

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.

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

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.

With the blessing of Hashem, Moshe sends twelve leaders, one from each tribe, to tour Canaan for forty days and report back whether the land is good, the people are strong or weak, the cities are open or fortified, the land is fertile, and whether there are trees. The Meraglim return, verify that it is indeed a land of milk and honey, and that the land produces terrific crops. However, they also report that the people are giants, that they view B'Nai Yisrael as grasshoppers, and that the land devours its people.

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag asks how the scouts sin, since they answer Moshe's questions. The sin of the majority report is that they assume that the Canaanites view B'Nai Yisrael as lowly insects and that the land devours its people. How do the ten Meraglim know what the Canaanite people believe? They do not investigate why so many people die during the forty day period. [Yehoshua's spies forty years later learn that the Canaanite people have heard of the power of Hashem and are terrified of B'Nai Yisrael. Chazal infer that there are so many deaths because God keeps the Canaanite people busy with funerals to protect the Israeli spies.]

Rabbi David Fohrman and the scholars at alephbeta.org note parallels in language and situation between the instructions and task of the Meraglim and two other earlier incidents in the Torah. When Yaakov sends Yosef to check on his brothers, they throw him in a pit and plan to kill him. Yehuda convinces the other brothers instead to sell Yosef to traders who will sell him as a slave in Egypt. In a second incident, after the Exodus, and after B'Nai Yisrael cross the Sea of Reeds, Amalek attacks the weakest members of B'Nai Yisrael, those in the back who have trouble keeping up with the others. Moshe selects Yehoshua to lead the fight against Amalek. Yehoshua, Aharon, and Hur (Caleb's son) stand and help Moshe hold up his arms to inspire B'Nai Yisrael in the battle.

Yehoshua, from the tribe of Ephraim (Yosef), teams with Hur (tribe of Yehuda) to fight against Amalek and later joins Hur's father (Caleb) among the Meraglim. Although Yehoshua has a family history reason not to trust Caleb or Hur, he works closely with these leaders from Yehuda to lead the fight against Amalek and oppose the evil report of the ten evil Meraglim. The partnership of Yehoshua with Caleb and Hur is a significant step in unifying the Leah and Rachel factions among B'Nai Yisrael.

Rabbi Marc Angel and Rabbi Michael Gordan both observe that leaders often err, and a majority can lead a group toward a misguided path. Rabbi Angel quotes playwright Diane Grant: *"It's better to walk alone, than with a crowd going in the wrong direction."*

In Sefer Shemot, when the people sin, Moshe quickly debates God until He forgives the people. When the people follow the majority report, cry about their coming doom, and seek to return to Egypt, both Moshe and Hashem are furious. God again threatens to kill all the people and start over with Moshe. The only argument Moshe can make is that killing B'Nai Yisrael would be a public relations disaster for God – other nations would interpret this course as indicating that Hashem does not have enough power to bring the people into the land that He has promised. Hashem partially relents. He will delay their entry into the land for forty years, the generation of the Exodus (other than Caleb and Yehoshua) will die, and the next generation will enter the land.

Why are God and Moshe so much angrier in Sefer Bemidbar than in Shemot? The people of the generation of the Exodus see Hashem's power, such as a year of plagues against Egypt and destruction of the Egyptian army and weapons. They also see His love for the people – manna six days a week, quail on some occasions, water from rocks, fighting against enemies, and keeping dangerous animals and pests away from the people. They should learn from the war against Amalek that God fights for B'Nai Yisrael, even when we do not see His impact directly. The reason for the plagues and wars is to teach B'Nai Yisrael that Hashem is with us, even when He hides His presence from our view. Yehoshua and Caleb understand this lesson. The other ten Meraglim and the people fail to learn this lesson, and they therefore do not deserve to enter the land.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the mitzvah of tzitzit to bring this lesson to the current situation in Israel. Since the horrors of October 7, there has been a religious revival in Israel, especially among the soldiers and many women in Israel. Many soldiers have started wearing tzitzit and davening daily with Tefillin. Soldiers are reciting Gomel after dangerous situations. Many women are baking challah and preparing Shabbat meals for soldiers.

Military history scholars have frequently concluded that they can explain which side has won virtually every war in history. The exception is that they cannot explain the victories of Israel against the combined forces of many larger and often better equipped Arab countries. Iran recently sent a thousand missiles toward Israel on a Saturday night. Almost none of the missiles landed in Israel. There was no destruction of buildings. One person (a Druze girl) was injured, and she has recovered. Jordan and the United Kingdom joined the United States in helping to shoot down missiles. (How in the world did four countries combine to shoot down missiles without getting in the way of each other?) Egypt and many other countries, not all friendly to Israel, denounced Iran. The exercise exposed weaknesses in the Iranian military and weapons. The exercise was a public relations disaster for Iran. How can anyone explain these miracles without seeing the hand of Hashem fighting for Israel?

The most important lesson of Shelach is that we must see Hashem's protection in our lives – every day as well as over time. The sin of the majority report of the Meraglim is not understanding Hashem's lesson plan and role in protecting B'Nai Yisrael every day.

The discussions of the Meraglim from my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, from more than a quarter century ago remain vivid in my mind. Rabbi Cahan brought out many insights from this parsha, including lessons from comparing this parsha with Moshe's repetition of the story in Sefer Devarim. Connections with language and situations in various parts of the Torah continue to fascinate me after many years of study. Hopefully we Jews can learn some of these lessons and bypass some of the adverse consequences of dispute in the future. We must avoid repeating this sin of failing to notice God's role in our lives – indeed, one of our most important tasks is to understand Hashem's lessons and teach them to our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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. 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.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Shelach: Stolen Objects and Robotic Mitzvot – The Need to Own our Observance

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

A mitzva may not be performed with 'dirty hands.' In other words, when we are engaged in the fulfillment of the Torah's commands, it would be antithetical to the whole enterprise, and hence prohibited, to do so by means of stolen objects or other forbidden materials. This is how the Talmud understands the words in our parsha: *va'asu la'hem tzizit*)Bamidbar 15:38(. "And they shall make for them tzitzit of their own, to exclude the use of stolen ritual fringes")Tractate Sukkah 9a(.

The Talmud in multiple locations warns us against a *mitzva haba'a ba'avera*, a mitzva ensconced in a transgression. If we have stolen assets, how dare we use them to purchase a lulav, or a sukkah, or even make a charitable contribution to a worthy cause? The Torah refuses to assign holiness to objects that have come into our hands through forbidden means.

Yet perhaps there is another paradigm of stealing to which we also must be sensitive.

Allow me to explain what I believe to lie at the core of this issue with a story. Two American sailors had shore leave in Amsterdam and decided to visit a church. Knowing neither the language nor the liturgy, and fearing being out of step, they selected one well-dressed young gentleman and decided they would do whatever he did. All went well for a while until at one point the gentleman stood, so the sailors stood, and pandemonium broke loose. Much later the sailors discovered that they had happened upon a baptism and the pastor had just asked the father of the child to rise.

It is easy to understand why stolen ritual objects disqualify mitzva performance. But perhaps the mitzva may also be disqualified when it has become robotic, "stolen" from a previous time in which the performance was still meaningful. When we perform a mitzva – whether it be wearing tefillin, davening, celebrating Shabbat – but do so by rote, failing to imbue the act with meaning, passion, and relevance, it becomes a "stolen act," a mitzva that is not truly our own.

One of the most moving aspects of this war has been witnessing the reinfusion of mitzvot with meaning, passion and relevance – not only amongst observant Israelis but also by those who might not identify as traditionally religious. Soldiers preparing for battle and putting on tzizit for the first time; soldiers previously unfamiliar with the blessing of Hagomel – recited when one is saved from a dangerous situation – reciting the blessing after battle; groups of soldiers in Gaza going to great lengths to ensure that they wrap tefillin everyday despite the difficult conditions of war. Women participating in challah-baking events to feed the soldiers and support them spiritually, or lighting additional Shabbat candles on Friday evenings for the sake of the hostages in Gaza.

These thriving religious practices are emerging naturally in response to the trauma and serve as a beautiful example of what religious practice looks like when it is claimed, owned and imbued with meaning – and not a robotic, “stolen” act of past habit.

Along similar lines, perhaps a productive way to understand some Israeli movements seeking an alternative to the state rabbinate for events like weddings or conversions, as well as the promotion of halakhic prenuptial agreements and affording women more pronounced roles in the halakhic religious life is to see these as a desire to make Judaism and mitzvot more relevant for the current generation.

It serves to remind us that if a mitzva is not yet truly our own, then our Avodat Hashem remains incomplete. It is our responsibility to take ownership of our mitzvot and religious experience. We must find meaning and relevance within the mitzvot we perform, and to use them to foster deeper relationships with God, with ourselves and with the spiritual community around us.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Shlach: What's Really Going On

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2015

HASHEM said to Moshe, saying:

“Send)Shelach(for yourself men who will scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel. You shall send one man each for his father’s tribe; each one shall be a chieftain in their midst.”)Bamidbar 13:1-2(

What happened to the spies? What had they done so wrong? They were sent by Moshe and they returned with, what they assumed, was an honest assessment! Every job has a definition and description. The initial job description was as messengers, “M’shulachim.” They were sent! In the end they are known forever as “Meraglim” – spies. What’s the difference between the two?

We can begin to analyze the subject according Loshon HaKodesh – the Holy Language – Hebrew. This ancient study is not less than the science of understanding the real purpose for which anybody or anything is created. The assumption is that words in Loshon HaKodesh are not random or arbitrary societal assignments of convenience. The name tells you the essence of or the highest value of that particular object or relationship.

Let us take a simple pedestrian example that relates to our topic. A table is conceptually simple enough. Everyone knows what we are talking about when we say “table.” It’s probably constructed of four legs and has a flat top so you can eat on it! Here’s where the Holy Language departs dramatically. That may well be a practical description of this “four legged creature we dine on” but what is its real purpose? What is its highest function?

A table is called a “Shulchan.” It comes from the word for “Send”: “Shelach.” What role does a table have in sending? When a Jew sits down to eat he makes a Brocho before and after! That eating is not just for physical nourishment. It is a show case for delicious well prepared food. We are meant to be inspired by its beauty and aroma and all of the culinary qualities. It’s a gift to us from HASHEM! What’s our response?

At a birthday party there is sometimes the ceremonious moment when the gifts are opened. Everyone sits around with piqued interest. When that magic moment finally arrives, the wrapping paper is swiped off the box, the sweater is violently torn from it and held up to see if it’s a near fit before the birthday boy or girl is running hungrily to the next gift. The wise parent overseeing the event will inevitably intervene, understanding that the feelings of the giver of the gift are being trampled in a selfish feeding frenzy. That good parent will then remind the little child that there is something he forgot to do handing them the envelope that flew off when the gift was being ravaged from the box. The pace of the party now slows to a precious and poignant punctuation.

The envelope is opened. The beautiful card is revealed and the words are read slowly and aloud for all to hear. “To our favorite nephew Andrew – Happy Birthday -- love, your Uncle Bob and Aunt Helene.” A tear wells up in the eye of the recipient. There’s a spontaneous hug. The gift is temporarily forgotten. The giver and the receiver are united. The gift then is understood to be a means of connecting the two and if even for a brief moment.

A table is a launching pad. Ruchanios – Spirituality is translated into Gashmios – Physicality in the form of delicious food. It is then returned and converted back from Gashmios – Physicality to Ruchnios! This exchange takes place at a table. It is place where heaven and earth meet and embrace! How had the Meraglim – spies failed? They moved horizontally from the spiritual universe of the Midbar – Desert where the Torah was received and into the dark material land of the Canaanites. They returned with a tainted – physical description, not a translation back into the language of Torah. They departed from their job description as Meshulachim, pure messengers and relapsed into mailmen, bearing clusters of raw data – information, like human reporters, justifying their earthy agenda. So even in an “age of information” it is possible to not know **what’s really going on**.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5775-shlach/>

Shelach Lecha – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Giving and Changing Hebrew Names

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

“And Moshe called Hoshea ben Nun, Yehoshuah” (Bamidbar 13:16).

QUESTION – Chicago

A couple, both Jewish, whose wedding I officiated at had a son two years ago. He was circumcised by a mohel on the eighth day but at the pediatrician’s office as a procedure. No ceremony took place then or afterwards. The parents now want to give their son a Hebrew name. While the naming usually happens at the brit, is there any way to give this boy a name without another ceremony? The parents very much want to connect their child more formally to the Jewish community.

New York

We have an urgent situation in which someone who is ill wants to add a name and can’t come to the synagogue. She suggested having someone in shul do it without her. What if it isn’t done in shul — can she just have a friend call her by that name?

ANSWER

Giving a name to a baby does not require a brit or a special ceremony — think of how Jewish girls are traditionally named. All that is required is that it be the name by which he is known to others. I would say that the father should get an aliyah and have the gabbai make a mishebeirach which will mention his wife and their son (by his new name). Also, if they are actually going to call him that new name in practice, just starting to do so in the presence of others will suffice.

As to adding a name or changing the name of a person who is sick — the same principle holds. As long as the new name is used publicly, that becomes the person's name. Have the gabbai say a mishebeirach and use both her English and Hebrew name (using her English name is important so people know to who it is referring.). Let's say she's adding the name **חיה**, he would say **הוא ירפא את חיה** — Sarah Goldberg, **ח'יה שרה בת מרים...** (May God heal the sick person, Sarah Goldberg, Chaya Sarah bat Miriam...) Having it done by a friend in a private setting might not be sufficient, because it does not make it a name that the community is aware of and thus it is not a name that she is known by.

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevi Torah, Bronx, NY.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/06/ryrshelachlecha/>

Leadership and Representation

By Rabbi Michael Gordan *

Parashat Shelach-Lecha contains few mitzvot. Of its two mitzvot asei, positive commandments, the first is challah, the commandment to take a portion of a dough made from the five grains and give it as a gift to the priests. The Torah introduces this concept with the phrase *“when you come to the land.”* The Sifrei, an early rabbinic commentary on the books of Bamidbar and Devarim, notes that while certain mitzvot are connected to entering the land of Israel, the phrasing here is different from the typical phrasing elsewhere in the Bible, where the words might be used — the same thought expressed in slightly different words. Based upon this difference, the Sifrei reports, Rabbi Yishmael insisted that the obligation of taking challah began as soon as the Jews entered the land of Israel, and did not wait until the land was conquered and divided among the tribes. For Rabbi Yishmael, the coming of the Jewish people into the land might be satisfied by entry of a few spies into the land, who stood in for the entirety of the Jewish people.

This is not a universal view, and the debate itself reflects a problem that we see increasingly in the parashiot of Bamidbar — who represents the Jewish people? In next week's parasha, Korach will put the question bluntly, but in Shelach we see it as well, particularly with the story of the spies. We see top-down governance in the way the spies are selected and their mission assigned. Moses chooses and dispatches the spies to Israel, since it is impractical for the entire Jewish people to enter the land as spies. The group is not chosen on pure merit — the twelve sneakiest Israelites, say — but the members are consciously chosen to represent each of the tribes that constitute the nation. Though God has promised the land to the Jews, it seems that the people as a whole must confirm the choice.

When the spies return, we witness the ambivalence about the leadership of the Jews reflected in how they make their report. Given that it was Moses who assigned the spies their mission, we could understand if they made their report to a select committee of sorts — perhaps the princes of the tribes, or the seventy elders who were to help lead the people. That group could then discuss what was said, devise a strategy, and report back to the people as a whole. Instead, both Moses and the spies seem to take their representative roles seriously, and the spies make their report directly to the people, without mediation by Moses. The results are disastrous, as the majority of the spies not only slander the land of Israel but also manipulate the people in an effort to dissuade them from entering Israel.

We may see the story of the spies as a rebuke to notions of democracy and to the thought that the wisdom of the people will always lead to the best outcome. It is equally, however, a rebuke to the leadership of the elites. The twelve men chosen to spy the land, we are told, were already leaders of the Israelites. Yet 83% of them tried to prevent their nation from entering Israel. If there is a lesson here, it is that leaders cannot always be trusted to reach the correct conclusions, and that a healthy skepticism about their conclusions is always useful. By choosing prominent men, Moses actually made it easier for the people as a whole to be misled. Their standing gave their public objections to the conquest of the land of Israel greater weight.

The parasha closes with the mitzvah of tzitzit, the fringes that we attach to the corners of our clothing (interestingly, the Sifrei also records a tradition that suggests that all adult Jews, not just men, should be obligated in tzitzit). Rashi makes an explicit connection between the language of the verses of tzitzit, which forbids us from straying after our eyes, and the language of the spies' assignment, which used the same verb. I think both tzitzit and challah get at something a little different. After all, the vast majority of the Jewish people did not see the land of Israel themselves and then go astray — they relied upon their leaders' report. Tzitzit and challah remind us daily, in ways that impact our two most basic needs, food and clothing, of the need to remember that holiness and a dedication to mitzvot are universal and dependent on our behavior. With this motivation we can more accurately assess our leaders and determine when they are truly representing us and when we need to challenge their judgment. This ability is crucial to any functioning community, from Biblical times to the present day.

* Semicha from YCT in 2023. Attorney in Philadelphia area; J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Founding member and Board member of Congregation Sha'arei Orah who organized a local partnership minyan, Lechu Neranena, Active in many organizations in his community.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/06/shelachlecha5784/>

Majorities Are Often Wrong: Thoughts for Parashat Shelah Lekha

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

My late friend and mentor, Professor Mair Jose Benardete, once told me: *"You don't determine truth by counting bonnets!"* When seeking truth, one must not be swayed by numbers, by majorities. History has proven time and again that multitudes are often wrong, that lonely dissenting individuals frequently are the great spiritual and cultural heroes of humanity.

In matters of halakha, the Great Court of ancient Israel made rulings based on majority rule. People needed to know the law, and there had to be a definitive decision. But in matters of philosophic or scientific truth, majority votes are irrelevant. Maimonides taught: *"When something has been demonstrated, the correctness of the matter is not increased and certainty regarding it is not strengthened by the consensus of all men of knowledge with regard to it. Nor could its correctness be diminished and certainty regarding it be weakened even if all the people on earth disagreed with it"* (Guide of the Perplexed, 2:13).

Just as majorities are irrelevant in determining philosophic or scientific truth, so they may be misguided in the area of policy making. Because many people prefer one agenda or one political decision, this does not mean that the choices of the many are objectively the best.

This week's Torah portion tells of the twelve Israelite leaders who entered Canaan to spy out the land. Famously, ten of these spies came back with a report that indicated the overwhelming power of the inhabitants of the land. They thought the Israelites would be crushed by their enemies. Although Caleb and Joshua tried to reassure the people, the majority report caused panic and loss of heart among the masses of Israelites. This horrible advice of the majority of spies led to the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness for forty years.

Why indeed did the majority of spies come back with such a negative report? These spies, after all, were the top leaders of the Israelite tribes. This elite group should surely have done a better job. Why were only two of them strong enough to resist the majority's erroneous report? The Torah may be alluding to the fact that people — even top leaders — come to incorrect conclusions because their judgment is perverted by their emotions. The spies confronted giants among the Canaanites: *"and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight"* (Bemidbar 13:33). The spies were infected with fear, with profound feelings of inferiority. Because of their fear and trembling, they were unable to think calmly and reasonably. All factors pointing to the possible success of the Israelites were quashed. They saw giants; they were afraid; their minds could not control their palpitating hearts.

When fear or anxiety govern the decision-making process, majorities will vote with their emotions rather than their minds. People are told: if we follow this path, we will be doomed. Or, people are told: if we don't make this choice, we will

undergo catastrophe. Faced with doom and catastrophe, people's judgment is impaired. They can't think beyond their fears. They can't marshal rational arguments to refute the fear-mongers. They become intimidated. They break down crying, and they make decisions based on desperation and panic.

The Torah is not only teaching that majorities can be wrong, it is also teaching that unique individuals are able to stand up against erring majorities. It often happens that wise individuals see more clearly than the dominant majorities; strong and calm individuals are better guides than fear-mongering or self-serving majorities.

Psalm 147 states that God's wisdom is infinite (*litvunato ein mispar*). Literally, the Hebrew words mean: To His wisdom there is no number. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik interpreted this phrase to mean: God is not impressed by numbers! His wisdom is absolute Truth. The Truth is not subject to numerical votes. One person who approaches the Truth is more cherished by the Almighty than millions or billions of people who are remote from the Truth.

Our goals should be to strive for genuine truth and to make the best decisions. We are more apt to achieve these goals if we think calmly and carefully, if we try to factor in all relevant information...and if we do not allow ourselves to be swept up by the fears, anxieties and judgments of others – even if they are the majority. The playwright Diane Grant has aptly remarked: "*It's better to walk alone, than with a crowd going in the wrong direction.*"

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

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during and since the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/majorities-are-often-wrong-thoughts-parashat-shelah-lekha>

Truth, Compassion – and the Vindication of Humanity: 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 rabbinic tradition, 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 their 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.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/truth-compassion-and-vindication-humanity-thoughts-parashat-hukkat-june-19-2010>

Shilach: Enjoy the Ride!

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The mitzvah of Tzitzis is to put tassels on the corners of a four-cornered garment. Once the tassels are made correctly, what is most prominent about them is the eight strands that hang from a series of knots and windings.

Rashi explains that these eight strands represent the eight significant days surrounding the Exodus from Egypt. Specifically, there were eight days from the time the Jews brought the Korban Pesach before the redemption (on 14 Nissan) until after the splitting of the sea, when they finally said Thanksgiving for the redemption (on 21 Nissan).

Normally, we think of the eight days of the Exodus as something that we commemorate at the time of Pesach. What message do the eight strands of the Tzitzis impart regarding those eight days for daily living?

The Talmud tells us that the Jews of the Exodus were *“Small of faith.”* Even after the miracle of the splitting of the sea, they refused to recite thanksgiving until they actually saw the Egyptians wash up dead on the shore. Only then did they feel that they were truly saved and able to say, *“Thank You for the redemption.”* Until then they still wondered. Despite the great miracles that were done for them, they thought, *“Maybe the Egyptians will still come from a different route, and attack us.”*

For almost eight full days, the Jews at the time of the Exodus felt that they could not yet recite thanksgiving on the miracles they experienced. It would have been premature, they thought, because the redemption was not yet definitively complete.

At the time of the Exodus, the fact that they were able to kill the Egyptian sheep god as a Jewish observance in Egypt without repercussions was in itself a monumental level of redemption and reason for thanksgiving.

That they were redeemed from Egypt as a people, from a place from which slaves never went free -- and they were given gifts by their taskmasters -- was also reason for celebration.

And, that G-d led them with a cloud and a pillar of fire, protected them from the Egyptian projectiles, and miraculously split the sea to enable escape should have caused them to rejoice.

But, instead, their attitude was, *“We are not yet done. We can’t rejoice until we are totally and definitively successful in the process of redemption.”*

The strands of Tzitzis come to remind us of a different perspective.

Imagine that a child graduates eighth grade, but the parents refuse to celebrate because the child did not yet finish high school. And, when the child finishes high school, they won’t celebrate because the child still didn’t graduate college or find a job. And, when the child finds a job, they would not offer congratulations or thanks because the child is not yet married. And, when the child does marry, they would not wish the child *“Mazal Tov”* because he or she does not yet have children. We all understand that the perspective of such parents would be totally mistaken.

The strands of Tzitzis remind us not to repeat the *“eight-day mistake.”* Instead of waiting for some final moment of salvation, we should enjoy every moment of the ride. Enjoy the process and celebrate the mini successes along the way.

This coming week our dear friends, Yuri and Cindy Volpin, will be moving to Eretz Yisroel. I would like to take a few lines in our weekly Dvar Torah to say, *“Thank You!”* for all you’ve done for the Jewish community here in the United States, and wish you continued success.

I met you, Yuri, a few years after you arrived here in the United States from what was the Soviet Union. You felt it was time to learn Hebrew and be able to daven from the original text of the Siddur. From that time, you have hosted and attended hundreds of home-study classes, progressed through the Take Ten for Talmud series, and went on to various types of advanced Torah study including the Shulchan Aruch Initiative (SHAI) program. When your mother passed away you used the opportunity to literally will a Maariv Minyan into existence *“so that you could say Kaddish,”* to the awesome benefit and growth of the community.

Cindy, through your wisdom, and your dedication to your family and the community, you follow in the footsteps of the wise women of the Jewish people, building and growing in Torah one step at a time. Your relationships in the community and with the Partners in Torah program are inspiring. Thank you so much for your help with this weekly Parsha newsletter. May you have much continued Nachas from Mordechai and Shlomit and the family as you move closer to them.

Throughout your journey you always made time to celebrate milestones and accomplishments. May Hashem grant you many Simchos and much success to continue to rejoice in His blessings.

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 and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Shelach – The Journey is the Goal

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2022

This week's Parsha opens with the fatal sin of the spies. As we prepared to enter Israel, we sent some of the greatest men of the generation to spy out the land. Most of these great men reported that we would not succeed in conquering Israel. Tragically, their report was accepted by the rest of the nation. For this sin, G-d decreed that this generation would not enter Israel themselves. Instead, they would wander in the desert for forty years. Once they had passed on, their children would be the ones to settle the promised land.

The Ramban finds a beautiful thought within this tragic episode. There is a discrepancy between the way the event is described in our Parsha and the way Moshe repeats the event later in Devarim. Here the Torah tells us that Hashem commanded Moshe to send people ahead to spy out the land. (Bamidbar 13:1-2) Yet, in Devarim Moshe tells us that we approached him on our own and asked to send spies ahead. He does not mention G-d's command at all, only saying that he liked our idea and chose men to send as spies. (Devarim 1:22-23)

The Ramban explains that both storylines are true. We initially approached Moshe, and he agreed with our idea. Before he could act on it, though, G-d came and instructed him to send spies, and to choose a leader from each tribe. It was presented to Moshe as a new command, with no reference to our request. In our parsha the Torah is recording how Hashem commanded it. Moshe in Devarim is relating the sin of the nation in asking for spies without any direct command from G-d. We should have simply trusted G-d that the land would be good.

Why, though, did G-d command us to do what we had already decided to do? The Ramban explains that G-d created the world with a mystical force that provides extra spiritual strength to anyone who is working in the service of G-d. Since He knew that the spies were facing a serious challenge and were likely to fail, G-d gave a command to send spies, thereby making the mission into an act of service of G-d. This gave them added spiritual strength and increased the possibility that they would not sin. It was for this reason that G-d also decreed that the spies should be leaders of their tribes. The merits they have as leaders would give them added spiritual strength, as well. Out of His love for us, G-d is always looking to help us succeed.

The Ramban continues, though, and tells us that G-d specifically chose not to fully protect us from failure. He notes that G-d did not choose who the spies would be. G-d instructed Moshe to choose leaders of the tribes but left it to Moshe to decide which leaders would be sent. This is because there is a different level of spiritual protection provided to one who is fulfilling a direct command from G-d, rather than a general command. This protection is so great that one cannot know evil and cannot fall prey to sin while he is fulfilling that command. Had G-d commanded these men to go, it would have been guaranteed that they would have brought back a positive report. Since G-d only said that someone should go, they were making their own decision in choosing to be the ones. Therefore, they were not privy to this highest level of protection from sin.

If G-d wanted to ensure their success, why didn't He want them to have this higher level of protection? I believe that this question shows us the true beauty and meaning of life. G-d put us in this world to overcome our challenges. He loves us dearly and wants to see us succeed. But He wants to see us succeed. He doesn't want to do it for us. He wants us to develop a true and meaningful relationship with Him, by choosing to overcome our challenges and by making the effort to devote ourselves to Him. He wants us to succeed, and will give us any edge available to enable us to make the right decision, but He will not remove the challenge itself. It is for this reason that every stage in life has its own challenges. As we get older and grow and become better people, new challenges await us. We are always provided with the opportunity to push ourselves internally, to stretch our spiritual muscles and to deepen our relationship with G-d, for it is this which is the very purpose of life.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Shelach Lecha by Rabbi Herzl Heftter *

[Rabbi Heftter did not send in a Dvar Torah for Shelach Lecha. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see 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.

Shelah Lekha -- Boy Scouts of Canaan By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Every Friday night, before Arvit, we read the Song of Songs, *Shir HaShirim*. It is beautiful, and it makes me want to scream. I cringe as I recall how my grandfather used to read it slowly and melodically. In his hands, the words came alive, the love, the longing, and above all, the tragedy. The tragedy of the unfulfilled love, the missed opportunity of not being ready to rise to the challenge you have been waiting for all your life.

At the center of *Shir HaShirim*, in a hazed daydream, the girl thinks of her beloved as he reaches out through the hole in the door and tries to open it without success. He calls out to her, come, open the door and let me in, but she is hesitant. She just washed her feet, she just changed clothes, and even as she decides to open the door her oiled, slippery fingers fail and her beloved disappears, never to be seen again. As she wanders through the streets, searching in vain for her lost love, she is mocked and beaten by the guards who helped her before, as they show her no mercy. All this is folded into few verses from this beautiful book, but we race through it to make the ten minutes mark before Arvit, and I feel the same as we sort of race through the book of BeMidbar, failing at times to see the urgency of its message. Oblivious, in the synagogue's routine, to the human and national drama playing out each year as an echo of our distorted reality.

The beautiful bond, the love between Am Yisrael and HaShem, was compared to a betrothal in the eternal words of the prophet: *"Thus saith the Lord, I have remembered thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy brides, and thy going after thee in the wilderness in a land not sown"* – Yermiyahu 2:2. But that wonderful connection is compromised and discarded in BeMidbar. Like a girl waiting to reunite with her beloved, so were the Israelites in the beginning of BeMidbar. Their house was built, the gifts have been exchanged and plans were made for a wonderful future. But then, with the same word used to describe the beloved waiting at the door in *Shir HaShirim* – נִשְׁלָח – the scouts are being dispatched to Canaan. And the Israelites, just like the girl from the Song, miss the opportunity. They are afraid of the unknown, afraid of taking responsibility and taking charge of their lives. They would rather go back to Egypt and suffer under the hand of their cruel taskmaster, feeling calm and secure that there is someone who knows what should be done. Such people, God

decrees, do not deserve to enter the land, and when they go up the mountain in a pathetic attempt to show their trust in Him, they share their fate with the girl from the Song – they are beaten and mocked.

But this is not a punishment. It is a natural consequence. Had it been a punishment, the whole nation would have been annihilated. But only the parents are prevented from entering the Promised Land. Their children, who will have to learn the hard way what are the consequences of hesitating, of not trusting yourself when God empowers you, will inherit the land. And it leaves us thinking, as we rush through Humash and Song alike, don't we all have our "scouts" moment now and then? Those times when despite having a clear concept of our goal, purpose and place in life, we feel exasperated. When we feel that the task is too difficult, that it is reserved for giants, not physical giants like those of Canaan, but giants in spirit, wisdom, wealth or strength. How often do we exempt ourselves from doing the right thing because of peer pressure or by not believing?

When HaShem knocks on our door, we should not hesitate. When we are sent out to scout a new possibility, a new venue of spiritual growth and empowerment for ourselves, our children, and the world, we should not come back saying that it is too much for us and we rather slaves in reality as is. We should say, in the words of Kaleb and Yehoshua: "*Come up, let us inherit us, for you are able to conquer her.*"

We shall go up, we shall overcome, and we shall inherit and conquer the land)and our challenges(because God has granted us the mission and the power.

Shabbat Shalom

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Slavery to Freedom: A Long Process

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Good things take time. Sometimes they take centuries or even millennia.

If you had just come out of a centuries long slavery situation, where you have had no idea how to run a government, a functioning agricultural economy, court systems, and military, the possibility of engaging in such matters would make you nervous.

A community made up of recently freed slaves would require generations trying and failing to run an economy and government well. And after passing on their unrealised ideals and best practices to the next generation, hopefully the new generation would learn from previous generations' successes and failures.

The other option would be to run away and remain as slaves.

Unfortunately our ancestors in our Torah portion decided on the latter option after a terrible report about Israel caused a seizure of fear. According to Rabbi Sacks, the motivation for the bad report was this fear of entering into the multigenerational project of society building. It is hard and fear-inducing to enter into a project where the fruits of your labour may come after your lifetime.

Eventually the Jews did come around, but it was after 40 years of wandering. That is what it required to build the courage to start this centuries long project. We still actively participate in this project across community, synagogue, and our extended family.

Our parsha reminds us to nail our courage to the post, to keep trying, succeeding, failing and learning, and to make our contribution to the grand tapestry of the Jewish story. We may or may not see the fruits in our lifetime, but when they do arise, we will have played our eternal part.

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

Rav Kook Torah Shlach/Pinchas: The Sin of Tzelofchad

“Our father died in the desert... He died because of his own sin, and he had no sons.”)Num. 27:3(

So begins the request of the daughters of Tzelofchad. Since there were no sons in the family, the daughters wanted to know: may we inherit his portion in the Land of Israel? Their question stumped Moses, and was referred to God Himself.

The Torah doesn't tell us, but we are curious nonetheless: what was the sin for which Tzelofchad deserved to die? The text seems to imply that his transgression was an unusual one: *“He died because of his own sin.”*

In the reading of Shelach it says:

“The Israelites were in the desert, and they found a man collecting wood on the Sabbath.”)Num. 15:32(

Interesting. Again, we find the phrase, *“in the desert.”*)And quite superfluous, considering that the entire book takes place in the desert.(Once again, Moses is stumped, and needs to ask God what is the appropriate punishment. Who was this unidentified man, the wood-gatherer who desecrated the Sabbath?

It was Rabbi Akiva who made the connection between the man with the unknown sin, and the sin of the unknown man. Tzelofchad was the Sabbath wood-gatherer. That was his personal transgression, for which he was punished)Shabbat 96b(.

Is there a connection between Tzelofchad's desecration of the Sabbath, and the fact that he died without sons, thus jeopardizing his inheritance in the Land of Israel? Also, why does the Torah emphasize that his sin took place *“in the desert”?*

Trapped in the Desert

The desert represents transience. A desert is not a place that can be settled and cultivated. We only pass through the desert as we make our way to a permanent location, to our true destination. Life in the desert is transient; it is only a preparation and a means towards a desired objective.

Even the holiness in the desert was temporary. Mount Sinai was sanctified solely for the sake of the Torah's revelation; afterwards, the mountain reverted to its previous state. Permanent holiness only exists in the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

Sanctity within the dimension of time — as in space — may also have varying degrees of permanence. The most eternal holiness in time is the holiness of the Sabbath. *“The Israelites will observe the Sabbath, making it a day of rest for all generations, an eternal covenant”)Ex. 31:16(*

Unlike the Sabbath, which falls out every seventh day, the holidays are dependent upon the calendar, as set by the high court. The sanctity of the holidays is thus of a less eternal nature. Additionally, the holidays relate to historical events: the Exodus from Egypt, the journey in the desert, the Revelation of the Torah. The Sabbath, on the other hand, transcends the realm of mankind. It celebrates the very essence of creation.

Tzelofchad's sin took place in the desert, and he died in the desert. When Tzelofchad desecrated the eternal sanctity of the Sabbath, he transformed the desert from a passageway into a dead end. He became disconnected from eternal holiness, both in time and space. He lacked permanence and continuity in the dimension of time -- the Sabbath day, and in the dimension of space — his inheritance in the Land of Israel.

We should learn from Tzelofchad's mistake, and avoid being locked within the temporal realm of the desert. We need to stay focused on that which is enduring and eternal, and not confuse the way station for the final destination.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 243-245. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, p.238.)

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHLACH61.htm>

Shelach Lecha: Assembling Reminders (5775. 5782)

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

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 shall 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

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.

FOOTNOTES:

]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.

Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[Do all people need reminders of what is right and wrong, even good people?

]2[Do we need religion to teach us how to be moral? Can atheists also be moral?

]3[What does religion add to our lives as moral people, and moral communities?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shelach-lecha/assembling-reminders/> Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

Shelach: We Can Do It! -- Life Lessons From the Parshah

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

The portion of Shelach tells the story of the 12 spies Moses sent to scout the Land of Canaan. It is one of the most riveting episodes in the entire Torah.

“Go up ... and see what kind of land it is,” Moses instructed the spies. “... and the people who inhabit it: Are they strong or weak? Are there few or many?”¹

The story of the spies takes a bad turn when they come back with a negative report about the land. We cannot conquer it, they say. It's never going to happen. We're all going to die.

This was a transformative event; it changed what would have been a one-year stay in the desert — due to the sin of the Golden Calf — to a 40-year sojourn.

Mirroring the 40 days that the spies spent crisscrossing the land accumulating their discouraging intel, G d's punishment was an additional year in the desert for each of the 40 days of spying. Thus, the Jewish people remained in the desert for a total of 40 years.²

Our Divine Mandate

A number of perplexing questions immediately arise when reading this narrative:

First, why send spies at all? If G d says go, then go! Second, these spies were men who witnessed miracles firsthand! If G d could bring about the Exodus from Egypt, strike the Egyptians with 10 plagues, split the sea, and give the Torah at Mount Sinai, then surely He could bring about the liberation of the land from the Canaanite nations. What was the big deal?

One of the reasons that G d allowed Moses to send spies is because that was what the Jewish people wanted. Whenever possible — within reason — people must be allowed to do as they wish. *“I have a bad feeling about it,”* G d said to Moses, *“but if this is what you want to do, do it.”³*

So why, in fact, did the spies come back with a negative report?

On a basic level, it is because they encountered giants in the land, and they simply became overwhelmed by the prospect of going up against these fierce warriors. But there is a deeper explanation. The spies were very spiritual people; they were leaders of the Jewish people, great Torah scholars. They were good people, yet their ideas quickly transformed and they began to develop plans to convince the Jewish people that G d would not be able to liberate the land of Canaan. Why the change?

The answer is rooted in a profound Chassidic concept. When the Jewish people were in the desert, their very survival was miraculous. Every aspect of their existence was the result of a miracle. Where did they get food from? Manna came down from heaven. Water? A rock rolled alongside them and provided water. Their clothing was laundered by the surrounding Protective Clouds while still on their bodies. They had no financial worries, no money problems. The stock market didn't go up and it didn't go down. Real estate prices were steady. Everybody had money in their pockets.

So how did they spend their time? What did they do all day? They studied Torah! They grew spiritually.

The spies said,

“Why should we go into the Land of Israel, where we're all going to become farmers? What do we need this for? We'll have to wake up very early in the morning and fight with the earth, and deal with the trials and tribulations of farming. And then, after spending our days plowing, planting, reaping, and harvesting, we'll have to make sure that we don't become so involved with the earth that we forget about the Heavens. We have a better idea: let's stay here in the desert where we can remain spiritual.”

The spies reasoned that G d's miracles worked in the desert. Their existence was guaranteed as long as they stayed there, because everything in the desert was miraculous. But as soon as they entered the Land, their existence would need to subscribe to the laws of nature. What guarantee did they have that they were going to be successful? According to the laws of nature, said the spies, they are stronger than us. Meaning, not only are the Canaanites physically stronger than us, but the natural law of materialism is stronger than the natural law of spirituality. It won't work to be spiritual people surrounded by materialism; we'll be easily overwhelmed.

And G d told them they were making a big mistake. The entire purpose of creation is for the Jew to take the material world, connect with it, engage with it, and transform the physical into the spiritual.

When the physical world is transformed, it becomes a dwelling place for G d. Choosing to remain in the spiritual cocoon of the desert might feel good, but it doesn't fit with G d's plan. G d wants a dwelling place here on earth, a home among His people.⁴

Resisting Peer Pressure

Only two of the 12 spies — Joshua, Moses' student and right-hand man; and Caleb, Moses' brother-in-law — returned from their mission with positive reports.

Interestingly, Caleb decided to detour to Hebron while scouting the land. The verse states, "*They [the spies] went up in the south, and he came to Hebron ...*"⁵ switching from the plural "they" to the singular "he."

Rashi, citing the Talmud⁶, explains that this refers to Caleb, who decided to pray at the Cave of Machpelah, the burial site of the patriarchs and matriarchs, to ask their souls to intercede with G d on his behalf.

This is the idea of praying at the gravesite — at the ohel — of a tzaddik, a righteous person.

What was Caleb's prayer? He beseeched G d to save him from the evil counsel of the other spies and to keep him from falling into their trap.

The Power of Positivity

As the spies delivered their pessimistic report, Caleb suddenly spoke up:

*"Caleb silenced the people ... and he said, 'We shall surely ascend and take possession of it, for we can surely do it!'"*⁷

The Rebbe taught a profound lesson from Caleb's bravery:

In life, as we encounter challenges and approach seemingly insurmountable tasks, we tend to panic. A little voice inside of us says, "*You can't do this. It's impossible. You'll never succeed. It's going to overwhelm you. Give up now.*" We often listen to that voice of panic, which convinces us that we will never amount to anything.⁸

This holds true in general, and especially regarding our commitment to Torah, mitzvot, acts of kindness and goodness, and to building the infrastructure of Judaism. The Rebbe often directed this message to his shluchim, the emissaries he sent out across the globe, with only a blessing and mandate: "*Go make it happen.*"

How can we make it happen when we have that voice of negativity inside of us, telling us, "*It's impossible. It can't happen. Go home*"? These voices of negativity are not only inside us, they're also all around us!

In 1973, when my wife and I arrived in Encino, Calif., to take up our post as the Rebbe's shluchim in the San Fernando Valley, I was handed a short list of people in the area who had previously contributed to Chabad of California. What was I going to ask them for? I felt that if asked for support, they'd probably throw me out. So instead, I decided to ask for advice.

"I'm here to set up a Chabad house," I said. *"Do you have any ideas?"*

And what advice did I get?

"Go home!" they said. *"Go back where you came from."*

"You're never going to succeed," they said. *"It's impossible."*

"You think that you can bring Judaism to the Valley?" they asked incredulously. *"Give up now. It's never going to happen."*

Amidst all of these voices of negativity, along comes the resolute voice of Caleb from deep within us that says: *"We can definitely take possession of the land. We can definitely do it. WE CAN DO IT!"*

Caleb reminds us all that sometimes we need to channel our inner Little Engine That Could and repeat to ourselves, *"I think I can. I think I can. I know I can."* If we say it enough, we can actually do it. That is the power of positive thinking.

But there's a lot more to it than mere positivity. We need to have faith. We need to believe in what we're doing. We need to put our trust in God.

Tracht gut vet zein gut! *"Think good and it will be good!"* taught the Third Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, known as the Tzemach Tzedek.

A negative attitude breeds panic; a positive attitude breeds faith, trust, and success. And that's the powerful message from Caleb. We all go through bumps in life. Hang in there. This too shall pass. Stay positive!

Grasshopper Complex

Several verses later, we are given additional insight into what caused the spies' state of panic:

*"There in Canaan[we saw the giants ... In our eyes, we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes."*⁹

I remember feeling like that once. Many years ago, I was traveling to a wedding in Caracas, Venezuela, and the flight I took had a changeover in Dallas. I went through the security checkpoint in Dallas, and, of course, I was wearing my black hat. This was in the early days of the TSA, and every security checkpoint was different. So I asked, *"What should I do with my hat? In L.A. and New York they tell me to put my hat in a bin. Do I need to do that here?"* The officer looked down at me. This guy was six feet and five inches in his socks. I thought he was going to kill me. He says, *"Sir, this is Texas. In Texas, we never get between a man and his hat!"*

Back to the story of the spies. The Rebbe tells us to look closely at their words: In our eyes, we seemed like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes. Why did they say, *"...and so we were in their eyes?"* Did they know what the giants were thinking?

The answer lies in the fact that the spies' problems all began with their own self-perception. When you have an inferiority complex, you walk around saying, *"What am I? I'm just a grasshopper. I'm a nobody. I will never amount to anything."* When you see yourself as a grasshopper, pretty soon everyone else will see you as a grasshopper as well. But if you see yourself as a giant, everyone else will see you that way too.

It all begins with a healthy sense of self, which comes directly from recognizing that we are all connected to G d. We are on a mission, doing what He wants us to do, and therefore nothing is impossible, nothing is hopeless. We can accomplish anything. Indeed, we can do it!¹⁰

A Second Chance

We look at the generation of the spies, known as the dor hamidbar – the “*generation of the desert*,” and we may wonder, “*What’s wrong with these people? Why did they repeatedly question G d? Why did they so often lose their faith?*”

The Mishnah¹¹ tells us that the Jewish people in the desert tested G d 10 times! How could they be so foolish? So stubborn? So fickle? And we think, “*If it were me in that desert, I would never question G d!*”

Well, according to Kabbalah, the souls in the generation that will merit the Ultimate Redemption with the arrival of our righteous Moshiach)and the Rebbe said that this is our generation!(are all reincarnations of the souls of that constantly-doubting desert generation.

In other words, we’re getting a second chance!

Will we do it right this time? Will we have the strength to believe — and to proclaim — that the Land of Israel was given by G d to our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to each and every one of us as an eternal gift?

Yes, we will! G d wants us to succeed. He wants a home.

We now have the opportunity to accomplish what we were unable to the first time around. This time, we will heed Caleb’s exhortation and our positive mindset will carry the day.

“*We shall surely ascend and take possession of it, for we can surely do it!*”

We can and we will.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 13:17-18.
2. Numbers 14:34.
3. Rashi to Numbers 13:1.
4. For more on this insight, which is based on the teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)the Alter Rebbe(, see *The Generation Gap*.
5. Numbers 13:22.
6. Sotah 34b.
7. Numbers 13:30.
8. *Likkutei Sichot* Vol. 8 pg. 92.
9. Numbers 13:33.
10. For more on this, see *Belief in Yourself*.

11. *Ethics of the Fathers* 5:6.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6479699/jewish/We-Can-Do-It.htm

Shelach: Misplaced Fear by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Misplaced Fear **

Joshua and Caleb said to the people, "do not fear." Bamidbar 14:9

Since time immemorial, those who aspire to do what is right have faced opposition and even ridicule. Yet, the Code of Jewish Law begins with the instructions: *"Do not be embarrassed by the mockers."* When G-d is with us, there is no reason for fear.

The same response applies not only to fear of others, but to fear for our spiritual well-being. Other than Joshua and Caleb, the spies were afraid that engaging in material life in the Promised Land would undermine the people's ability to lead holy lives. Since G-d is with us, aiding us in our mission to transform the physical world into His home, there is no reason to fear. We can indeed infuse Divine consciousness into all aspects of life, down to the most mundane.

— from *Daily Wisdom 2*

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* Insights from the Rebbe.

** I did not receive the new Daily Wisdom email by my deadline this week, so I am printing a message from the archives:
<https://www.kehot.org/Newsletter?issue=567>

Chapters of psalms to recite for Israel to prevail over Hamas and for the release of remaining hostages. Recite these psalms daily – to download:

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via the Internet

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5784 B'H

Sponsored by Elaine Millen
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Rose Gottlieb, z"l, (21 Sivan) and Sam Gottlieb, z"l,
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Two Kinds of Fear

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

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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.

What Does Judaism Say About ... Podcast
with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is **Parents and Children in Judaism** - Next week: Peace in Judaism
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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.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Why Send Scouts in the First Place?

"And God spoke unto Moses saying, 'Send out men for yourself to spy out the Land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel; of every tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, every one a prince among them.'" (Numbers 13:2)

As the portion of Shelach opens, we read how God commands the Israelites to send ahead men to spy out and explore the Land of Israel.

And we know the tragic results of this "spy" mission. The report, which emerged from ten out of twelve, was a negative and discouraging one, which only served to divert the Israelites from their God-given mission of the conquest of the land of Israel. Hence the agonizing question which this portion evokes is: Why did God command the sending of scouts in the first

place? Why risk a rebellion in the ranks by requesting a committee report which may well go against the divine will to conquer and settle Israel?

A totally different perspective, not only as to why God commanded Moses to send out the scouts but much more profoundly as to how God operates in the world and why, is to be found in a remarkable interpretation given by Rabbeinu Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (1823-1900), a great Hasidic master, in his commentary on the Torah, called *Pri Tzaddik*. He points out a striking analogy between the incident of the scouts and the gift of the second tablets which came as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, both conceptually as well as textually: in both cases the Almighty saw the necessity of involving – even to the extent of establishing a partnership with – the people, the nation of Israel.

In what way were the second tablets an improvement on the first tablets which Moses smashed, and which God congratulated him for smashing (Exodus 34:1, Yevamot 62a)? What was "built into" the second tablets which would be more likely to prevent a fiasco of the proportion of the sin of the Golden Calf, which occurred only forty days after the gift of the first tablets? The fact that the first tablets had been "written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18), and were in actuality the very "script of the divine," whereas the second tablets were "hewn out" by Moses (Exodus 34:1) and thereby were created as a result of human involvement, suggests the difference: the first tablets were the product of divine creativity alone; the second tablets involved human cooperation, setting the stage for rabbinical interpretation, decrees, and enactments which are such a major portion of what we call the "Oral Law." The Oral Law not only accepts but requires the direct participation of rabbinical leadership, and even the involvement of the masses of committed Jews (*Pri Tzaddik* on Exodus, Ki Tissa 3, and on Numbers, Shelach 2).

Of course, we believe that the major principles and salient laws of the Oral Torah were also given by God. However, the sages of each generation must actively interpret the Torah and often plumb from its depths great innovative concepts necessary for the needs of that generation. Indeed, in a stunning Talmudic passage, the rules of rabbinical exegesis can even cause the Almighty Himself to accept a decision of the majority of the sages, causing Him (as it were) to cry out "My children have conquered Me" (Bava Metzia 39b). The very words with which God commands Moses to "hew out" the second tablets, "psal lekha" (Exodus 34:1), also contain a nuance: you, Moses, have the authority and the obligation to determine whether an activity or object is *pasul* (improper and invalid). The sages are given the power to add decrees and enactments (*gezerot* and *takkanot*) to the body of the Torah, many of which – such as lighting candles on the eve of the Sabbath and festivals,

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the kindling of the Chanukka menorah, and the reading of the Purim Megilla – have become major expressions of our Torah commitment and lifestyle (Deut. 17:8-11). Moreover, no such decrees or enactments can become part and parcel of the Torah of Israel without the endorsement of the majority of the committed people who have the right of acceptance or rejection. The masses of committed people, the *hoi polloi* or *hamon ha'am*, have also initiated customs throughout the generations which assume the status of Torah law (*minhag Yisrael din hu*, the customs of Israel are law).

All of this suggests a Torah which is not the product of ossified paternalism – as divinely perfect as such a Torah might be – but is rather the result of a living partnership between God and His people. Apparently, the Almighty believed – after the tragic trauma of the Golden Calf – that only a Torah which would involve the active participation of the Israelites could survive the seductive pitfalls of idolatry and immorality.

Fascinatingly enough the phrase "psal lekha" (Exodus 34:1) parallels the words God uses to command the scouts, "Shelach lekha," send out for yourselves, in the beginning of our portion. God apparently understood that a mission as important as the conquest of Israel could not take place without the enthusiastic approbation and active participation of the people.

Of course, opening up the process – be it Torah interpretation or the appointment of a reconnaissance committee – is fraught with danger. But it was a chance that God understood had to be taken if He desired His nation to be more than marching robots. He didn't want us to receive a Torah on a silver platter or to be brought into the Promised Land on eagles' wings; He realized that despite the inherent risk which came from involving the people, excluding them would be a more likely prescription for disaster. Just as a wise parent and a sagacious educator understand that children/students must be "involved in the process" so that hopefully they will continue the path even after they achieve independence, the Almighty set the stage for our continuous devotion to Torah and our third return to Israel – despite our many setbacks – by insisting on the participation of His people!

One might also argue that in the words of Rabbeinu Tzadok lies the pivotal reason for the ten scouts' rejection of Moses' goal as well as for God's higher plan for his people in history. Throughout the Egyptian and desert experience, God had acted in a thoroughly paternalistic manner, as it were, bringing about miracle after miracle and providing food, shelter, and protection for the desert wanderers. In effect, the Israelites were in a "Kollel for the masses," with the divine *Rosh Yeshiva* providing manna (they didn't even have to go to the bank to cash the Kollel checks), housing, and directions as to their comings and goings, with a cloud by day and a

fire by night. They didn't have to work and they were spared the major battles against the Seven Nations. Is it any wonder that the majority of the tribal princes wished to prolong this rarefied, ethereal Kollel-desert experience and rejected the responsibility-ridden decision-inducing war-perpetrating entrance into Israel?!

God, on the other hand, expected the Israelites to enter a new phase in their development, to begin to become engaged in directing their own destiny, in accepting the challenges and confrontations involved in conquering a land, irrigating the swamps, fertilizing a desert, forging a society. And God also saw that the response He received after all His steady support and committed care was kvetching and complaining, carping and criticizing – no real appreciation, and certainly no mature acceptance of responsibility. And so God commanded the reconnaissance mission as the next stage of Israel's development, the stage in which the members of this covenantal people must begin to stand on their own feet, make their own decisions, take responsibility for their failures, and – with the divine guidance to be found in the Torah and the divine guarantee that not only will they never be destroyed but also that they will eventually prevail – direct their own destiny.

Rabbenu Tzadok goes on to teach that when the scouts were initially commanded to "be of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land" (Numbers 13:20), this was an allusion to the initial fruit which brought disaster upon humanity, the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. The problem with the Garden of Eden was that everything had been provided by the Almighty; had we remained in Eden, there would have been no risks, no challenges, and no real involvement. The repair (*tikkun*) for this primordial transgression – a transgression which was really inevitable given the paternalistic reality of the situation – is the human production of fruit in partnership with God in the Land of Israel. We can only return to the Garden of Eden if we ourselves remake the world into an Eden with our own blood, sweat, and tears, with humanity assuming the risks and overcoming the obstacles.

The scouts were not yet ready for the challenge. Are we? What can greatly help us in our decision-making is the knowledge that God believes in us and has faith that we can and eventually will do it! And the first step is for Jews of the Diaspora to come home – to the only Jewish homeland. As for those of us living in Israel, we must especially strengthen ourselves, and take from the fruits of the Torah of Zion with an open and cupped hand, always ready to give out what we have; hence we must truly become a kingdom of priests who will export God's ways and God's will to all corners of the earth. What Rabbenu Tzadok is teaching is that we dare not wait for the Messiah; the Messiah is indeed waiting for us!

The Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

The Blue Above the White

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

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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.

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 primordially 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://www.tekhelet.com) website, will be convinced to add this new spiritual dimension to this important everyday mitzvah.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Moshe Was Confident that Caleb's Wife Would Set Him Straight

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 Caleb.

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 Caleb 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: Caleb 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’irvuya (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 irvuya 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

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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 Caleb 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 Caleb. This answer contains a tremendous truth within it. He says the reason Moshe felt compelled to give Yehoshua a bracha and not Caleb is that Caleb was married to a righteous woman (*Miriam haNeviah*). Certainly, Caleb would therefore not fall prey to the evil schemes of the Meraglim, and so Caleb was not in need of a blessing. At the time, Yehoshua was still single. Caleb, who was married to a tzadekes, had a spiritual anchor. Therefore, Moshe could be confident that Caleb 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, Caleb 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 Canaanites (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 haaretz"? 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) (Bereishis 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

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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.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

It is possible for a person to be an expert in Torah law without practising any of it. For example, this could be an academic who has studied the Torah and has produced a thesis as a historic document as opposed to being a guide for life. Or perhaps, you might have somebody who has been schooled in the ways of the Torah, who has grown up within a Torah environment but doesn't any longer want to translate their knowledge into action.

It is with this in mind that in the third paragraph of the Shema, which is presented to us in Parshat Shelach Lecha (Bamidbar 15:39), Hashem tells us, "Uzecharterem et kol mitzvot Hashem va'asitem otam." – "And you shall remember all the mitzvot of Hashem and you must perform them." What we remember needs to be translated into action.

And then the Shema continues to reinforce this message (Bamidbar 15:40), "lema'an tizkeru ve'asitem et kol mitzvotai," – "so that you will remember and translate that memory into the performance of my commandments," "vehayitem kedoshim l'Elokeichem." – "So that you shall become holy before your God."

If you indeed lead a life which is filled with shemirat mitzvot, the performance of the commandments, you will have a sacred existence, 'vehayitem kedoshim' – you'll have meaning in life, you'll have joy in life, you'll have a deep sense of fulfilment, you will have a spiritual existence.

In Parshat Shelach Lecha, we are told of the saga of the meraglim, the spies. They ignored the word of Hashem who had promised them that they were going to a glorious, blessed land. They wanted to decide for themselves. They wanted to reach conclusions in life without regard to what they knew to be the word of Hashem – and the result was a great tragedy for our people.

So the Shema, at the end of the parsha, comes to tell us that when we are aware of the expectations of Hashem and we choose to translate them into meaningful practice, the result will be that we'll be all the better for it. Our lives will be enhanced and we will be enormously blessed. Everything that we know, is there to be translated into action, to give us lives of incredible spirituality, wonderful meaning and true happiness.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Sin of the Spies and Slander, Then and Now

Rabbi Dr. Lior and Rachel Kaminetsky

As a musician, I have a vivid memory of one specific recital some years ago, when I was

still an MA student at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem. A large and diverse audience attended the concert, at the end of which many people approached me to share their feelings, express their gratitude and congratulate me on the excellent performance. One after the other, people came over to say kind words. And yet, I, aware of my own shortcomings in expressing the great many nuances of the piece and its subtleties, knew full well that my performance was far from perfect. And so, I dampened the enthusiastic reactions of my well-wishers by sharing my professional and very critical opinion on my performance. My mother, of blessed memory, noticed what was going on and urgently took me aside for a private talk. "Not only are you ruining their experience," she said, "but you are also turning them into idiots! In fact, you are ruining your musical career with your own hands because now they will go and tell the others what an awful concert this was..."

This conversation made a lasting impression on me, and drew my attention to something mentioned in our portion of Shelach. This is what the spies say: "... we were like locusts in our own eyes, and so we were in their eyes" (Bamidbar 13:33).

The spies who were sent to scout the land were not standard spies operating covertly to gather information about the enemy. Rather, they were leaders, the presidents of Israel, who were expected to serve as an example, to appreciate and express gratitude for the great miracles that God had performed for us in the Exodus from Egypt and in the desert, and that He will continue to perform for us upon entering the land. They were expected to be visionary individuals capable of looking beyond the surface of reality and seeing the inherent potential within it. However, the spies did not see themselves as leaders but rather as spies, and it is interesting to note that this is how they were also engraved in our consciousness. They did not understand their own power and the responsibility placed upon their shoulders, and in doing so, they not only diminished their own spirit but also the spirit of the people alongside them.

"In my understanding, this is the root of the sin of the spies – the self-disparagement in ourselves, in our abilities, and in the wonderful gifts that have been given to us on a silver platter. This causes us to lose self-confidence and, as a result, we see a dark and threatening reality around us, even though sometimes it is actually intended to benefit us.

The spies are able to identify that the land is "flowing with milk and honey," and they even bring back abundant fruits as evidence. However, their lack of faith in themselves causes them to ignore the half-full cup and focus on the empty half, whether it be the real challenges that require divine assistance or their own interpretation of the reality they see.

They see "cities that are exceedingly large," and they view this as a point of strength for the Canaanite people. If they had self-assurance, they would see it as evidence of the weakness and fearfulness of the Canaanite people, as a strong nation does not need fortifications but can freely roam in security.

They see dead people in the streets and interpret it as "a land that consumes its inhabitants," whereas at least according to the words of Rava in the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate Sotah 35a), the Holy One, blessed be He, took special care to ensure that when the spies arrived, the people of the land would be preoccupied with their own deaths, and their minds would be occupied during the spies' visit."

A negative perception, a distorted view, forecasting darkness – this causes tension and panic that is out of place, not only among the spies themselves but also among the majority of the people who are swayed by their leaders, as appears at the beginning of Chapter 14: "And all the congregation raised their voices and cried that night." Their emotional response is so strong that it diminishes the miracles and goodness that have been done for them thus far, and they cause self-destruction, seeking to return to Egypt and die there. The strong fear and emotions blind their balanced perspective, and in their frenzy, they almost stone Joshua and Caleb for offering an alternative to the situation.

Contrary to what may seem to us, the greatest producers of gossip are not our haters or those seeking our harm, but rather we ourselves! The belittlement and self-criticism cause us and others to belittle us and speak ill of us, creating a reality of self-fulfilling prophecy.

The world is mostly not black and white, and there is always room for improvement and growth. However, there is constructive criticism and there is destructive criticism. There is a nuanced perception of reality that leads us to pay attention to dangers and be cautious of them, encouraging positive action and helping us cope with them more effectively. On the other hand, there is a negative and critical perception of reality that causes us to worry, lack faith, engage in self-silencing, and self-sabotage. The story of the spies teaches us an important lesson, that much of it begins within us, and it depends solely on us.

"Beliefs create reality" – that's what I learned in the Avatar course I participated in. So let's make an effort to learn from the sin of the spies and practice treating ourselves and those around us with proper respect. Let's choose positive beliefs for ourselves and express them in positive and empowering words that will, God willing, rectify the sin of the spies and guide us on the path to the good land we aspire to be in.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

Looking Through the Right Lens

At the end of Parshas Shlach (15:39), the Torah cautions, "Do not explore after your heart and your eyes, after which you stray". Chazal (Berachos 12b) explain that "after your heart" refers to heretical beliefs. At first glance, heresy is a product of the mind, not the heart. Why do Chazal associate inappropriate thoughts with the heart?

Rav Elchonon Wasserman (Dugma'os L'Biurei Aggados Al Derech Hapshat, printed at the end of Koveitz He'aros, chapter 1) answers that, in reality, belief in G-d should be something that comes naturally. After all, the incredible precision, sense of order, and exquisite detail found in every living thing - in plants and animals and especially in human beings - conclusively point to the existence of a Creator. Those who choose not to believe in a Creator do so only because their hearts refuse to accept that which is self-evident. The Torah advises us to follow our minds, not our hearts, to ensure that we view the world from the proper perspective.

Often, people believe what they want to believe; they see what they want to see. They filter their experiences through the prism of their deep-seated emotions and fears, their likes and dislikes. This was the mistake of the spies. The posuk (13:26) says, "They went and they came". Rashi comments that the Torah compares their going to their coming; just as they came back with an evil scheme, so too they went initially with bad intentions. For whatever reason, the spies did not want to enter Eretz Yisrael, and that colored their whole perspective. They saw a land with strange, gigantic fruit (see Rashi 13:23), a land "that eats its inhabitants" (13:22). They could not see the beauty of the land nor Hashem's beneficence (see Rashi 13:22) because their hearts did not want to see the positive.

Similarly, Korach's jealousy of Aharon caused him to make an error in judgement. Moshe Rabbeinu warned Korach that only one person will remain alive after offering incense (Korach 15:7). Korach was a smart man, so why did he insist on taking such a risky gamble? Rashi explains that his eye deceived him. He saw an impressive line of descendants, including the prophet Shmuel and twenty-four watches of kohanim, emerging from him. But he did not see that his sons would do teshuva and this chain of greatness would emerge from them, not from him. Korach interpreted his vision incorrectly because his jealous heart refused to allow him to see things differently.

A mistake of the heart is also what led to Haman's downfall. When Achashveirosh asked him what should be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor, Haman "said in his heart" whom would the king wish to honor more than me? (Esther 6:6) Why was Haman

so convinced that there was no one else the king would want to honor besides him? And why did he suggest such an outlandish idea - to dress the man in the king's clothes and ride him on the king's horse? Isn't that a little extreme even for someone the king wishes to honor? The answer is that Haman was so arrogant he just could not control himself. His desire for honor clouded his vision. And that was the beginning of his downfall because once Achashveirosh saw that Haman had delusions of grandeur, he was only too happy to get rid of him when Esther told him of Haman's plot.

People often hear what they want to hear; they see what they want to see. If one allows his feelings of jealousy or his desire for pleasure and honor to color his perceptions, that can lead him to a bad place. But if one listens to the inner voice that emanates from his neshama, then he will be motivated by a higher sense of purpose, by positive middos and healthy emotions, and that can lead him to great heights.

The mitzvah of tzitzis serves as a constant reminder to keep the proper perspective. "And you shall see them and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem" (15:39). Seeing the tzitzis constantly encourages us to improve our character and purify our vision as much as we can so that we will view the world through the right lens. We will appreciate the opportunities we have to accomplish and to grow spiritually; we will develop a proper sense of priorities; and we will make our life decisions guided by a Torah outlook.

Two people can see the same thing. But how they interpret what they see is often a matter of perspective.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Utmost Importance

And HASHEM spoke to Moshe, saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel and you shall say to them that they shall make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations, and they shall affix a thread of sky blue on the fringe of each corner. 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. I am HASHEM, your G-d, Who took you out of the Land of Egypt to be your G-d; I am HASHEM, your G-d. (Bamidbar 15:37-41)

Here we have the third paragraph of SHEMA which we say twice a day every day. The Tzitzis are some kind of Heavenly reminder of all the Mitzvas. How does that work?

I was always amazed and puzzled by one of my Rebbeim. Whatever he was doing seemed to be important. If he was saying Tehillim it was important. If he was collecting Tzedaka it was important! If he was heading home for lunch, it was important! I would feel the opposite about whatever I was doing. If I was saying Tehillim, then I was perhaps wasting my time. Maybe I should be doing something else. I wondered for a long time why he projected such importance in everything he did and I was feeling off task in so much of what I did. What was the difference? I knew it had to do with something more than just superficial confidence.

This Talmudic concept might provide the beginning of an answer: "Shlucho Shel Adam C'moso" – "The messenger is like the one who sends him." A messenger takes on the power and proportion of the one who is sending him. An act is greatly enlarged due to the "power of attorney" granted by the sender. Even a simple task that does not require originality or genius from the performer but by the connection to The One Who commands him. The deed is not less than an extension of the will of HASHEM. That is what energizes the performance of a Mitzvah!

Let's say I was to approach the Governor's mansion at 3:00 AM and begin to knock on the door and demand a meeting with the Governor. Somebody would likely shout out, "Who goes there?" I might sheepishly answer, "Label Lam!" "Go away you fool!" they would appropriately respond and I would be made to leave. However, if I was carrying a message from the President, I would bang on the door more emphatically and when asked what the racket was all about, I would forget at that moment about myself and I would answer with a sense of overpowering urgency, "It's a message from the President!" The door would open wide!

How important are we and how important is what we are doing at any given moment? It is entirely up to us! How do we perceive our purpose, our mission on this earth? Who is sending us! Who do we represent? Do we represent ourselves? Do we represent our families? Do we represent our neighborhood or the Jewish People? Do we represent some other agenda or do we represent HASHEM? That is the question?

Here is a shocking statement that needs a big explanation. We speak in practical terms of Ruchnius/spirituality and Gashmios/physicality but the truth is that everything is really one of the two. Which? The entire world is Ruchnius! Yes, there is dense Ruchnius and less dense Ruchnius, but everything is Ruchnios! "Ain Od Milvado!" – "There is nothing other than Him!" Gashmios is an illusion, a coverup. Hence, the word for "world" in Loshon HaKodesh is "OLAM". OLAM means hidden.

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If you are having a hard time digesting this concept, keep in mind that Einstein had posited and it has been accepted as truth, a fact of life, that everything is energy; E=MC2. Everything on the periodic table may seem solid but in reality, it is all sublimated energy, oceans of the same sublime energy. Maybe that is what the Tzitzis are aiming to remind us of and wake up inside. We can look at life with our fleshy eyes or study the world with our mind's eye and perceive the ultimate truth, and when we do, then everything we do is infused with sublime energy and the utmost importance.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

The Fall of the Sinai Generation

You can have the greatest teacher in the world – Moshe Rabbeinu, the teacher par excellence, handpicked by G-d – learn in the most incredible environment without distractions at Mount Sinai with all your needs taken care of... and still learn so little.

How can it be that the generation that came out of Egypt, saw all the great miracles, spent a whole year at Mount Sinai – from Rosh Chodesh Sivan (in Parashat Yitro) to the 20th of Iyar one year later (in Parashat Behaalo techah) – and then, as the Jewish people leave Sinai after learning from Moshe, and are about to enter the Land – everything goes wrong!

They begin complaining inexplicably (Rashi bring an opinion that the Sanhedrin were even killed) and moan about how wonderful it was in Egypt. Then following that, in Shelach Lecha, the entire generation was wiped out in the desert, the great generation that rose to such heights and heard the voice of Hashem and accept the Torah. In fact, Rabbi Akiva says (Sanhedrin 107) that they fell so low that the generation has no place in the World to Come!

We see that you can be in the best environment, have the greatest teachers, and have every opportunity to grow – but somehow not be able to internalize those teachings.

Perhaps, coming so soon out of Egypt, from the lowest (49th) level of impurity, they were unable to fully integrate what they learnt and transform themselves, which is so hard to do over such a short period of time. There was something impeding their ability, no matter how high they rose, to remain at the level of Mount Sinai and caused them to fall to the greatest depths.

We must utilize the opportunities that we have – not blame those around us – because ultimately the choice is ours. It is up to us!



BS"D

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Parshas Shlach - Two Types of Laziness

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1297 – Oh Oh Some-one Took My Tallis by Accident and Left His; Can I Use His Tallis? Good Shabbos!

There is a Medrash in Parshas Shelach that quotes a pasuk in Mishlei in connection with the meraglim. The pasuk in Mishlei says, "Like what vinegar does to a person's teeth and like smoke getting into a person's eyes, this is what a lazy messenger does to the person who sent him." (10:26) The Gaon, in his commentary to Mishlei, explains that when a person wishes to stimulate his appetite, he usually drinks something. However, if by mistake he drinks vinegar, not only will that not stimulate his desire to eat something, but on the contrary, it ruins his appetite (because it ruins his teeth). Similarly, if a person wants light to read by, or if he needs a source of illumination for any reason, but he lights wood that is still moist, it will cause a lot of smoke and make it even more difficult for him to read or see anything. The Gaon explains that a lazy messenger is similar, vis-a-vis his sender: Contrary to his expectation and hope, the lazy messenger not only does not accomplish his mission, but also causes disappointment and aggravation that is even worse than if he had never been sent in the first place. The Medrash is pointing out that the meraglim were lazy, and this caused great aggravation and disappointment to Moshe Rabbeinu, who sent them on their mission. The meforshim provide a lengthy indictment of what the meraglim did wrong. They had ulterior motives, they were seekers of honor, they were haughty, etc., etc. The list of what they did wrong goes on and on. However,

laziness does not seem to be among the list of accusations. So why then does the Medrash accuse them of laziness? How was their laziness manifest? On the contrary, the Rashbam says that the meraglim volunteered for this mission. A spy mission is a dangerous venture. It involves heading into enemy territory. If a spy is caught, he will likely be killed. Lazy people do not volunteer for life-threatening jobs.

Rav Chaim Dov Keller addresses this question with a vort from Rav Shneur Kotler. His insight is based on another pasuk in Mishlei and on another Gaon. The pasuk in Mishlei (6:9) reads, "How long will you be lazy, one who sleeps? When will you arise from your sleep?" This pasuk seems to contain a redundancy of expression. However, the Gaon says that there is no redundancy here. Just as there is laziness in action, there is also laziness in thought. The first part of the pasuk is speaking about physical laziness (not getting out of bed). The second part of the pasuk is referring to laziness of thought. The laziness that we usually think about is when someone is too lazy to get up and do something. However, there is a much more subtle form of laziness: Laziness of thought, for example, failing to expend the effort to think things through. Laziness of thought is characterized by jumping to conclusions and being satisfied with the most facile or superficial explanation of the facts.

This is what the Medrash means that the meraglim were lazy. They were not lazy in their actions. They volunteered for this mission. They traveled throughout the country for forty days. These were not lazy people. But their laziness manifested itself in how they viewed and how they perceived Eretz Yisrael.

One of the complaints of the meraglim was that Eretz Yisrael was "a land that consumes those who dwell there." How did they come to that conclusion? When they arrived, the whole country was involved with funerals. Their immediate conclusion was "People are dropping dead here like flies." Granted, that was one way of explaining what they witnessed. But there was another way to view this phenomenon.

From my house, I happen to have a view of the corner of Mt. Wilson Lane and Reisterstown Road, on which stands a funeral home – Sol Levinson and Brothers. I have a good idea what happens at funeral homes. Some days, there are no funerals, some days there are two or three funerals, and some days there are four or five funerals. Even though Baltimore is a large city, and this is a major funeral parlor, it is very rare, if ever, that I see seven or eight funerals on the same day. And here we have an entire country involved in funerals. What does that mean? If the meraglim would have taken the time to think about the matter, they would not have immediately concluded "this is a land that consumes its inhabitants." Maybe it was a sign of Divine providence that the Ribono shel Olam wanted the inhabitants to be preoccupied with burials and mourning so that they would not notice the meraglim passing through their land. However, coming to that conclusion required thought and brainpower. Anything that requires depth of perception will not be considered by someone who manifests laziness in thought. The mistakes that the meraglim made were all along these lines. It is possible to come to more than one conclusion. Their conclusions were caused by laziness, not traditional laziness, but rather laziness of thought. This is what the Medrash means that the meraglim were lazy and caused aggravation to their sender.

Sins That Come Without Any Pangs of Guilt or Regret

Virtually all the meforshim comment on the name change Moshe Rabbeinu implemented for his talmid Hoshea prior to sending him out on the mission to spy out the land. The pasuk says, "And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun, Yehoshua" (Bamidbar 13:16). Rashi says, "He prayed for him: May Hashem save you from the plan of the meraglim." The question is, if Moshe suspected that the meraglim were planning a conspiracy that might corrupt his faithful disciple, why did he not cancel the mission? Alternatively, why didn't Moshe daven (pray) for the other meraglim? Furthermore, the Targum Yonosan ben Uziel interprets this pasuk as saying: "When Moshe saw the humility of Hoshea, he changed his name to Yehoshua." The question is: What does Hoshea's humility have to do with the fear of his being ensnared in the scheme of the meraglim?

Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef (the one and only Chief Rabbi of the City of New York) gives a beautiful interpretation. There are two types of aveiros, "standard aveiros" and "subtle aveiros". A standard aveira is when a person knows something is wrong, but he does it anyway. "I know I am not supposed to do this, but my Yetzer HaRah is too strong and I am going to do it regardless!" However, a subtle aveira is a much more difficult aveira to overcome. That is when you think what you are doing is a mitzvah. There are no regrets or pangs of guilt associated with such an action. It is very difficult for me to believe that I shouldn't be doing such an action: "What are you talking about? I'm doing a mitzvah!"

According to the Zohar, the rest of the meraglim did not want to go into Eretz Yisrael because they were aware that if and when Klal Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, there would be a new regime of leadership. The leadership of the wilderness (of whom they were all a part) would be retired or replaced. The Zohar says that they wished to retain their positions of power and prestige. Therefore, they tried to sabotage the national entry into Eretz Yisrael.

Yehoshua's challenge was entirely different. Yehoshua was not, chas v'shalom, worried about his position. This is the first category of aveira – "a grobba aveira". They knew it was wrong to put their personal honor above the welfare of the entire nation, but they went ahead with the plan anyhow. As Chazal say, if there was any reason for Yehoshua to have hesitated about going into Eretz Yisrael, it was because "Eldad and Meidad prophesized in the camp." (Bamidbar 11:27) Rashi explains that their prophecy, which so concerned Yehoshua, was that "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will take the nation into the Land."

Yehoshua, the talmid protégé of Moshe Rabbeinu did not want his master to die. "What is Klal Yisrael going to do without a Moshe Rabbeinu?" So if Yehoshua would have any "negiyus" (ulterior motive) not to go into Eretz Yisrael, it would be the furthest thing from a personal agenda. He had no interest in preserving his own honor. His motivation would have been totally for the Sake of Heaven, a talmid being devoted to his Rebbe. So, if Yehoshua would have tried to sabotage the mission, it would definitely have been an aveira, but it would have been an aveira of the second category – that he perceives as a mitzvah!

So, says Rav Yaakov Yosef, everything is understood: Moshe Rabbeinu assumed that somewhere along the line the meraglim would say to one another "Hey! Wait a minute! We should sabotage the plan of the Ribono shel Olam because of our own honor? We can't do such a thing! How low can someone be?" In other words, guilt would eventually get to them. Moshe, therefore, felt that he did not need to daven for the other eleven spies. They would come around and decide not to sabotage the mission on their own. However, when Moshe saw the great humility of Yehoshua, and that Yehoshua did not want to be the leader, Moshe recognized that this was a much more difficult aveira to overcome because it was disguised in the form of a mitzvah. Therefore, Moshe felt that Yehoshua needed s'ata d'shmaya more than any of the others, so Moshe davened specifically that Yehoshua be saved from the scheme of the meraglim.

Values Trickle Down – For Better and For Worse

With so many things to talk about in Parshas Shelach, there is an incident in the parsha that is often overlooked: The day after the Divine decree that this generation would not enter Eretz Yisrael and that they would die out in the wilderness, there was a group that decided on their own to make an abortive attempt to enter the land in an ostensible show of remorse and repentance for having accepted the negative report of the meraglim. Moshe immediately chastised them and warned them that their efforts would not be successful. This group of rebels did not listen to Moshe Rabbeinu.

The pasuk says, "va'ya'apilu" (They defiantly ascended...to the mountaintop...) (Bamidbar 14:44). On this basis, this group was known as the m'apilim. The Torah says that Amalek and the Canaanites who dwelt on the mountain descended and beat them back to Charnav. (Bamidbar 14:45). The m'apilim were wiped out for refusing to accept the Divine decree.

The Baal HaTurim notes that the Gematria value of va'ya'apilu is Tzelafchad, implying that Tzelafchad was one of the m'apilim (as mentioned

in Maseches Shabbos 96b). It is interesting that despite being wrong, Tzelafchad had his heart in the right place. Of course, when Hashem says "Don't go," you don't go. When Moshe Rabbeinu says "Don't go," you don't go. However, Tzelafchad had his heart in the right place in that he loved Eretz Yisrael. He wanted to go into Eretz Yisrael. In this particular instance, his chibas ha'aretz caused him to make a misguided, bad decision, but it was still chibas ha'aretz.

Later on, at the end of Sefer Bamidbar, who came to Moshe Rabbeinu manifesting a love for Eretz Yisrael? It is none other than Tzelafchad's daughters! They protest "Our father died in the dessert! What is going to be with us? We want a portion in Eretz Yisrael!" Where did they get that love of the land? Obviously, it came from their father. Tzelafchad had a chibas ha'aretz. He must have talked about Eretz Yisrael with his family. His daughters were raised hearing about the beauty and richness of the land and were instilled with a love of Eretz Yisrael.

The lesson is that our values trickle down to our children. Children pick these things up. If we have ahavas haTorah, they see that. If we have ahavas Eretz Yisrael, they see that. If we have a sense of kavod for rabbonim and Torah scholars, they see that. But if we have a love of money and things like that, they see that as well. If we perpetually have an attitude of cynicism, they see that too. It all trickles down. So, although Tzelafchad did something which was obviously wrong, his love of the land trickled down to his children to the extent that they later said, "We want our portion in the Land of Israel!"

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A "Different Spirit"

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Twelve leaders were dispatched on an excursion to collect intel about the land of Israel. Tragically, they turned- against Hashem and against Jewish history. They returned with terrifying reports about cities fortified to the sky and about a fearsome land roaming with giants who dwarfed human beings into the size of insects. Their devious slander and cowardly lack of faith derailed Jewish history. What was shocking was the complete lack of any debate or internal discussion. Hadn't Hashem just liberated them from Egyptian slavery, split the raging oceans and parted the heavens at Sinai? Shouldn't He be trusted to assure the successful settlement of the land which He Himself had promised. Panicked and delirious with fear, they betrayed ancient divine promises. Only two of these men displayed any courage. Yehoshua, Moshe's closest talmid and his future successor, could be counted upon to remain loyal to his mentor. Alongside Yehoshua, Calev, a relatively unknown, also defied this insidious conspiracy, almost succeeding in restoring public faith. Where did he get his courage and his strength from? Part of the answer is that he drew his conviction from his "defiant" wife,

herself trained to resist public opinion. According to one report in the Gemara, Calev married Batya, the Egyptian princess who had rescued Moshe from a watery death. Her heroic rebellion against the system was a bold defiance of her own father's decree. Batya rebelled against the Egyptian culture of blood and death, saved a Jewish infant, and triggered our liberation from Egypt. Years later, her husband Calev demonstrated similar fortitude by refusing to sheepishly fall in line with the conspirators. Two rebels, married in resistance, defied public opinion and almost rescued Jewish history. Calev was rewarded by being one of the few of his generation to enter Israel. The Torah announces that he had "a different spirit" about him. His non-conformist spirit emboldened him to resist the mob and to deliver truths. Whether people were willing to accept truths is another matter. Regardless, he stood up to lies and to distortion. He had a different spirit.

Group thinking One of the great ironies of the internet revolution is that it encourages herd mentality. Ideally, the internet should be a democratizing force, decentralizing the information flow, and empowering people to consume only the information they choose. However as with all human liberties, unconditional freedoms turn into oppressive cultural tyrannies. Instead of fostering greater personal autonomy social media has exacerbated group thinking. Social media incarcerates us in echo chambers which limit what we see and what we are exposed to. Additionally, it creates viral content compelling us to join popular trends without full evaluation of the facts. Moreover, social media empowers influencers with disproportionate sway regarding issues they are completely uneducated about. Finally, social media allows false ideas to quickly spread, creating the bogus impression of truth. All these factors incite a herd mentality. We have witnessed the toxic effects of herd mentality weaponized in the attack against our people and against the truth. Herd mentality has become a mob mentality. The victims of violence have been miscast as criminals. Calls for ceasefire have degenerated into chants for the murder of Jews. It is frustrating that so many get it so wrong. It is frustrating that so many are so blinded by hate, that they have absolutely no interest in even the basic facts. It is frustrating to see the world go insane with anger and hatred. It is not only frustrating, but also frightening. Frightening to watch mobs of Arabs hunt innocent people in Jewish neighborhoods around the world. Frightening to see Jewish stores and synagogues looted and frightening to face the venomous hatred of an enraged world.

To stand alone

Yet, we are the people of a different spirit, and we have faced this hatred before. It has been our legacy to stand tall and block out the noise and the hatred. We have always possessed this courage and this "different spirit" and our current crisis should be no different. The gemara records that, upon entering Israel, Calev detoured to Chevron to visit the Me'arat Hamachpeilah and to daven for the strength to defy the spies. Standing at the graves of our Avot and Imahot he surely identified with their ability to stand alone and resist their own culture. These founders of our nation weren't yet referred to as Jews or even as Israelites, but as Ivrim, or those from the "other side". They had the courage to stand on one side while the entire world stood on the other side. To be a Jew is to be comfortable standing alone. For centuries, we preached monotheism to a world drunk with pagan gods. We stood alone. For centuries we spoke of a civil society which preserved the dignity of Man, while the world was subjugated by brutal tyrants and miserable societies. We stood alone. For the past thousand years we faced malicious hostility and brutal violence while we were consistently demonized as the "other". We stood alone. During the nightmare of the Holocaust, Hitler tried to erase us from this planet, while much of the world stood by silently. We stood alone. During the first few decades of the State of Israel, hostile Arab countries partnered with the powerful Soviet Union in an attempt to crush our small country. We stood alone. We have always been the people of a "different spirit", unafraid to stand alone. Now is no different. As the people of a "different spirit" we cannot be intimidated by the violence and the rage we face. This is our responsibility to past generations who stood tall and stood alone. We owe it to them. They would gladly trade places with us if they could. They didn't have a State or an army to protect them. They didn't live

in the company of a Jewish people returning to their homeland to jointly build a common future. They stood alone and lonely. We stand alone and united. We owe it to them to summon our courage and to preserve our "different spirit"

As the people of a different spirit, we have a debt to Jewish history. We owe it to past generations to maintain our own inner moral conviction and to not allow crazed mobs of confused college students to muddle our clarity. Just because hordes of antisemites or crowds of bewildered college puppets vilify us as the aggressors doesn't alter the fact that, since our return to Israel, we have been ceaselessly attacked, and additionally, that we were the primary victims of October 7th. We consistently seek peace while our enemies always seek death. We owe it to past generations to continue this war to its necessary conclusion, which we alone must determine. We cannot allow international pressure to prevent us from ending this war a moment sooner than it should or from defending our country and providing a safer world for our children. We owe it to past generations not to be afraid. The Torah prohibits fear for soldiers engaged in war. Of course, the Torah cannot legislate against the emotion of fear. Rather, it demands that we manage fear just as we manage our other emotions. There is a thin line between fear and panic and the Torah warns us against crossing it. We have a different spirit. We have outlasted all our enemies, and we will outlast hatred and antisemitism. Don't be afraid to stand alone. It is part of Jewish identity. Emunah. Courage. Spirit.

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From: Iraz@klalgovoah.org

Tidbits in Memory of Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz

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 Shmulevitz zt"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) reveals to us that, in fact, 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 present for all forty days. Rav Elya Baruch Finkel zt"l expounds further with the words of the Chofetz Chaim who writes that the underlying sin of lashon hara is the ayin ra - an 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, Rebbetzin Bruria 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 one's mind and heart in order to cultivate positive words and deeds.

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Shelach 5784: Lessons in Respect

Mrs. Michal Horowitz : June 25 2024

This week's parsha, Parshas Shelach, tells us of Cheit Ha'Meraglim, the Sin of the Spies. Prior to their planned, and (what they thought was) imminent entry to the Land, Moshe sent twelve spies to scout out the Land - one per tribe. Ultimately, after forty days and nights of scouting out the Land, the spies returned with a negative report about the Land, and convinced the

nation, en masse, that entering and conquering the Land would be impossible. The entire nation cried on that night (*Bamidbar* 14:1), and the Sages teach that that night was *Tisha b'Av* (*Taanis* 29a).

וְתִקְרֵב: "וַיַּעֲשֵׂה כָל הַקָּהָן וְנָתָן אֶת קָרְבָּן וְיַבְּרֵךְ הַעַם בְּלִילָה כְּהַזָּא", אמר ר' רבי יוחנן: אוזו לוייה ליל תשעה באב קהה. אמר לנו קדשו ברוך הוא: אפס ביכים בכקה של חם — וְאַנְגֵל קָבֵעַ לְכָם בְּכִיהַ לְדוֹרוֹת - And the verse says: "And the entire assembly lifted up their voice, and the nation cried on that night" (Bamidbar 14:1). That night was 9 Av, and HKB"ה said to them: You cried a purposeless cry; I will establish for you a crying for generations (Taanis 29a).

This disastrous sin, and rejection of the Land, as well as a lack of faith in the One Who Promised to give them the Land, caused a ripple effect of galus (exile) and churban (destruction) through the generations.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski z'l writes, "The episode of the spies is one of the most enigmatic occurrences in the Torah. The twelve men chosen were tribal leaders, and Rashi states that they were righteous people (Rashi to Bamidbar 13:3). What happened to them that caused them to lose faith in G-d and discourage the nation from entering the Promised Land? Furthermore, the Abarbanel says that Moshe's involvement in sending the spies was the real reason he was not permitted to enter the Land" (Twerski on Chumash, p.306).

How can we understand this entire enigma of this sin? Why did Moshe agree to send the spies, once G-d had promised him - and the nation - that it was a good Land. In fact, at the Burning Bush, before Hashem tells Moshe about Matan Torah, He tells him about Eretz Yisrael! "And I am coming down to save them from the hand of the Egyptians, **אֶל-הָאָרֶץ הַהְרָאֶזְתִּי מִן-** **אֶל-הָעָלָמָן** - and to take the nation out of this land, to the Land that is good and broad, to the Land flowing with milk and honey" (Shemos 3:8).

What happened, and how did this happen?

Rabbi Dr. Twerski explains that, "Thirty-eight years later Moshe reminds the nation of this tragic sin. He says: 'All of you approached me and said, 'Let us send some men ahead of us and let them spy out the Land' (Devarim 1:22). Rashi comments that the phrase 'all of you (approached me)' indicates that they came as a mob, the young pushing the elders out of the way. This was complete disrespect. Yet, nonetheless, Moshe says, 'This idea appealed to me' (ibid, 1:23)" (Twerski on Chumash, p.306).

How could Moshe have seen the people pushing each other out of the way - you - וַיָּקְרֹבּוּ אֶלְيָהּ כָּלָם בְּעָרְבָּא - יְלִדִים וּזְהִבְרִיִּם, וּזְקִנִּים דּוֹפְכִין אֶת הָרָאִים all approached me in a great multitude/crush of people - the youth were pushing the elderly and the elderly were pushing the tribal leaders (Rashi to Devarim 1:22) - and nevertheless agreed to their plan? In the very next verse, he himself says: **וַיֹּאמֶר קָצְבֵן הַקָּדוֹר**, and the matter was good in my eyes, so I chose twelve men from amongst you, one man per tribe (ibid. v. 23).

Rabbi Dr. Twerski proposes that, "Moshe's error was that he mistook their pushing and shoving as enthusiasm for entering the Land, and this caused him to err - and overlook their lack of respect for the elders and leaders."

This misinterpretation was Moshe's complicity in the Sin of the Spies.

"Respect is primary in Judaism...lack of respect is a mortal sin. The spies were indeed righteous people at the beginning of the journey, but they were sent as agents of the people. And in halacha, an agent is a representative of the principal. While in mussar, an agent can be affected by the character of the principal. Having become agents of the people - people who were disrespectful towards Moshe, each other, and ultimately G-d - the scouts/agents were corrupted and their perspective was distorted.

"The fatal report of the spies resulted, not only in the death of that entire generation, but in a disastrous way on our entire history... We can rectify their mistake by being scrupulous in respect, not only of our elders, but of every person, young and old" (Twerski on Chumash, p.306-307).

In a generation, time and world that is sorely lacking in respect - one only has to take a cursory look at the news for countless real-life examples of the disastrous effects of lack of respect, one man for another - our nation must be elevated and live higher. We must strive to always show respect to others, through our thoughts, speech and actions.

A certain man recalled the following interaction he had with Rav Moshe (Rav Moshe Feinstein zt'l, 1895-1986). "One evening, I answered the doorbell and there stood Rav Moshe and his assistant, Rabbi Moshe Rivlin. We shook hands and I then escorted them upstairs to my dining room. My wife brought in glasses of tea and we began to talk. Rav Moshe came to ask that I support his yeshiva, and our discussion went on for some time.

"Finally, Rav Moshe rose to leave. It was then that my two young sons came to ask to take a picture with the Rosh Yeshiva. I was embarrassed but Rav Moshe said, 'No, no, there is nothing wrong at all. I would be happy to pose with them.' He put an arm around each boy and I took the picture. He wished me well, and then he left.

“A few minutes later the doorbell rang again. I opened it and was shocked to see Rav Moshe and Rabbi Rivlin standing at my door. Rav Moshe explained that they had forgotten to thank my wife for the tea. So he and Rabbi Rivlin had climbed the stairs once again (Rav Moshe was 74 at the time), thanked my wife, and then they left” (Reb Moshe, 25th Yahrzeit Edition, Artscroll Mesorah, p.214).

We live in a world where respect is virtually non-existent. Klal Yisrael must rise higher, and remember we are a nation of 'with our youth and our elders we shall go' (Shemos 10:9). Perhaps when we respect each other - in our families, neighborhoods, communities, and in our nation - we will be able to be mesaken (rectify) the sin of the spies, and effect redemption.

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/1101816>

Parashat Shelach

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider : June 24 2024

Taking the Land's Hand in Marriage

If asked what sin the spies were guilty of, most people would answer that it is *leshon ha-ra*, sinful speech, about the promised land. The Midrash makes their sin more egregious by saying that the spies failed to learn the evident lesson from the very last episode of the previous parashah. Right before the shameful episode that begins Parashat Shelach, Miriam spoke *leshon ha-ra* about her brother and was punished in such a way that the entire million-strong nation had to take notice. The willful ignorance of the spies was unforgivable.¹

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik noticed a more substantive connection between the events. Miriam had failed to realize that her brother Moshe, the greatest prophet to have ever lived, was categorically different from all others. His segulah or special quality put him in a category of his own.² Similarly, the spies failed to perceive the segulah of the Holy Land, its unique character that makes it different from all other lands on the face of the earth.³

The Land of Israel is not a mass of dirt and stone. In at least three places in the Book of Leviticus, the Rav discerned the special character of the Land, particularly in how it is responsive to the needs and activities of the Jewish people living on it.

(1) The Torah enjoins us to observe a sabbatical year, shemitah, every seven years, and a jubilee every fifty. It then preempts the question of how the Jewish people will have food if they are not working the land, by saying that it will provide an abundance in the other years. It is a land attuned to the needs of the segulah people who inhabit it. "Eretz Yisrael has a vibrant, vital personality that distinguishes it from all other lands."⁴

(2) Shemitah is not described as a year of rest for the farmer, but a Sabbath for the land itself. Man rests on Shabbat, the Land of Israel rests on shemitah. Unlike other lands, Eretz Yisrael has a special character.⁵

(3) Transgressions made in the Land contaminate it, leading to an almost allergic reaction, by which its inhabitants are ejected, or, more viscerally, vomited out (Leviticus 18:28). The Land cannot tolerate sinful people, just as the body naturally rejects foreign tissue. The Holy Land is only at peace with holiness.⁶

Land as Bride

The Israelites already knew all of this by Parashat Shelach in the Book of Numbers, as it appears already in the Book of Leviticus. Not only would this land flow with milk and honey, but it would be a singular place, chosen by God as the only place for His Shechinah (divine presence), for a singular people, “a nation, one of its kind, which God has designed to preserve and disseminate His Divine teachings.”⁷ The Maharal argued that entering this unique land was part of the very plan of the Exodus and the final phase of redemption. God promised: “I shall take you out... I shall rescue you... I shall redeem you... I shall take you to Me... I shall bring you to the land” (Exodus 6:6-8).⁸

The Rav compared the ontological union between the singular people with their singular land, where their shared destiny would unfold, to an eternal marriage. In this context, he cited a halachah which states that a man may not marry a wife sight unseen. No matter how many glowing recommendations pour in from trustworthy sources about the match, the prospective groom must make his wife’s personal acquaintance. The connection must be formed in the depths of the heart and without reservations.⁹ Therefore, “before commitment could be deeply rooted and irrevocably assumed,” the people had to “meet” the land through their tribal princes.¹⁰

Meeting the Soulmate

If one reads Moshe’s checklist carefully, as the Rav did, one sees that Moshe primarily requested a demographic and agricultural report. Although the quantity and quality of produce is important for armies, who famously march on their stomachs, it is clear that information of military value was secondary to data on the nature of the land itself. Otherwise, why take pains to personally bring back clusters of grapes rather than sample and rate them in situ? The Rav noted further that the usual Hebrew root for spying (שָׁבֵן) is not employed here; instead we find a root that seems to indicate scouting or touring.¹¹ This all makes sense in the framework of an arranged match. The people were promised a land of milk and honey by the ultimate Matchmaker, but Moshe wanted their representatives to become acquainted with the entire land firsthand.

The sin of those meant to become acquainted with the land was, in the Rav’s words: “Their report was that of spies, not that of scouts; they balanced debits against credits and declared the entire enterprise hopeless. With grandeur looking down on them, all they could see was the mundane.”¹²

In the same way Miriam failed to see what made Moshe sui generis, the spies and the people could not see the segulah of the land. The land has a certain *je ne sais quoi*, a character and personhood that is beyond rational definition and logical categories. Its choice is an absolute expression of God’s will. According to the Maharal, this grave error committed millennia ago of underestimating the vital relationship between the Land of Israel and our people, continues to have a detrimental effect on generations of Jews who, until this very day, fail to acknowledge the land’s indispensability to living a committed life.¹³

Exploring the Rav’s Insight

If one can put the Rav’s insight in different terms, the scouts considered the land too cerebrally, and did not let their heart guide the initial meeting with the land of their destiny. The first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Mandate Palestine, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, once made a quip that expresses the same idea.

A Jew from the Diaspora was once visiting and touring the land, and he wanted to explore the possibility of living there permanently. He presented the pros and cons of living there to Rav Kook and made numerous calculations (השנתון) to try and determine whether it was worthwhile for him to make the move. Rav Kook remarked: “Before the Israelites entered the land, they killed Sichon, king of Cheshbon 14”.¹⁴ In order to be find one’s home in the land, one must eliminate calculations and take the plunge.¹⁵ Furthermore, it is our duty to expunge the spies’ undervaluation of the land from our consciousness in every single generation, and to inculcate the centrality of the land to our national existence.¹⁶

The Rav suggested that we can learn from Moshe himself what it means to yearn for the Land. Moshe lived in the camp of the Levites that was closest to the Mishkan, he entered it, and had regular, direct contact God. Still, he

knew that an indispensable dimension of his spiritual life was missing outside the Land.¹⁷ There are communities throughout the world in which Jews live full Torah lives, but like Moshe they should have an insuppressible desire to live in the eretz segulah, the singular, Jewish Land.¹

<https://www.tekhelet.com/pdf/conundrum.pdf>

TEKHELET - A CHEMICAL CONUNDRUM

Emily J. Liebling

“...And they shall place upon the tzitzit of the corners [of the garment] a thread of tekhelet” (Bamidbar 15:38). “You shall make the mishkan of ten curtains twisted linen and tekhelet and argaman and tola’at shani...” (Shemot 26:1).

“You shall make the robe of the ephod entirely of tekhelet” (Shemot 28:31). These verses represent a mere sample of the myriad references made to the pigment of tekhelet in the Torah. Conventionally translated as the color turquoise, tekhelet has become nothing short of a mystery to its seekers. The chilazon is the source of tekhelet (Shabbat 26a), yet the identity of its species is fraught with uncertainty. As such, the Midrash states that the tekhelet has been concealed and today we possess only white tzitzit (Bamidbar Rabba 17:5) [1]. Because of this anonymity, the majority of observant Jews continue the tradition of not using tekhelet. In relatively recent times, however, there has been a concerted effort to re-determine the nature of tekhelet and the process of its production.

The color of tekhelet has long been associated with royalty and nobility, as can be seen from the verse, “clothed in tekhelet, governors and rulers...” (Yechezkel 23:6). The vestments of the Kohein Gadol were sewn of tekhelet-dyed wool and the palace of King Achashverosh was adorned with the piercing blue, as well (Esther 1:6). The Gemara, in Menachot 44a specifies that “the chilazon emerges from the water once every seventy years and with its blood tekhelet is dyed; therefore, tekhelet is expensive.” Rashi comments that the rarity with which the chilazon appears on land is the reason for its astronomic cost. This could provide an understanding as to why the color was found mainly in the company of the wealthy. In fact, it was precisely the harvesting of the chilazon that gave the tribe of Zevulun its great wealth. When Moshe blessed Bnei Yisrael before his death, he declared to Zevulun, “...for by the riches of the sea they will be nourished and by the treasures concealed in the sand” (Devarim 33:19). The Talmud, in Megilla 6a, discloses that the “treasures” refer to “white glass” and the blood of the chilazon.

In various and disparate locations, the Gemara gives several criteria by which the chilazon is identified. Why, then, is this creature unbeknownst to us today? The answer lies in the fact that our tradition gives specific criteria for the chilazon, but several species would have to be combined to meet those criteria. Some of the physical characteristics include:

- Its appearance on land once every 70 years (Menachot 44a).
- Its anatomy is like that of a fish (Menachot 44a).
- It is captured with nets that are lowered into the water (Shabbat 74b).
- Its capture on Shabbat is prohibited by tzad (Shabbat 75a).
- The method of dye extraction from the chilazon is described as “potzea”, the cracking of a hard surface (and not korea, which would imply the ripping of flesh) (Shabbat 75a).

Descriptions of the tekhelet itself are given, as well:

- Its blood is collected in a separate sack, and does not diminish the life of the chilazon upon extraction (Tosfot, Ketuvot 5b).
- The dye is of better quality when extracted from a live chilazon (Shabbat 75a).
- The color of tekhelet from the chilazon is identical to that of kala ilan (indigo) (Bava Metziah 61b).
- Tekhelet is permanent and does not fade with time nor wash out of the dyed wool (Menachot 43b).

Even though so many details are known about the chilazon and the tekhelet, the question still remains as to why the manufacture and wearing of tekhelet ever fell out of practice? There has been much speculation about the disappearance of tekhelet. No doubt ever existed in our tradition as to the

identity of the chilazon or the process of tekhelet production. The falling from practice of dying with tekhelet was not a result of suddenly forgetting how to accomplish the task. It was due, rather, to the political decrees of Rome, as well as the enormity of its cost. During the supremacy of the Roman Empire, emperors, among them Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius, proclaimed an official prohibition against the public production of tekhelet. They restricted the wearing of this royal color only to certain nobility, threatening capital punishment to those who disobeyed. Thus, the great danger associated with the use of tekhelet caused it to become lost as the generations passed. Additionally, the production of tekhelet was very expensive, even for the nobility who were permitted to use it. To appreciate the expense that tekhelet represented, in 301 BCE, one pound of tekhelet-dyed wool cost 50,000 dinarii, a salary of almost three years for a baker [2]. Throughout the ages, several proposals have been made as to the chilazon's identity. Although modern day evidence is not supportive, Rambam, Rashi, and Tosfot agree that the chilazon is a fish. This creature satisfies the first three criteria, but how, then, can its dye be removed by potzea, which would imply that the chilazon has a hard shell to be cracked or smashed? Rashi resolves the issue and proposes that in this context, potzea means "squeezing out" the blood, or dye, from the chilazon. Some maintain that because tekhelet is used in the construction of the mishkan, it must be derived from a kosher source. Others disagree and counter that the dye is used to color materials which necessarily adhere to kashrut laws; the dye, in and of itself, is not considered to be substantive and may, therefore, come from non-kosher animals [3].

A resurrection of the search for tekhelet came with the advent of a renewed Messianic enthusiasm of the nineteenth century. Religious leaders wrote and preached about the imminent redemption to the eager masses. Amid the excitement, were discussions regarding the rebuilding of the Temple and the recreation of the priestly garb. A standstill was then reached; how could the holy vestments be made without tekhelet? Rabbi Gershon Henoch Leiner, the Radziner Rebbe, assumed the responsibility of finding the lost ingredient and the animal from which it comes. He traveled to an aquarium in Naples to investigate a suggestion that the chilazon was the squid, *Sepia officinalis*, or as more commonly known, the cuttlefish. He consulted with the chemists of his town and found that its black ink secretions could be turned to blue. The Talmudic descriptions of the anatomy of the chilazon and its blue dye now paralleled his discovery. In three treatises, *Sefunei Temunai Chol*, *Petil Tekhelet*, and *Ein HaTekhelet*, R' Leiner identified the chilazon as the cuttlefish.

In 1913, as part of his doctoral dissertation on tekhelet, Rabbi Isaac Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Dublin and subsequently Chief Rabbi of Israel, contacted eminent chemists and dye experts in Germany for an analysis of the tekhelet of the Radziner Rebbe. The shocking results showed that the deep blue was, in fact, an inorganic dye known as ferric ferrocyanide, $Fe_7(CN)_{18}$, or Prussian blue. Upon request for the methods of tekhelet production used by the Radziner Chasidim, Rabbi Herzog noted that the ink was heated to very high temperatures and iron filings were then added to the hot liquid. Through this procedure, organic molecules in the ink decomposed. The carbon and nitrogen atoms recombined with the iron, producing the deep blue pigment. Thus, the Radziner's tekhelet was not from the squid, but from an inorganic substance that could be produced from a generic chemical reaction. It represented the recombination of the atomic components of any number of molecules. Rabbi Herzog decided that the Radziner Rebbe's formula could not be true tekhelet, as the Talmud goes to great lengths to specify the requirement of a specific biological species. He proffered, instead, that the chilazon could be the *Janthina* snail [4].

In the mid-1800's, archaeologists unearthed several "factories" where dye was produced. Near these structures were large piles of snail shells, among them, the *Murex trunculus* [2]. Recent chemical evidence has led scientists to believe that the chilazon is, indeed, the *Murex trunculus* snail, which was used by the Phoenicians to dye their garments. The dye of the *Murex trunculus* undergoes a series of transformations, from colorless to yellow to

green to blue, and finally, to purple [5]. Because tekhelet should be purely indigo, the presence of purple is very enigmatic.

In the 1980's, Otto Elsner of the Shenkar College of Fibers investigated the ancient technique of exposing the dye to the sun. He and Ehud Spanier of Haifa University researched this method even further and found that when the *M. trunculus* dye is in a chemically reduced state and subsequently exposed to any form of ultraviolet light, the purple hue completely disappears. Thus, the dye naturally reduces upon exposure to sunlight, which would explain the method of old [4].

The biochemistry of the in vivo dye production was later explained. The precursors of the dye are in the snail's hypobrachial gland as a clear, colorless liquid. Upon the liquid's exposure to air and sunlight, an enzyme known as purpurase converts it into the dye. The reaction produces a mixture of the blue indigo and the purple dibromoindigo. The sunlight causes the carbon-bromine bonds to break and the molecule is transformed into indigo, or tekhelet. Because of the rapid denaturation of purpurase, the gland must be squeezed immediately from the living mollusk, which is a criterion consistent with the Gemara's description that the animal remain viable after the extraction of the dye [4]. Rabbi Dr. Moshe D. Tendler, Shlita, writes that though no single individual can testify that he has received a tradition as to the identity of the chilazon and tekhelet, the knowledge that has surfaced from research and investigation is almost incontrovertible. Thus, "...the matter is equivalent to the testimony of two witnesses, whose word is sufficient to establish a matter" [2].

The complexity of the modern reestablishment of tekhelet is truly fascinating. It reflects the beautifully unwavering devotion of the Jew to HaShem and His commandments. The tireless efforts of those determined to find the chilazon and study the manufacture of its dye have hopefully contributed to the nearing of our final redemption. May we merit once again to see the tekhelet-colored constituents of the third and final Temple speedily in our days.

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from: Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com> **to:** Beth Sholom Landau Bill <latemaariv@bethsholom.org> **date:** Jun 27, 2024, 10:22 PM **subject:** Potomac Torah Study Center Devrei Torah for Shabbat Shelach 5784

BS"D The Internet Parsha Sheet, an outstanding compilation, will be available at parsha.net shortly after midnight. I recommend this compilation highly.

Alan

BS"D June 28, 2024

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

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.

With the blessing of Hashem, Moshe sends twelve leaders, one from each tribe, to tour Canaan for forty days and report back whether the land is good, the people are strong or weak, the cities are open or fortified, the land is fertile, and whether there are trees. The meraglim return, verify that it is indeed a land of milk and honey, and that the land produces terrific crops. However, they also report that the people are giants, that they view B'Nai Yisrael as grasshoppers, and that the land devours its people.

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag asks how the scouts sin, since they answer Moshe's questions. The sin of the majority report is that they assume that the Canaanites view B'Nai Yisrael as lowly insects and that the land devours its people. How do the ten Meraglim know what the Canaanite people believe? They do not investigate why so many people die during the forty day period. [Yehoshua's spies forty years later learn that the Canaanite people have heard of the power of Hashem and are terrified of B'Nai Yisrael. Chazal infer that there are so many deaths because God keeps the Canaanite people busy with funerals to protect the Israeli spies.]

Rabbi David Fohrman and the scholars at alephbeta.org note parallels in language and situation between the instructions and task of the Meraglim and two other earlier incidents in the Torah. When Yaakov sends Yosef to check on his brothers, they throw him in a pit and plan to kill him. Yehuda convinces the other brothers instead to sell Yosef to traders who will sell him as a slave in Egypt. In a second incident, after the Exodus, and after B'Nai Yisrael cross the Sea of Reeds, Amalek attacks the weakest members of B'Nai Yisrael, those in the back who have trouble keeping up with the others. Moshe selects Yehoshua to lead the fight against Amalek.

Yehoshua, Aharon, and Hur (Caleb's son) stand and help Moshe hold up his arms to inspire B'Nai Yisrael in the battle.

Yehoshua, from the tribe of Ephraim (Yosef), teams with Hur (tribe of Yehuda) to fight against Amalek and later joins Hur's father Caleb among the Meraglim. Although Yehoshua has a family history reason not to trust Caleb or Hur, he works closely with these leaders from Yehuda to lead the fight against Amalek and oppose the evil report of the ten evil Meraglim. The partnership of Yehoshua with Caleb and Hur is a significant step in unifying the Leah and Rachel factions among B'Nai Yisrael.

Rabbi Marc Angel and Rabbi Michael Gordan both observe that leaders often err, and a majority can lead a group toward a misguided path. Rabbi Angel quotes playwright Diane Grant: "It's better to walk alone, than with a crowd going in the wrong direction."

In Sefer Shemot, when the people sin, Moshe quickly debates God until He forgives the people. When the people follow the majority report, cry about their coming doom, and seek to return to Egypt, both Moshe and Hashem are furious. God again threatens to kill all the people and start over with Moshe.

The only argument Moshe can make is that killing B'Nai Yisrael would be a public relations disaster for God – other nations would interpret this course as indicating that Hashem does not have enough power to bring the people into the land that He has promised. Hashem partially relents. He will delay their entry into the land for forty years, the generation of the Exodus (other than Caleb and Yehoshua) will die, and the next generation will enter the land.

Why are God and Moshe so much more angry in Sefer Bemidbar than in Shemot? The people of the generation of the Exodus see Hashem's power, such as a year of plagues against Egypt and destruction of the Egyptian army and weapons. They also see His love for the people – manna six days a

week, quail on some occasions, water from rocks, fighting against enemies, and keeping dangerous animals and pests away from the people. They should learn from the war against Amalek that God fights for B'Nai Yisrael, even when we do not see His impact directly. The reason for the plagues and wars is to teach B'Nai Yisrael that Hashem is with us, even when He hides His presence from our view. Yehoshua and Caleb understand this lesson. The other ten Meraglim and the people fail to learn this lesson, and they therefore do not deserve to enter the land.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on the mitzvah of tzitzit to bring this lesson to the current situation in Israel. Since the horrors of October 7, there has been a religious revival in Israel, especially among the soldiers and many women in Israel. Many soldiers have started wearing tzitzit and davening daily with Tefillin. Soldiers are reciting Gomel after dangerous situations. Many women are baking challah and preparing Shabbat meals for soldiers.

Military history scholars have frequently concluded that they can explain which side has won virtually every war in history. The exception is that they cannot explain the victories of Israel against the combined forces of many larger and often better equipped Arab countries. Iran recently sent a thousand missiles toward Israel on a Saturday night. Almost none of the missiles landed in Israel. There was no destruction of buildings. One person (a Druze girl) was injured, and she has recovered. Jordan and the United Kingdom joined the United States in helping to shoot down missiles. (How in the world did four countries combine to shoot down missiles without getting in the way of each other?) Egypt and many other countries, not all friendly to Israel, denounced Iran. The exercise exposed weaknesses in the Iranian military and weapons. The exercise was a public relations disaster for Iran. How can anyone explain these miracles without seeing the hand of Hashem fighting for Israel?

The most important lesson of Shelach is that we must see Hashem's protection in our lives – every day as well as over time. The sin of the majority report of the Meraglim is not understanding Hashem's lesson plan and role in protecting B'Nai Yisrael every day.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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. 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.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

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reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net date: Jun 27, 2024, 3:37 PM

Three Jewish Revolts—Then & Now, and the Response of a Jewish Leader In Tribute to the 30th Yartzeit of the Rebbe

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

In August 1977, on the way to the Camp David Accords, Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Brooklyn, NY Five Mothers

Four Catholic mothers and a Jewish woman were having coffee.

The first Catholic woman tells her friends, "My son is a priest. When he walks into a room, everyone calls him Father."

The second Catholic mother chirps, "My son is a Bishop. When he walks into a room people call him Your Grace."

The third Catholic mom says, "My son is a Cardinal. When he enters a room, everyone says Your Eminence."

The fourth Catholic woman declares, "My son is the Pope. When he walks into a room people call him Your Holiness."

They all turn to the Jewish woman, and give her a subtle, "Well?"

She replies, "I have a son. He's argumentative, confrontational, self-centered, narcissistic, impulsive, impossible and irrational. When he enters a room, people say, Oh My G-d!"

Disaster

It was perhaps the single greatest collective failure of leadership in the Torah. Ten of the spies Moses had sent to survey the land returned with a report calculated to demoralize the nation.

"We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large ... We cannot go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are ... The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height... We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."^[1]

The spies Moses sent to survey the land convinced the entire nation that the advance to the Land of Israel was doomed and that Moses had misled them by taking them out of Egypt. Hysteria consumed the nation. They demanded a new leader who would return them to Egypt.

Moses, in response, chastised the nation severely. He told them G-d's oath that they would not enter the land but rather roam the wilderness for forty years. Only their children, anyone younger than 20 at the time, would enter the Promised Land.

Defiance and Mutiny

This part of the story is relatively well-known. What is often overlooked is that this story is followed in the Torah by three narratives of rebellion—two in Shlach and the third in Korach. The implication behind the chronology of these events seems clear. All three scenes of mutiny were a response to the new and harsh reality of the nation destined to wander for four decades in the desert.

The first rebellion happens, the Torah says, immediately, the following morning after Moses gave them the news that they would not enter the Land. A group known as the "Maapilim," the defiant ones^[2] (we don't know their exact number, but it seems like it was a sizable group) assembled and decided to advance toward the Holy Land. They exclaimed, "We are ready! We shall ascend to the place G-d has spoken; indeed, we have sinned."

This time, though, Moses refuses to go along. "Why do you transgress the word of G-d? It will not succeed! Do not ascend, for G-d is not in your midst! And you will be smitten before your enemies."^[3]

But they disobeyed. They were determined to enter and conquer the Promised Land. "They defiantly ascended to the mountaintop, while the Ark of G-d's covenant and Moses did not move from the camp." It was an ill-advised move. They were struck down.^[4]

The Wood Chopper

The second rebellion is recorded a few verses later.

"And the children of Israel were in the desert—an apparent reference to the fact that the Jews were to remain in the desert long-term—and they found a man chopping wood on the Sabbath."^[5]

Let us recall that the day of rest has been held sacred by the Israelites even before they left Egypt. Later, it was enshrined as one of the Ten Commandments, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work and the seventh day is the day of Sabbath to your G-d, for G-d created the heavens and the earth in six days and on the seventh day He rested."^[6] It was one of the commandments heard by the entire nation from G-d directly at Mt. Sinai, encapsulating the core Jewish belief that

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

What Made Joshua and Caleb Different?

SHELACH LECHA

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The twelve men sent by Moses to explore the land of Israel came back with a wholly misleading report. They said:

"We cannot go up against those people, for they are stronger than us . . . The land which we have journeyed through and scouted is a land that consumes its inhabitants; and all the people we saw were tall and broad to a man."

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. Just not the second. They knew how they themselves felt, but 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.

Now 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^[1], 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 and quick to give up.

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. Where they do not succeed, 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. When do people with the fixed mindset thrive? "When things are safely within their grasp. If things get too challenging . . . they lose interest."

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." Parents can do great damage, Dweck says, when they tell their children they are gifted, clever, talented. This encourages the child to believe that he or she has a fixed quantum of ability. This in turn discourages them from risking failure. Such children often grow up to say things like, "I 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 person with a fixed mindset lives with the constant fear of failure. Those with a growth mindset don'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 all leading men among 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 ba'al 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 (see 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 fall 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.

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.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah

Parshas Shelach

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

כי כל האנשים הוראים את כבדי ... ולא שמעו בקולו ... אם יראו את הארץ ... וכל מנצץ לא יראו

All the men who have seen My Glory... and they have not listened to My voice... They shall not see the land ... all those that spurn Me shall not see it. (14:22,23)

The terms, Ha'ro'im, "Who have seen (My Glory)," and Im yiru, "They shall not see," appear to be closely related. This, explains Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, is why the Torah, in issuing the decree that this generation would not enter the Land, uses the expression, re'iyah, seeing, rather than im ya'vo'u, they will not come. He explains the rationale for the altered text. The Holy Land, the Eretz zovas cholov u'devash, flowing with milk and

honey, the Land in which Divine intervention is to be seen on a national basis can only attain its destiny if the people "see," acknowledge the Divine Presence in every aspect of their lives. They must see G-d in the Land as well. These people experienced Egypt – both the slavery and the redemption. They saw firsthand the awesome miracles and wonders. This was followed up in the wilderness where miracles were a daily occurrence. They should have developed a trust in Hashem which would thereafter inspire them to fear nothing else in the world.

Unfortunately, the script did not play out this way. The very converse of this "seeing" Hashem in the Land, believing that nothing would stand in their way, occurred. They were guilty of niutz, spurning Hashem. This form of rejection is the highest degree of scorn, which does not consider the object to be worthy of consideration. It describes the attitude manifest by the people: They had nothing whatsoever to talk about. After receiving the slanderous report of the spies, Hashem was no longer in their equation. Their sin was a lack of re'iyah, seeing. Their punishment fit the crime: They would not "see" the Land.

Acknowledging the presence of Hashem in our lives is a staple of Jewish belief. It is how we find meaning and purpose in the seemingly ordinary moments, viewing them as opportunities for spiritual growth and connection with the Almighty. When we see Hashem in our lives, it spurs us to be grateful, mindful and develop a deeper understanding of the sacred within the mundane.

One can only see, however, if he is looking. If his vision is stunted by spiritual myopia, or if he refuses to open his eyes and look, he will not see. Consciously choosing to ignore – or blatant refusal to acknowledge – the potential threats to our spiritual/moral compass is akin to closing our eyes to the clear and present danger ahead. As a result, we fail to take the necessary precautions that would circumvent the challenges to our spiritual dimension. Being open to and perceptive of the realities – both positive and negative – that surround us are essential to our personal growth and that of our families.

Lo ira ki Atah imadi, "I fear no evil for You are with me"

(Tehillim 23:4). The eternal words of David Hamelech should accompany a Jew throughout his life, so that he never forgets that he is not alone. Hashem is always with him. Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, related that prior to leaving his friends in the world of entertainment, Horav Uri Zohar, zl (probably the most famous ba'al teshuvah of our generation), they asked him for one parting joke (he had been a successful comedian). He agreed and related the following incident. Two students went for a ride on a motorcycle. They did nothing wrong and observed every rule of the road. This did not prevent an overzealous policeman from pulling them over and giving them the third degree. The two students were prepared with the correct answer to every one of his questions. He could not find a reason to give them a ticket. In desperation, he finally asked, "Tell me, how is it that you were able to ride so long without transgressing any of the laws?" They replied, "We have Hashem with us." As soon as the policeman heard this, he said, "Got you! Three riders!" He gave them a ticket. Rav Pincus sums it up: A Yid must never forget the ki Atah imadi; Hashem is with us.

The following story is related concerning Horav Yitzchak Aryeh Sekel of Michelstadt (Baal Shem of Michelstadt) who was a tzaddik nistar, hidden tzaddik, and a Torah scholar without peer. It is well-known that all Jews and gentiles that prayed at his grave prior to being inducted into the army during World War II returned safely. He was a descendant of Rashi and David Hamelech. News of his extraordinary abilities spread throughout the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. His reputation reached the ears of the Duke of Michelstadt who was impressed, but felt he needed to see this brilliance first hand. He summoned the young boy to his palace.

The duke was no fool, and he decided to put the boy to a test to ascertain if his powers were that be rectified with stitches and cosmetic creativity. Mistakes happen. If this were cardio-thoracic surgery, however, an error in a centimeter can spell a death sentence for the patient. It all depends on the surgical site. The heart, brain or any such organ which is critical for life demands surgical perfection with no room for error.

Shabbos is unlike any other mitzvah. It is a core mitzvah upon which the principles of Judaism are established. If one does not believe that Hashem rested on the seventh day of Creation, then his belief in Creation is flawed. Shabbos is the heart of Judaism, the source of blessing, the fountain of life for a Jew. To desecrate Shabbos is to sever one's relationship with the Shechinah.

The flipside is shemiras Shabbos. When we see the punishment meted out for desecrating Shabbos, we have an inkling of the extraordinary reward in store for he who observes Shabbos. One develops a greater, closer and more meaningful attachment to Hashem's Shemiras Shabbos, allowing him to experience me'ein Olam Habba, a semblance of the World-to-Come. Obviously, the blessings apply only under such circumstances that one observes Shabbos joyfully, looking forward to the moment that Shabbos begins, and dreading when it ends. Shabbos is here for us to commune with Hashem and infuse our own lives with His kedushah.

One Shabbos, Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, walked together with Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, to Yeshivas Chevron. A number of cars passed them by. Rav Elya began to moan, "I have such pity on these drivers. There is no one who could impress upon them the stringency of desecrating Shabbos. Let us return. I just cannot tolerate this." Rav Moshe Aharon said, "But Rebbe, we are almost at the yeshivah. The closer we get in proximity, the chillul Shabbos will decrease."

Rav Elya agreed, but he still emitted a loud moan. At that moment, a car stopped, and its driver looked up at Rav Elya and asked, "How do I get to Rechov Yaffo?" (The man was obviously clueless to what he was asking and whom he was asking for directions.) When Rav Elya heard this question, he broke out in bitter weeping, "What should I do?" he cried. "Give directions, so that a Jew will continue along in his chillul Shabbos, or ignore the question? How can I ignore a brother who asks me for help?" Rav Elya once again began to weep bitterly.

Seeing this, the driver stopped, shut his motor and exited the car, "Rebbe! Never did I sense rebuke that was sincere as I do now. My mother is shomeres Shabbos, observant, and, all Shabbos, she screams at me concerning my lack of observance, but I never saw her cry bitterly over my actions. I see, Rebbe, the sincerity, the love of Shabbos and the pain you have if a Jew desecrates it. I promise from here on in to begin to observe Shabbos as a Jew should!"

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When Must I Check for Shatnez?

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

In previous articles, available on the website RabbiKaganoff.com, I discussed many of the basic laws of shatnez. We learned at the time that the prohibition of shatnez exists only if the garment is made from a blend of sheep's wool and linen, but that wool of other species does not make shatnez. Thus, wool made of camel, rabbit or goat hair mixed with linen is not shatnez (Mishnah, Kilayim 9:1; see Rambam, Hilchos Kilayim 10:2). ("Wool" means simply soft hair that is comfortable enough to use as cloth.) Therefore since mohair and cashmere are both varieties of goat's wool and not made from sheep's wool, the existence of linen in a garment containing them will not make it shatnez. At the time, a correspondent noted that in practice one should not rely on this, since manufacturers usually add less expensive sheep's wool to mohair and cashmere. We also learned in the earlier articles that when a thread is spun from a blend of fibers, the halachic status of the thread is determined by what composes most of the thread's content and ignores the existence of other fibers inside the thread (Mishnah Kilayim 9:1). Therefore, a thread spun from goat hair fiber with a small amount of sheep's wool fiber cannot become shatnez, whereas a thread spun with a majority of sheep's wool fiber can. However, a thread of linen that is woven into or otherwise attached to a woolen garment renders the garment shatnez, and there is no bitul (Rosh, Hilchos Kilei Begadim #5 quoting Tosefta; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 299:1). Even a single linen thread in a large woolen garment renders the entire garment shatnez.

How should one check for Shatnez?

The first step in checking for shatnez is to read the label when looking at the garment. Although one cannot be certain from this that the garment is not shatnez, it may tell you that it is.

Years ago, I was present when a frum organization conducted a men's fashion show as a fundraiser. A local mechaneich was modeling a suit for the show when the announcer read the garment description over the microphone for all to hear: "This suit contains 70% wool and 30% linen." I will not describe the pandemonium that ensued.

Here is another example:

Following a lecture on shatnez, a woman came forward with a scarf for which the content label stated: 48% Linen 42% Wool 10% Cashmere. However, one should never rely on labels, which are notoriously inaccurate. Here is an example: =

May one rely on the label?

Since neither storekeepers nor manufacturers take any responsibility for the content label on their garments, I see no halachic basis to rely on them. The concepts of uman lo marei umnas, that an expert may be relied upon because he is careful and concerned not to damage his professional reputation, and mirtas, that a merchant is concerned about being caught lying because it will affect his business, are true only when being caught with a lie or an error that will disparage their professional reputation. In an environment where we see that clothing stores feel no responsibility, legally or commercially, for the accuracy of the content labels on the clothes that they sell, there is no halachic basis to rely on those labels.

Even when a label is accurate, it describes only the material itself, but not backings, linings, ornaments, loops, fillings, button thread, etc., all of which often contain shatnez. It is even common that garments contain remnants of wool or linen thread in seams and canvasses that accomplish no recognizable purpose. For example, a number of shatnez laboratories have reported woolen sweaters containing remnants of linen threads in their seams.

Here is another example: A sweater purchased in a store in Boro Park, was labeled as 70% acrylic and 30% wool. This appears to have correctly described the exterior of the sweater, but no mention was made of the materials' of the lining -- which was 100% linen -- making it shatnez min haTorah.

So how does one know whether a garment must be checked for shatnez?

Although all types of garments might contain shatnez, the halachic question is: When is the possibility of shatnez frequent enough to require that this garment be checked.

The laws of checking are not unique to shatnez. Let us see if we can compare shatnez to other halachic issues. The most extensive discussion about checking for non-kosher items regards checking animals to see if they are tereifos, defects that render them non-kosher. This halacha is germane to all meat, eggs and dairy products that we consume, since the eggs produced by a tereifah chicken and milk from a tereifah cow are also non-kosher. So what can we do? If we were to check every chicken or cow for tereifos before we consumed any eggs or dairy products, this would drive up the price of eggs and milk considerably, since we would need to slaughter the chicken before we could consume its egg and the cow before we could drink its milk. Obviously, we all realize that halacha does not require this. So what does halacha require?

The general rule regarding checking these items is as follows:

When a problem exists in more than half of a species, one may not consume the product of that species without checking. When one cannot easily check for a problem, and it occurs less than half the time, there is no need to check for a problem. One may eat eggs or drink milk and rely that the majority of chickens and cows are not tereifah.

Regarding meat, the halachic authorities dispute when one is required to check for tereifos. How high a percentage of tereifos is needed to require examination? A dispute over this issue developed in the early nineteenth century between two great poskim, Rav Efrayim Zalman Margolies, the Rav of Brody (Shu"t Beis Efrayim, Yoreh Deah #6) and Rav Yaakov of Karlin (Shu"t Mishkenos Yaakov, Yoreh Deah #16 & 17). The Beis Efrayim contended that it is not necessary to check for a tereifah if we do not find that Chazal and early poskim required it, whereas the Mishkenos Yaakov contended that if a certain tereifah occurs in ten per cent of animals, one is required to check every animal for this tereifah. (The halachic source for this figure of ten per cent is beyond the scope of this article.) It appears that the accepted approach today is to follow the Mishkenos Yaakov's ruling and check for tereifos that appear frequently (see Darkei Teshuvah 39:3), although some contemporary authorities feel that the percentage should be closer

to seven per cent than ten per cent. This percentage is usually called *mi'ut hamatzuy*, literally, a commonly found minority.

Do we compare *tereifos* to *shatnez*?

Do we do a statistical survey of *shatnez* found in clothing and see if we find *shatnez* in 10% of men's suits, ladies' sweaters, etc.?

The halachic sources do not imply this. Based on a Mishnah (Kilayim 9:7), the Rambam rules "Someone who purchases wool garments must have them checked very well to determine that they are not sewn with linen thread" (Rambam, Hilchos Kilayim 9:28). He does not say that it depends on the percentage of *shatnez* that we find.

For example, one early authority contends that whether we need to be concerned about *shatnez* depends on local market conditions (Rash, Kilayim 9:7). When hemp is readily available and less expensive than linen, one need not be concerned that a tailor would use linen (see also Taz, Yoreh Deah 302:4). The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 302:2) concludes the following: "One purchasing wool garments from a gentile must remove all the stitching and replace them with hemp," although he also rules like the Rash that one may be lenient when hemp is readily available and less expensive than linen. (We should note that there are authorities who disagree with the Rash and the Shulchan Aruch, contending that one may not be lenient even when hemp is readily available and less expensive than linen, because the tailor may prefer working with linen, which is stronger and easier to work than hemp.)

It appears that we do not use the rules of *mi'ut hamatzuy* -- that we statistically use 10% to determine whether we must check, for the laws of *shatnez* -- for the following reason. All the cases of *mi'ut hamatzuy* are when there is a natural situation that something happens -- wine sours, animals develop diseases or injuries that render them *tereifah*, or insects dine on vegetables. One cannot apply *mi'ut hamatzuy* to something dependent on the whim of a manufacturer, who is, after all, a *baal bechirah*. Thus, we should compare the laws of *shatnez* to situations where we are concerned about whether a product was adulterated with a non-kosher substitute. There the logic is: Do we suspect that someone would adulterate the product with non-kosher? The answer is that we must be strict when we suspect that there might be a problem, and we are not required to be strict when there is no reason for suspicion. The same rules apply to *shatnez*. With this background, we can understand that any garment that has a reasonable concern that there might be *shatnez* needs to be checked.

Cannot check in time-

What if I cannot get it checked in time, and I need to wear it immediately? Reuvein arrives in Zurich the day that his brother is getting married, but his suitcase did not end up on his flight. He has nothing appropriate to wear to the wedding, and there is no time to have a new suit checked for *shatnez*. May he purchase a suit and wear it to the wedding, and only afterwards have it checked for *shatnez*?

My suggestion is that he call a local *shatnez* tester or one of the major *shatnez* testing laboratories, as they may be able to advise which brands have a lesser chance of being *shatnez*, or they may know that a particular brand is mostly *shatnez* and it would be assur to wear that brand without checking.

Here is an actual story. The night of *bedikas chometz*, about 6 years ago, a yeshiva man called the Har Nof *Shatnez* lab. He purchased a new suit in Geula and wanted a "heter" to wear it on Pesach, relying that "most suits in Geula" are probably not *shatnez*. Although the particular brand had been *shatnez*-free in previous years, the *shatnez* checker knew that 700 suits containing *shatnez* of that brand were recently brought into Israel and some had been distributed to local "frum" stores. Based on this information, the "checker" told the consumer to do *bedikas chometz* and then bring the suit for checking. The suit's collar indeed contained *shatnez*, which was removed that night, and the suit was tailored the following morning. BH -- he didn't wear *shatnez* at his Pesach seder!

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Rav Kook Torah

Shlach: Rejecting the Land of Israel

"And [the spies] began to speak badly about the land that they had explored." (Num. 13:32)

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, and at the head of the table now sat his son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook

At the Sabbath table, one participant raised a disturbing topic: the phenomenon of visitors touring Eretz Yisrael and subsequently criticizing the country upon their return home. "These visitors complain about everything: the heat, the poverty, the backwardness, the political situation — and they discourage other Jews from considering moving here," he lamented.

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

The Failed Match

Once, there was a wealthy man who sought the hand of a particular young lady. She was the most beautiful girl in town and possessed many talents, as well as a truly refined character. Her family was not well-off, so they were enthusiastic about a potential match with the prosperous gentleman.

The young woman, however, had no interest 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 requested that she meet the young man at their home, to avoid causing him embarrassment. "Remember," he said, "just one meeting doesn't mean you have 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 afterward, his daughter made her entrance. However, 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!"

Rabbi 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, ready to accept only 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!"

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 befitting for a son of your eminent father, may his memory be a blessing!"

Seeing the Goodness of Jerusalem

Rabbi 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."

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."

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. Mordechai 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 Zevahim (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..." (Vayikra 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 Sinaiitic 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'hillim 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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Parshat Shelach Lecha

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Parashat Shelah reports the well-known, tragic story of the meraglim, the scouts sent by Bnei Yisrael to gather information (and fruit) from the Land of Cana'an. 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 Cana'anites, why do they need to send scouts at all? What difference does it make whether the Cana'anites 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 Cana'an 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 Shelah, 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 Cana'an. Without His help, they are beaten back by the Cana'anite 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 Leviyyim.
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 Mitzrayim. 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 Cana'an.

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 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 Cana'anite 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 grumblings 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, adacious 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]

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)	"I'ragel" (to spy)
the type of land, [its fruit, its cities etc..]	only military information

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 Kaleb 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 Kaleb 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 "mitzvat 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) Chilul 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) Tzizit

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?