarly, God promises that "I will Place My Presence/Sanctuary among you...And I will walk among you..." (Vayyikra 26:11-12). In other words, the promise of the Mishkan is a return to the close relationship which we enjoyed with God in Edenic times. We will refer to this promise as \*B'rit Mishkan\* – "They will make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell among them" (Sh'mot 25:8).

A second, less intense relationship, is implied by the covenant of Sinai. The covenant involves more than fulfilling Mitzvot and avoiding prohibitions – it involves a unique relationship, as described by the introduction at Sinai:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the B'nei Yisra'el." (Sh'mot 19:5-6). This is known as \*B'rit Sinai\*.

A final, much less intense relationship between the B'nei Yisra'el and haKadosh Barukh Hu is known as \*B'rit Avot\* (the covenant with the patriarchs). The covenants which God made with Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov are binding for all time and give us the Land and a populous people.

## VII. B'KHIYAH L'DOROT

### STEP ONE: B'RIT MISHKAN

Until we actually moved from Sinai, there was every reason for us to be able to live up to the B'rit Mishkan – for the 'Anan to be more than a guide, it would also be our protection in war. There was no reason for us to have to fight; just like when the 'Anan first protected us at the Reed Sea: “YHVH will fight for you...” (Sh'mot 14:14). This would have been the ideal completion of Sinai and the Mishkan – for us to march directly into the Land, with the Ark and 'Anan dispersing our enemies as we moved towards settlement.

This is the intent of the phrase, said by Mosheh when the Aron was taken out to war:

...Arise, YHVH, let Your enemies be dispersed, let those who despise You flee from Your Presence.” (Bamidbar 10:35). This phrase (and the next verse), however, is marked off by an upside-down Nun before and after – where do these symbols come from?

### STEP TWO: B'RIT SINAI

The next verse tells us about the Mit'oNeNim, whose name includes two Nuns in a row. These complainers weren't really complaining – they were \*K'Mit'onenim\* – “like complainers”. In other words, they had nothing concrete about which to complain; rather, they were looking for things to critique and fault about Mosheh's leadership.

How were they punished? “The fire of God burned against them” (11:1). What was “the fire of God”? – it was the Cloud! (see 9:16). In other words, as a result of the complaints of these people who could not stand the great proximity and intimacy with the Divine, the “power” of the Ark and 'Anan was turned against them – and, instead of the 'Anan remaining at the front of a war which we would not have to fight, it turned against us and could no longer provide protection. That is why the section of \*Vay'hi bin'soa' ha'Aron\* is marked off with upside-down Nuns – those are the Nuns from the \*Mit'onenim\* who turned the 'Anan (again, two Nuns!) from our “warrior” into our punisher.

Once this level of intensity – the B'rit Mishkan – was lost, we moved back to B'rit Sinai – where we are promised victory over our enemies and perpetual settlement in the Land (if we don't violate its sanctity too broadly), but we will have to fight for it ourselves. Coming into the Land on these terms would have been the completion of the Sinaitic experience. In order to “match” the stand at Sinai, the first enemy (as indicated in our Parashah) would have been Amalek, whose destruction would have meant the introduction of the Messianic era:

He said, “A hand upon the Throne of YH! YHVH will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (Sh'mot 17:16).

Commenting on this verse, R. Levi says in the name of R. Aha:

The Name is not complete, neither is the Throne complete, until the memory of Amalek is destroyed, as it says: \*Ki Yad al Keis YH\* (A hand upon the Throne of YH); it should have said \*Ki Yad al Kisei YHVH\* – but once the memory of Amalek is wiped out, the Throne and the Name are complete. (Midrash T'hilim 9:10)

**In other words, had we but maintained the level of B'rit Sinai, we would have entered the Land through the south, defeated Amalek and ushered in the era when “on that day, YHVH will be One and His Name One” (Z'khariah 14:9). The Messianic era would have followed immediately from Sinai.**

**This is why Mosheh sent the “scouts” on the Divine mission for forty days – to approximate the stand at Sinai.**

### STEP THREE: B'RIT AVOT

Now let's reexamine the people's odd reactions, opting for Egypt when God wants them to conquer the Land, then turning around and storming the Emorite mountain when God tells them to go into the desert.

What was the phrase with which the scouts introduced the negative part of their report? – \*Ephes Ki Az ha'Am\* – the word \*Ephes\*, which may mean “nonetheless”, is not easily translated. The sense of the word – and the entire report and the subsequent reaction – is one of choice: Shall we go up to this Land or shan't we? The feeling that there was a choice was

what directed the reaction of the people. This is often the cause of the success of outmanned and poorly armed fighters against more powerful enemies. When you are fighting with your back to the wall, and there is no choice (as the old Israeli slogan – " 'Ein B'reirah' (there is no choice) is our most powerful tool" attests), your fighting ability is greatly enhanced. On the other hand, when the fighting force feels that they don't need to win this war, defend this land, take this hill – they can be defeated (witness Vietnam).

When the scouts said \*Ephes\*, the people still thought there was a choice – to go back to Egypt and return to slavery there. What they (perhaps) didn't realize was that going back to Egypt was also a direct reversal of B'rit Sinai – of "I am YHVH your God who took you out of the land of Egypt". It was only when Mosheh told them of their punishment – that they would wander the desert for forty years etc. and that a return to Egypt was not an option, that they opted to take the Land. If their only choices were (certain) ignoble death in the desert or (possible) heroic death on the battlefield, they chose the (seemingly) heroic path.

They had already rejected the B'rit Mishkan of "walking with God" as evidenced by the Divine reaction to the Mit'onenim. Now they rejected the B'rit Sinai by expressing a willingness to return to Egypt. (This would explain an interesting textual difference between Mosheh's prayer here and the original of that statement in the aftermath of the sin of the Golden Calf.

Compare:

YHVH passed before him, and proclaimed, YHVH, YHVH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and truth, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Sh'mot 34:6-7) With:

And now, therefore, let the power of YHVH be great in the way that you promised when you spoke, saying, 'YHVH is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children to the third and the fourth generation.' Forgive the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have pardoned this people, from Egypt even until now. (Bamidbar 14:17-19)

Note that when God forgave the people at Sinai, He declared that He is \*Rav Hessed v'Emet\* (abounding in steadfast love and truth); when Mosheh "reminded" Him of this commitment, he said: \*Rav Hessed\* (abounding in steadfast love), but \*Emet\* (truth) was left out. Truth is the mark of Sinai, of the Torah which was given there. **Since the people had rejected B'rit Sinai, Mosheh could only point to \*Hessed\* as a Divine attribute which would save the people.**

**Now that they had rejected B'rit Sinai – all that they had left was B'rit Avot. They had, effectively, returned to a pre-Exodus mode of Divine promise. This explains the forty years of wandering – a micro-version of the 400 years of exile promised to Avraham (B'resheet 15:13). This also explains how their reaction to the scouts' reports, how their weeping on that night, introduced the possibilities of future exile into the national destiny.**

From the Mishkan, we were to "move" the Edenic reality to the Land. From Sinai, we were to (at least) usher in the Messianic era with the immediate destruction of Amalek. Both of these were lost. Once we go back to the model of B'rit Avot, we aren't encountering the permanence of settlement in the Land, rather the cycle of exile and return which was begun by Avraham (Haran, Israel, Egypt, Israel) and continued by Ya'akov (Israel, Aram, Israel, Egypt) and his children (Aram, Israel, Egypt). Once the people reverted to B'rit Avot, they allowed for the possibility that this upcoming entrance into the Land would not have the permanence promised at Sinai – but that the cycles of exile and return would remain our destiny until the final redeemer would come.

Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. Rabbah said in the name of R. Yohanan: That night was Tish'a b'Av; haKadosh Barukh Hu said: They cried for naught, I will establish for them [this night as] a weeping for generations. (BT Sotah 35a)

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