

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #35, June 20-21, 2025; 25 Sivan 5785; Shlach Lecha 5785; Mevarchim HaHodesh
Rosh Hodesh Tammuz is next Thursday and Friday

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. Iran is now sending sophisticated cluster bomb missiles into Israel to maximize damage and casualties. May Hashem protect Israel and all our people from our enemies and their weapons.

Writing an introduction to my Devrei Torah each week, especially coming up with something I have not already discussed in recent years, is challenging enough. This week, with thunderstorms knocking out Internet connections several times during the past two days, has presented more issues than usual.

In addition to the regular Torah cycle, Sivan this year includes our continuing struggle with Gaza, the war with Iran. The Iranian monsters are now sending missiles with vicious cluster bombs into Israel, killing and injuring dozens of our Israeli fellow Jews, and destroying important buildings (including parts of the Weitzman Institute and hospitals).

While taking a break from my preparation last night, I picked up a book that I had acquired recently, Rabbi Ephraim Oshry's *Responsa from the Holocaust*. Rabbi Oshry was a young man when he was caught up in the ghetto of Kovno, Lithuania after the Nazis invaded the country in 1941. The Jews of Kovno came to Rabbi Oshry frequently with Halachic questions that arose when the Jews were confined to the ghetto and concentration camp and did not have access to Kosher food, ritual items, and other support that we take for granted. As the only halachic authority in the ghetto and concentration camp, Rabbi Oshry had to respond to questions according to Halachic precedent in situations that the rishonim probably never anticipated. Thanks to the mercy of Hashem, Rabbi Oshry was one of the few European Rabbis to survive the Nazi horrors. During the war, he wrote his questions and responses on scraps of paper. After the war, he transcribed the material and published the questions and responsa in Hebrew. He later translated, condensed, and published selected items in English in *Responsa from the Holocaust*.

In our parsha, Moshe selects and sends twelve men, leaders of the tribes (other than Levi) to enter the land of Canaan, check whether the land is fertile, the people are strong or weak, and the cities are open or walled. Ten of the men verify that the land is fertile but say that the people are giants and that B'Nai Yisrael would not be able to conquer the land. Only two of the men (Yehoshua and Caleb) give a contrary report, that with Hashem's help, the Jews would be able to conquer the land. Moshe and God are furious. The people ignore the lessons of God's power in defeating Paro and the Egyptian army, destroying the most powerful country of the time (Egypt), bringing water and food for three million people in a desert for forty years – something that God has provided because of His love for B'Nai Yisrael and our Avot. Hashem decrees that the generation of the Exodus will all die out, except for Yehoshua and Caleb, over the next forty years and

that only the next generation, those not yet twenty years old, will survive to enter and take over the land that He had promised to our ancestors.

God concludes the parsha by telling Moshe to command to the people that they make tzitzit for the corners of their garments and include a thread of turquoise blue wool among the fringe strings. When we see the thread, we are to remember Hashem's mitzvot, perform them, and not stray from His mitzvot by following any other influences. The mitzvah of tzitzit is the third paragraph of the Shema, words that we recite in our services twice a day to continue to refresh our memory of Hashem's commandment. Our tradition is that the mitzvah of tzitzit is equal to all the other mitzvot of the Torah, because when we look at them, we are to recall *all of Hashem's mitzvot*.

In the Kovno ghetto, the residents had no way to obtain ready made tzitzit or fibers to make new ones. One man, Meir Abelow, worked in a workshop where Jewish slave laborers used wool. Abelow planned to steal some strands of wool, hide them, and bring them into the ghetto where Jews could spin them for tzitzit. He asked Rabbi Oshry whether the Jews could use the stolen wool to make tzitzit and whether he (Abelow) would be sinning by stealing wool for this purpose. Rabbi Oshry ruled that taking wool from the Germans did not constitute theft and that the yeshiva boys could use the wool to make tzitzit. He also ruled that since there was no other way to obtain four corner garments, they could cut a large tallit in two, to turn it into two small garments. This plan brought great joy to the yeshiva boys, because they now had an opportunity to fulfill the great mitzva of tzitzit.

When we look around at the world, we should focus on God's love of our people and continued protection despite the hatred of our enemies throughout the world. Yes, our enemies seek to kill us and destroy our land and families. However, no other nation or people has survived for 3500 years. It is a miracle that such a small nation has survived for so long. Other, much larger and more powerful nations and religions have disappeared into other nations and religions. Meanwhile, we Jews, despite the efforts of many generations of enemies, continue to thrive and carry on our relationship with our Creator.

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 Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilisa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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 Shlach: Iran and Moral Clarity in Times of War

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers. ***

OTS dedicates Devrei Torah for this week to the memory of Staff Sergeant Naveh Leshem z"l, a graduate of our Derech Avot High School in Efrat, who fell in battle in southern Gaza. May Naveh's memory – and the memory of all our fallen soldiers – be a blessing.

As Israel engages in crucial defensive actions against Iran and bears the burden of safeguarding its citizens and future, the timeless lessons of this week's parsha feel especially relevant.

Parshat Shlach and its Haftarah in Sefer Yehoshua both recount missions of "spies" sent into the Land of Israel. But a closer reading reveals striking contrasts — in purpose, execution, and outcome — that offer enduring lessons on leadership, truth, and the moral demands of power — especially during times of war.

In Parshat Shlach, Moshe sends twelve men, *kulam anashim roshei b'nei Yisrael heima* — "all distinguished leaders of the Children of Israel")Bamidbar 13:3(. These were not undercover agents, but public figures, tasked not with espionage but with spiritual ambassadorship. Their mission, as framed by Moshe, was not military, but inspirational: to affirm the land's bounty and excite the people for their divine inheritance. In fact, the Torah doesn't call them *meraglim* — spies — but rather *tayarim*, those who "explore" or "scout")*latur et ha'aretz*(. Their goal was to inspire, to elevate national faith, not to assess military risk.

Yet despite reporting the truth about what they saw — the land's fertility and the presence of formidable inhabitants — their mission failed. Why? Because they misunderstood their purpose. Though factually accurate, their words injected fear instead of faith, and in doing so, they sowed doubt in the hearts of the nation. Their truth lacked vision; their facts lacked trust in God's promise.

Contrast this with the Haftarah from Sefer Yehoshua. Here, Yehoshua sends two anonymous spies — much like the recently revealed clandestine missions Israel was compelled to undertake against Iran — explicitly to *leragei* — to gather intelligence)Yehoshua 2:1(. This is classic espionage: secretive, strategic, and purposeful. They are not known. Their goal is to prepare for battle, not to inspire the people.

And yet, Yehoshua's spies' clandestine mission produces an extraordinary moral moment. In the heart of enemy territory, they encounter Rachav, a Canaanite woman of ill repute, who not only protects them but declares her faith in the God of Israel. She is spared — and later, according to the Rabbis)Bavli Megillah 14b(, becomes a righteous convert, counted among the ancestors of prophets.

Why does the Tanach preserve this story of Rachav for us? Because it teaches us that even in war — especially in war — the Jewish people are held to a higher moral standard. The Rambam)Hilchot Melachim 6:1(famously rules that even when waging a *milchemet mitzva*, an obligatory war, the Jewish people must first seek peace. War, even when justified, must be guided by ethical clarity. The saving of Rachav is not a tactical footnote; it is a moral headline.

This message could not be more relevant today. For years, Israel has warned the world that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons threatens not only Israel, but the entire free world. The Torah demands that we uphold justice and compassion, but when we are left with no choice, we bear responsibility to protect our people and the values of a free society. Unlike Iran, whose attacks deliberately target our civilians, Israel focuses solely on military objectives — even at great risk to our pilots and soldiers. Like Yehoshua's spies, who recognized and honored Rachav's humanity, we too must continue,

despite the extreme difficulty, to uphold our moral compass, even when our enemies exploit that very morality. This is not a weakness; it is our greatest strength! It is the embodiment of Tzelem Elokim, the divine image in every person.

May we be blessed with leaders – military, political and spiritual – who possess both the strategic clarity of Yehoshua's spies and the humility and moral vision that Moshe's emissaries lacked. And may we always remember that the land we strive to protect is not merely territory — but a living testimony to the principles and values we uphold.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, 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@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

** This week's OTS Devrei Torah are dedicated in loving memory of **Bryna (Bertha) Charif, z"l**, whose yartzheit is on 21 Sivan by Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney, Australia.

Dvar Torah: Shlach: A Powerful Message about Our Power! (2002)

by Rabbi Label Lam

Moshe sent them to scout the Land of Canaan, and he said to them:

"Go up this way in the south and climb up the mountain. You shall see what kind of land it is, and the people who inhabit it; are they strong or weak? Are there few or many? And what of the land they inhabit? Is it good or bad? And what of the cities in which they reside are they in camps or in fortresses? What is the soil like? Is it fat or lean? Are there any trees in it or not? You shall be courageous and take from the fruit of the land." It was the season when the first grapes begin to ripen. (Bamidbar 13:17-20)

Are they strong or weak? : He gave them a sign. If they live in open cities]it is a sign that[they are strong, since they rely on their might. And if they live in fortified cities]it is a sign that[they are weak. JTanchuma 6[)Rashi(

This Rashi is rather counter intuitive! We would think things should be just the other way around. If they are in walled cities they are secure and if they are in open encampments they are vulnerable and weak! What's origin of this notion? What's the relevance?

When peaking back at the earliest moments of human history we find a curious phenomenon. What was the first recorded human invention? Take a few moments to think before answering. Some will guess fire but that's not explicitly related. Well surprisingly it's clothing, albeit primitive and minimal. Adam and Chava felt the need to cover-up with a fig leaf after they ingested the forbidden fruit because their innocence was now lost. Prior to that moment they were naked and without any shameful or selfish tendencies. Now, however, afterwards, because of an inner weakness, a moral failing they needed to shield themselves from themselves.

We live nowadays with a gross misconception -- that because of the rise of technology we are somehow superior to prior generations. We are learning here that this is far from the truth. When we behold someone with a hearing aid we are not likely to be inspired to jealousy. He needs a device on the outside because his hearing has become diminished.

Somebody in need of a walker or wheelchair can be envious of those of us that can still ambulate without assistance. When we see that person in a hospital room is hooked up with tubes and wires galore it is a clear sign that the inner tubing system is currently malfunctioning. The more hardware required on the outside – the weaker the inner world!

The Czech Poet-President, Vaclav Havel made the following bold and keen observation:

"The dizzying development of this science, with its unconditional faith in objective reality and its complete dependency on general and rationally knowable laws, led to the birth of modern technological civilization. It is the first civilization in the history of the human race that spans the entire globe and firmly binds together all human societies, submitting them to a common global destiny. It was this science that enabled man, for the first time, to see Earth from space with his own eyes; that is, to see it as another star in the sky.

At the same time, however, the relationship to the world that the modern science fostered and shaped now appears to have exhausted its potential. It is increasingly clear that, strangely, the relationship is missing something. It fails to connect with the most intrinsic nature of reality and with natural human experience...It produces what amounts to a state of schizophrenia: Man as an observer is becoming completely alienated from himself as a being...

Today for instance we may know immeasurably more about the universe than our ancestors did, and yet, it increasingly seems they knew something more essential about it than we do, something that escapes us."

I recently came across a charming but alarming cartoon with two distinct images! One depicts a cluster of people madly yapping on cell phones, texting, net surfing, you name it! The other portrays a group of regular folks but relaxed with smiles on their faces. The caption reads: *"World Population is Now Divided into Two Distinct Groups; 'Communication Addiction Victims' and 'People'!" A powerful message about our power!*

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5772-shlach/>

Shelach: A Thought on the Parsha

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014, 2018

The parasha of tzitzit which closes parashat Shelach seems decidedly out of place. However, there are two key words which tie it back to the beginning of the parasha: lirot, to see, and la'tur, to spy out, or to seek. The purpose of tzitzit we are told is *u'ri'item oto*, and you shall see them, and you will remember all the mitzvot of God and do them, *v'lo ta'turu acharei li'vavkhem vi'acharei eineikhem*, that you should not seek, taturu, after your hearts and your eyes. Exactly these two actions – to seek and to look, were what the spies were commanded: *"Shelach li'kha anashim, send out men, vi'yaturu, that they shall seek out the land of Canaan."* And what were they to do when they entered the land? *"And you shall see the land, u'ri'item et ha'aretz, what is it, and the people that dwell therein, are they strong or weak, few or many."* (Bamidbar 13:18).

The spies' sin began before they gave their report to Moshe. It started with seeing. How they were seeing and what they were seeing. Consider their report that they saw giants and *"we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight"* (13:33). How did they know how they were perceived? Clearly, this is a case of projection. Because they saw themselves in a certain way, because they were grasshoppers in their own eyes, they also assumed that this was how others were seeing them as well. Their own assumptions, perspectives, fears and faith, shaped what they saw.

Tzitzit, then, come to serve as a corrective to the sin of the spies, encouraging us to see through the lens of the Torah. We may even, like the spies, have a mandate to seek out, to leave our sheltered existence. But it must be a seeking out that is directed by true religious motivation, not one that gives into our weaker selves, be it our lusts and desires, or be it our fears and weaknesses.

The key to how we see the world is how we see ourselves. The power of tzitzit is not just that they serve as a reminder to our obligations, but that as a part of our clothing, they become part of our very identity. They help define who we are.

As such, tzitzit link to other garments that are central to one's identity, in particular the bigdei kehunah. The Torah, of course, devotes many chapters detailing the exact fashioning of the priestly garments, and it is only when wearing them that a kohen can serve in the Temple. More than that, the Talmud teaches that *eyn bideihem aleihem, ein kehunatam aleihem*, if their priestly garments are not on them, their kehunah status – at least in all matters that relate to the Temple – is not on them (Zevachim 17b), and they are seen, and treated halakhically, just as a non-Kohen would be treated.

Tzitzit can thus be seen to be a form of bigdei kehunah that can be worn by non-Kohanim outside the Temple. As such, they are a part of the larger theme of Sefer Bamidbar – how does one stay oriented to God's presence when one travels away from Mt. Sinai? Yes there will be a Mishkan, but a person will often be distant from that Mishkan. The first answer is to have the Mishkan in the center, so that wherever one lives, the basic orientation and framing principle is the Mishkan and his or her relationship to it.

But it is so hard to maintain this perspective. The verse immediately after the departing from Mt. Sinai reads: "*And the people began to murmur...*" (11:1). Tzitzit offer a solution. By wearing the tzitzit the Torah tells us that we will be kedoshim leiloheikhem, holy to God, we will maintain that sense of holiness even distant from the Temple.

It goes beyond that. For there is a counterpart to being a holy people. We are told not only that we should be a goy kadosh, a holy nation, but that also we should be a *mamleket kohanim*, a kingdom of priests. Tzitzit allow us to achieve this. Tzitzit become a type of a priestly garment, and by wearing them, we will see ourselves as a type of kohen and our sphere of religious, God-oriented activity to be the world at large.

The Mishkan may be where God's presence is most intensely felt and where the actual kohanim serve. But God's presence can be found in the outside world as well, and it is there that we all can serve as kohanim, serving God and striving to actualize God's presence and God's Torah.

The universal nature of tzitzit extends to the people who wear it as well. For while the possibility of women being obligated in tfillin is not given much play in the Gemara, the Gemara (Menachot 43a-b) seriously considers the possibility that women are obligated in tzitzit. Rambam even rules that, while not obligated, women can wear tzitzit if they so choose (Laws of Tzitzit 3:9). In fact, the possibility that women are obligated is stated specifically in a Tannaitic source into which the Gemara reads the implied comparison of tzitzit to bigdei kehunah. Tzitzit, as our bigdei kehunah for the larger world, are a truly universal garment.

The connection to bigdei kehunah occurs in multiple other ways in the Talmud. In Menachot 43, for example, we find the possibility raised that Kohanim would be exempt from wearing tzitzit since they anyway wear the bigdei kehunah. In addition, Tosafot (Menachot 40b, s.v. Techelet) quotes Rabbenu Tam as stating that if a garment is shatnez because of the addition of tzitzit strings, that a person would never transgress shatnez by wearing such a garment, even if it was worn at a time when the mitzvah did not apply, like at night. Tosafot states that this should be compared to the bigdei kehunah regarding which a Kohen does not transgress shatnez even if he is not doing the service. Tzitzit, like bigdei kehuna, are exempt from the restrictions of shatnez. In other words, a garment with tzitzit functions like bigdei kehunah!

In this regard, it is worth noting that in the Talmudic discussions of tzitzit, the Gemara constantly refers to two special garments: the ketonet, linen tunic, and the cloak which is fully techelet, sky-blue. Both of these present special problems – the linen tunic, because placing the wool techelet strings will make it shatnez, and the cloak which is fully techelet because the two "white" strings will now have to be the same color as the techelet strings. Nevertheless, it is unusual the degree to which the Gemara keeps on circling back to these two garments, and in particular, it is unusual that the Gemara does not just refer to the latter garment as a techelet garment, but specifically as a garment which is kulo techelet, fully techelet.

The reason for this, I believe, is that it is exactly these two garments – the simple tunic worn on the body, and the outer cloak – which directly parallel the two primary bigdei kehunah which the Kohen wears on his entire body. The ketonet, the simple tunic, is worn by all Kohanim, and it likewise is linen. Then there is the me'il, the outer cloak. It is worn by the Kohen Gadol, and regarding which we are told: “*And you shall make the cloak of the ephod, fully techelet.*” (Shemot 28:31). The Talmud’s cloak which is fully techelet is none other than the me'il of the Kohen Gadol.

To wear tzitzit is to redefine our identity and to redefine our engagement with the larger world. We will see them, and that seeing will have an impact. It will transform how we see ourselves, and how we see the larger world.

The idea of framing our activity in the larger world as a taking of the service and the sanctity of the Temple and bringing it to the larger world, is echoed by the Rashba in reference to the ritual hand-washing that we do every morning:

Therefore, we must also sanctify ourselves with God’s sanctity and wash our hands from a vessel, just like a Kohen who would sanctify his hands from the laver before he would begin his service in the Temple. (Responsa of Rashba 1:191)

We begin each day looking at the world as our Temple. We begin each day with a ritual hand-washing before we enter into the holy space that is the world. We put on our tzitzit which are our priestly garments. And we begin our day serving in the Temple, which is the entire world. This is what it means to see oneself differently. This is what it means to see the world differently. To seek out, guided by God, and to see as God would have us see.

Shabbat shalom!

From my archives.

A Model of Genuine Religious Leadership: Thoughts for Parashat Shelah Lekha

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“And the Lord said to Moses: How long will this people despise Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, for all the signs which I have wrought among them? I will smite them with the pestilence and destroy them, and will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they”
(Bemidbar 14:11-12).

What a great offer! God tells Moses that He will destroy all the Israelites and create a new nation, a greater nation, from Moses himself.

Moses had many reasons to be tempted by this offer. He had been bitterly betrayed by leaders of ten out of twelve tribes, who came back with a demoralizing report after they had spied out the Promised Land. The people murmured against Moses, saying they would rather return to slavery in Egypt than go forward under Moses’ leadership. With all the dissatisfaction, backbiting and betrayals among the Israelites, how could Moses have resisted God’s phenomenal offer? Here was an ideal opportunity to be rid of the betrayers and complainers in one fell swoop. Here was a chance to eliminate a faithless and unreliable nation and be done with all their nasty complaining and rebelling.

And yet, amazingly, Moses rejected God’s offer. “*Forgive, I pray You, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Your loving-kindness and according as You have forgiven this people from Egypt until now*” (14:19). Just as he had done after the sin of the golden calf, Moses pleaded with God to have mercy, to spare the people, to forgive them.

How are we to understand this remarkable behavior of Moses?

The Torah describes Moses as the humblest of all people. He did not relish being a leader; he did not seek the limelight; he did not want power or wealth; he did not seek self-aggrandizement. If left alone, he would have preferred being a shepherd in Midian. But God chose him to lead the Israelites out of bondage and into freedom. When he undertook this responsibility, Moses considered himself a faithful servant of God. He gave himself totally to the wellbeing of the people. Even if they sometimes spurned him and betrayed him and rebelled against him, Moses rose above feelings of personal egotism. He was chosen to lead his people, and he was going to fulfill his mission with every ounce of energy in his power. Even if God gave him a way out of this responsibility, Moses was unwilling to betray the people even if they had betrayed him.

Moses demonstrated leadership qualities that set a standard for Jewish religious and lay leadership. Leaders need to emulate Moses' incredible humility and devotion. They need the wisdom and patience to stay loyal to the people, even when the people demonstrate very negative behavior. Leaders need to understand that they are serving God, not their own personal egos. True religious leadership is not manifested in seeking power or control, nor in seeking honor or public accolades. Just the opposite! A genuine religious leader, like Moses, must exemplify humility and self-sacrifice.

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz wrote a powerful article, "When Leaders Fail," (*Jewish Action Magazine*, summer 2015). He describes the grievous consequences of religious leadership that falls short of the Torah ideals. Rabbi Breitowitz notes the destructive nature of pride and overconfidence and the dangers of charisma and the personality cult. When religious leaders — whether rabbinic or lay — become smug, they may come to feel invulnerable. They lose sight of proper moral boundaries, thinking that they are not accountable to anyone. They seek power and prestige; they seek to control; they do not function as humble servants of God or as loyal servants of the public.

Rabbi Breitowitz writes:

"Erudition, scholarship and personal magnetism are no guarantee of spirituality and inner goodness....If one is imbued with compassion, kindness and humility, then Torah study will make him more so. If one is competitive, arrogant and self-aggrandizing, Torah scholarship will simply create another battlefield in which those qualities can be expressed..... All of this suggests that communities must pay much closer attention to the moral qualities and personality traits of the leaders and role models that they choose. That certain flashy qualities might be overvalued in the selection process while other qualities — gentleness, modesty — are undervalued or even disparaged will only hurt the community in the long run."

Rabbi Shemuel de Medina, a leading sage of 16th century Salonika, wrote a responsum in which he dealt with a certain rabbi who quit his position out of despair. This rabbi was so disgusted with his community that he made an oath never again to serve as a religious leader. Rabbi de Medina gently chastised this rabbi, and told him that his oath was to be rescinded. Rabbi de Medina pointed to the example of Moses, the ultimate leader, the man of genuine humility and loyalty. Moses demonstrated that a religious leader's duty was to God and to the people; that a religious leader was to view himself as a humble servant of God and the people; and that the true religious leader is one who braces his shoulders to carry the burdens of the public, patiently and lovingly...in spite of any and all frustrations that religious leadership entails.

It may not be possible for religious leaders to achieve the greatness of Moses. But at least they and the community at large should know the ideal to which all should aspire:

"And the man Moses was very humble, more than all the men that were upon the face of the earth" (Bemidbar 12:3).

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Israel at War

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Our prayers are with the people of Israel as they once again are compelled to defend themselves against the forces of terror, hatred and destruction. We pray that the time will come, speedily and soon, when Israel and its neighbors will live in peace and friendship, enabling all the people of the region to prosper and enjoy God's blessings.

War is ugly. It has been a scourge of humanity from time immemorial, and it continues to plague humanity today. War entails fighting and killing enemies. It entails a vast commitment of resources to mobilize and arm ones forces and to strengthen ones defenses. It involves heavy financial, social and psychological costs. It entails casualties and loss of life. War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook taught: *"We must see life in two dimensions, as it is, and as it should be. Absolute righteousness is always rooted in how things should be, but provisional righteousness which touches more on acting in the present is built on how things actually are...The two are connected, like alternating horizons on a long journey."* (*Igrot Ha Reiyah*, 194).

How things should be: peaceful, with love prevailing among humankind. How things are: warlike, with hatred and violence spreading like wildfire.

How are we to deal with this dichotomy? We are to maintain our commitment to absolute righteousness, peace, a world of love and harmony. At the same time, we must deal with harsh realities with strength and courage. Even while engaging in ugly warfare, our dreams need to be squarely focused on peace.

As I write these lines, Israel is engaged in war with Iran. Israel's courage and strength are astounding. Israel's goal is to eliminate Iran's nuclear threat. While Israel's attacks on Iran have been powerful, Iran has retaliated with numerous ballistic missiles aimed at Israeli cities and towns. The Israeli Defense Forces has been remarkably successful in shooting down Iranian missiles, but some have gotten through, causing death and destruction in Israel.

Anyone who knows anything at all about Israel knows that this is a country that wants peace, that strives for peace, that has sacrificed incredibly to attain peace. But in spite of Israel's desire for peace, its enemies preach hatred, violence, terrorism, and the most vicious anti-Israel, anti-Jewish propaganda.

War is surely a messy and ugly affair. Peace is so much nicer. But we must view life in two dimensions: as it is, and as it should be. As it is: we must fight in order to maintain ourselves and our nation. As it should be: we are fighting for a righteous, loving and peaceful world.

Hashem oz le'amo yiten, Hashem yevarekh et amo bashalom. God will give strength to His people, God will bless His people with peace.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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Shelach – Anchored in Love

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The Mitzva of Tzitzis is very precious. The unique feature of this special garment is its tassels, threads that are first bound together tightly in twists and knots then allowed to hang freely meandering their way this way and that way. The Torah indicates that this Mitzva will protect us from the fear of “*Lo Sosuru*,” that we would wander. What exactly is the concern, and how does the message of Tzitzis protect us?

Rav Matisyahu Salomon suggests that the word “*Sosuru*” used by Tzitzis is related to the similar word “*Losur*,” which is used regarding the Miraglim (spies) who wandered through Eretz Yisroel, as described in the beginning of the Parsha. Regarding the Miraglim Rashi tells us what went wrong. Hashem had said that the land is good, it was a gift. But the Miraglim ignored that truth and wandered around looking for clues of whether it was good. When a person ignores the information Hashem gave him and just wanders around, they are bound to make mistakes.

Rav Moshe Feinstein in Kol Rom (18) explains that this is what the tassel of the Tzitzis represents. **The part that is bound well represents our being anchored in Torah truths; the meandering threads represent our personal life journey.** If we are anchored well in the truths of Torah, then we will see and react to whatever we encounter in life through the lens of Torah. [emphasis added]

Interestingly, Rav Moshe practiced this in his own life in a very personal way. When Rav Moshe raised his children, he anchored his relationship with them with tremendous love. On cold winter mornings, he helped the children dress under their blankets before they got out of bed to make their discomfort from the cold just a bit less. Years later, when Reb Dovid, Rav Moshe’s son, made a Bar Mitzva celebration for his son, Rav Moshe needed to excuse himself early for a communal responsibility. Someone asked Reb Dovid how he could deal with the fact that his father left early from his son’s Bar Mitzva. Reb Dovid replied that it didn’t bother him because he knew profoundly that his father loved him. When Reb Dovid was asked how he knew with such confidence that his father loved him, he replied that the memory of his father’s consideration when dressing him years ago anchored him with that sense of clarity in his father’s love for him.

The Mitzva of Tzitzis is meant to remind us of the Mitzvos and anchor us in our relationship with Hashem. The Gematria (numerical value) of the word Tzitzis is 600. When we add the eight strings and five knots of a tassel, the number is 613 reminding us of the Mitzvos. Similarly, the 39 twists correspond to the words of Shema, “*Hashem Echad*,” G-d is One. When we are anchored in our relationship with Hashem we see life events through the lens of that relationship. [emphasis added]

The concept of being anchored applies to interpersonal relationships as well. The Talmud (Brachos 8) tells us regarding marriage that there are two perspectives. One perspective is a person who continually wonders if he married the right person. Every event is seen as a clue in the meanderings of life and their relationship. This, the Talmud declares, is a painful way to live. Another perspective is to be anchored to the clarity that you have found the right spouse. When a

person is anchored in this way, he or she can process disconnects, disagreements, and difficult times in a healthy way, viewing them as the challenges of life. Much of how we respond or react has to do with whether we have anchored ourselves to a narrative of clarity and love.

In current events we see the contrast of perspectives very starkly. The Torah Jew is anchored in the awareness of Hashem's eternal protection. Even as we live with concern regarding the threat that our enemies pose to the Jewish people, we are grateful for the blessings and guiding hand that Hashem has shown us. The words of the Novi Yirmiya (31), which we recite every evening, resonate: *"Hashem redeems us from those who are stronger than us."* In a very practical sense, we know that the success of a preemptive strike and air superiority are examples of Hashem's miracles. The success of so many undetected missions are part of Hashem's promise, even in times of Golus and distancing, never to forsake us. We are anchored in thousands of years of history, dating back to the times of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yakov and the various crises that Hashem helped them through.

Unfortunately, not everyone is anchored the same way. Some news commentators (ironically called anchors) tried to contrast the 48-hour success of Israel against Iran with the dismal stalemate between Russia and Ukraine, giving all kinds of interpretations. Even though they did the contrast with admiration for the State of Israel, their interpretations are very empty. As the Rebbe of my youth, Rabbi Wein, is fond of saying, *"One sentence from the book of Yeshaya can give you more clarity than all the musings of the news commentators."* A Jew can and must live with clarity that current events are just another chapter in the miraculous journey of the Jewish people. That clarity is ours when we are anchored well and remember Hashem's promise that he will always be with us.

The Miraglim disregarded Hashem's message that the Land is good. Had they gone wandering in the Land with that anchor, they would have seen good. Instead, they wandered around looking for clues. Similarly, in our daily lives — personally and as a nation — we live with the anchor of Tzitzis, an anchor which declares *"Hashem Echad,"* G-d is One, to guide us and protect us every day of our lives.

With heartfelt blessings 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.

Parshas Shelach – Tried and True Trust

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* (2020)

This week's parsha tells of the tragic downfall of the generation which left Egypt and received the Torah at Sinai. As they left Sinai and prepared to enter the land of Canaan, they sent spies to scout the land. Most of the spies brought back a report of powerful nations and fortified cities, leaving the nation terrified. Only two of the spies, Yehoshua and Caleiv, maintained their faith in G-d and encouraged the nation to do the same. The nation, swayed by the ten spies, cried that night over their concern for their future and thought to return to Egypt. As a result of losing faith, it was decreed that this generation would die in the desert, and their descendants would be the ones to enter the land of Canaan. The ten spies who spoke negatively were punished by G-d and died.

The Haftorah tells of a contrasting story, when Yehoshua has become the leader of the nation and is preparing to lead the next generation into Israel. After telling the nation that they should prepare to cross into Canaan in a few days time, he sends two spies into the land. This time, though, the spies come back with a simple report that the people are afraid of the Jewish nation, encouraging the nation to enter the land. Although Yehoshua's spies succeeded, one can't help but

wonder why he chose to send spies again. Yehoshua himself was one of the spies from the first failed mission. After wandering in the desert for forty years, why would he even risk the possibility of history repeating itself and spies bringing back a negative report?

The Ralba"g raises this issue and adds another question. The simple reading of the verses in the Navi state that Yehoshua first told the nation that they would soon be entering and only then sent the spies. If Yehoshua was sending spies before entering the land, shouldn't he have waited for their report, before finalizing his plans to enter the land? Why did he tell people when they would enter before he had even sent the spies into the land?

The Ralba"g explains with a fascinating lesson in our approach to faith and trust in G-d. Hashem had already told Yehoshua that the nations of Canaan would flee from them, and they were ready to enter Canaan. They did not need the spies' report before preparing. **The purpose of sending the spies was to strengthen their trust and faith in G-d.** When Yehoshua and the would hear that Hashem was already working miracles on their behalf and the nations were already scared of them, they would feel an even greater sense of reliance on G-d.]emphasis added[

The Ralba"g gives another example of this concept from Gideon.)Shoftim Chapter 7(Gideon was secure in his faith in G-d, and at G-d's command had sent away the vast majority of his army, leaving only three hundred soldiers. The night before the battle G-d told him to spy on the Midianite camp, to hear the talk of the soldiers and see that G-d had given them into his hand.

When we analyze both Yehoshua and Gideon, it seems that they did not need to strengthen their faith and trust in G-d. In both cases, they were ready to act and go into battle. G-d had also promised both of them that they would succeed in battle. Why did they need any strengthening of their faith at this point?

It appears that the purpose of strengthening their faith and trust in G-d was for its own sake. **Faith and trust, knowing that another is there for you and cares for you is the foundation of any real relationship.** G-d was not asking Yehoshua and Gideon to rely on Him. They already were. G-d was asking them to take the opportunity to see how much G-d is there for them and to experience a deeper sense of reliance on G-d.]emphasis added[

Faith and trust in G-d is a critical tool which can help with the vicissitudes of life. However, we see from this Ralba"g that trust in G-d can serve an even greater purpose. **The more we learn to trust in G-d, the deeper and more profound is our relationship with Him. The more we know G-d is with us, the closer we can feel Him.**]emphasis added[

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Shelach: On Decision Making, Responsibility, and Maturity

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The famous story about twelve men, sent on a reconnaissance mission to the Land of Canaan, has two contradicting versions in the Torah. According to the first version, in this week's Parasha, God initiated the mission, while according to the second, in Deut. 1:19-46, the Israelites requested it. In the first version, the men are called scouts and they are asked to gather technical data such as the size of the cities and the nature of the people, whereas the second version has the men described as spies, and their mission is to determine the best route for attack and to identify the first targets.

The most striking difference, however, is the report the twelve men delivered. The scouts of our Parasha deliver an 84-word scathing description of the Land of Canaan. It is a land of great abundance, they say, but it is populated by fierce giants. The land consumes its inhabitants, according to the scouts, and any attempt to conquer it will end in total failure. In contrast, the spies of Deuteronomy return with a succinct and positive report, only seven words long:

“The land which our God gives us is good.”

Yet despite the positive report of the spies, the Israelites erupt against Moshe and God in rebellious contempt and refuse to proceed with the Divine plan.

Here we have to ask two questions: a(why the discrepancy between the two versions? b(why did the Israelites refuse to go to the Promised Land?

I believe that the Torah teaches us that because of the subjectivity in storytelling, one cannot figure out the whole picture unless he listens to different versions of the same event. In this case it is God's version and Moshe's version of what has happened.

In Parashat Shelah, God speaks of a symbolic mission gone awry. The men were scouts and not spies. They were asked to collect data and not to plan a military campaign. They came back with a long report which stated that it is impossible to conquer the Land of Canaan and its fearsome inhabitants.

In Deuteronomy, we hear Moshe speaking. He tells the Israelites that they requested the mission, even though it was God who commanded him to send the men, because he understood that the command was a result of the people's restlessness. God responded to a message from the Israelites and granted them a symbolic mission, just to appease them.

God and Moshe viewed the men as scouts sent to gather general information, while the Israelites considered them spies. In Parashat Shelah, the reason for the rebellion of the people seems to be the report of the scouts, but in Deuteronomy Moshe reveals the truth. The Israelites made up their minds long before the scouts left. They were not going to go to Canaan, no matter what. The mission was just a pretext, and that is why Moshe writes that the report was positive. The reaction of the Israelites had nothing to do with the content of the report.

To prove that this is the message of the contradicting narratives, I would like to travel back in time, to the first rebellious act in the book of Numbers. This act took place immediately after the first successful travel of the Israelite camp, at the end of the tenth chapter of the book. The culmination of the perfect hierarchical plan displayed in the beginning of Numbers was this one voyage, where Moshe invokes God's might with the beautiful verse we until today read as we open the ark:

As the ark traveled Moshe said: Rise, God, and let your enemies be scattered from before You.

Immediately after that proclamation we read that the people were complaining, but the Torah does not tell us what were they complaining about. Simply they were complaining: *“it is bad.”*

There was no specific complaint but rather a feeling of restlessness and discomfort, and that is where we can use an analogy to children. A child who cannot yet express himself will cry when feeling uncomfortable. The parents worry in the beginning and try to satisfy the child's need, but at a certain point they might become frustrated and feel that the child is doing it deliberately. Experts will tell them, though, that if the child cries, it is for a good reason.

Similarly, the Israelites did not know why they felt that way, and only as events unfolded did the true reason become clear. They were afraid of going to Canaan and becoming masters of their destiny. Subconsciously they craved the familiarity of Egypt and preferred its relative security over the dream of independent life in a new land.

This fear stirred them to restlessness and to request, directly or indirectly, that scouts be sent to Canaan. They perceived those men as spies and could only hear in their report data supporting a decision to return to Egypt, where they had suffered immensely for generations, enslaved and tortured. They might have considered that the land they want to return

to is not the one they know, since it has been ravished by the Ten Plagues, including the hail and locust which destroyed the agrarian infrastructure. They also could have contemplated the possibility that the Egyptian population, who have been decimated by the plagues and the great losses suffered at the Sea of Reeds, would be less than welcoming to the Israelites, the source of all their trouble.

But all that did not matter, because centuries of enslavement have eroded the decision making process of the Israelites, their belief in themselves, and the understanding that they must take control of their lives. Not only were they, in the words of Stevie Wonder, *“spending most their lives living in a pastime paradise,”* but they were frozen in a childish, immature reality, where they had to do as they were told and had no free will.

Moshe’s words in Deuteronomy illustrate this conclusion. He first rebukes the people who could not show gratitude to God who *“carried them through the desert as a father carries his son,”* indicating that they were not willing to *“grow up.”* He then conjures the imagery of paradise and the Tree of knowledge by saying that not the rebels but their children will inherit the land, the children *“who today cannot distinguish between good and evil.”*

The Tree of Knowledge is the blueprint of coming of age. A child who defies his parents for the first time is Adam eating of the forbidden fruit. They both realize that they have the power to disobey and that they can use that power for good or for evil.

Alas, with great power comes great responsibility, and the child is not ready for it yet. He constantly tests the boundaries and tries to figure out how to balance power and responsibility. For the Israelites that ability was impaired because they grew up in Egypt as slaves and never had the opportunity to exercise free will.

In the book of Deuteronomy, when Moshe analyzes events in retrospect, he identifies the problem. He tells the Israelites that their behavior was immature and that they wanted to escape reality and live in the land of nostalgia. Only your children, he says, who today cannot distinguish between good and evil, will be able to conquer the land.

Moshe is saying that those children lack the power of distinction today, but they will acquire it later, as they grow up independently. Then they will be ready to use their powers and take responsibility for their lives and actions. To conclude, the story of the scouts and their failed mission, as told in this week’s Parasha, is a cautionary tale. We sometimes must make life-changing decisions, and we tend, just like the Israelites, to choose the past over the future. The pain, suffering, and difficulties of the past are familiar, we tell ourselves, so we would rather deal with them then adjust to a new reality with its many unknowns.

Almost all decisions, from hip replacement to keeping or breaking a marriage, fit this model, but the difficulty to reach a conclusion fluctuates according to the level of risk involved in the change, the investment we have in our previous lifestyle or conditions, and many other variables.

By telling the story in two different versions, however, the Torah provides us with additional insights.

We should try to learn the whole story, from the point of view of all protagonists.

We can sometimes fully understand events only in hindsight.

Taking responsibility is a gradual process which can be impaired under a totalitarian regime or a disciplinarian parent.

May God guide us in making the right decisions, ones we will be proud to claim responsibility for.

Shabbat Shalom

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Many 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 protections for this material.

A New Insight From Tevye's Song

by Rabbi Moshe Rube* © 2021

We've discussed Mashiach before. Specifically how talks of Mashiach currently and throughout Jewish history always spark up in times of travail.)Don Isaac Abarbanel even predicted that Mashiach would come in 1503 after the Expulsion from Spain in 1492.(

But Mashiach doesn't just mean that sweetness, peace, and light will descend over the whole world. It also means certain elements of Jewish service will come back. Like if you own orange trees in Israel, you can bring the first fruits to the Temple during Shavuos time. And we'll finally get to have some delicious roast lamb for the Passover Seder. But there is one thing that may have come back already. And it has to do with one of Judaism's most ubiquitous symbols. The Tallis.

We all know what a Tallis looks like. A four cornered shawl with eight white strings in each corner tied into special knots. But actually, the original tallis had another color attached to it. A blue string wound around the white ones called the techeles.)See our Parsha this week Numbers Chapter 15 Verse 37.(Now it might seem inconsequential, but this actually had tremendous political implications. In Korach's rebellion against Moshe, he mocked him for saying a completely blue tallit needed a blue string. Sometimes even the driest legal details can become a tool for demagogues.

Why blue? The Talmud gives two possibilities. One that it reminds us of the skies so it keeps our focus heavenward. Rabbi Eliezer had a different explanation that it reminds us of sapphire which according to the Torah was the main structural material in God's heavenly throne. You see how the Israeli flag is blue and white? That's where it comes from. It's like we're waving a beautiful Tallis in the halls of global leadership.

So why don't all of our tallis's have the blue string? Because you can't just manufacture the color in a lab. The dye used to make it has to come from a specific source that has been lost to history. Or so we thought.

Archaeologists some years back discovered an old tallit on Masada that had a blue string. Advanced scientific methods revealed that the dye came from the snail known as the Murex Trunculus. This sparked a debate among Jewish legal scholars. Does Jewish law allow us to reconstruct a tradition based on archaeological evidence? When Tevye sang "Tradition," did he have laboratory testing in mind?

The quick answer is yes. We have at least two Talmudic sources that seem to be clear on the validity of archaeological evidence for Jewish law.

1(The Talmud in Tractate *Bava Batra* 74a tells a story of an Arab merchant who showed the Talmudic sage Rabba, the son of Bar Chanah, the bodies of the Jews who died in the forty year sojourn in the desert. When Rabbah returned, his colleagues chided him and called him a fool for not inspecting their tzitzit. There were many disputes about how they should be tied and Rabbah missed an opportunity to provide a definite answer.

2(In Tractate *Sukkah* 5a, Rabbi Eliezer testifies that the words "Holy to God" can be written on one line on the High Priest's headband because the headband on display in Rome had it on one line.)Many of the lost Temple vessels are rumored to be in the Vatican.(

From these two sources it's clear that archaeological evidence can be trusted. Jewish tradition can be scientific as well as mimetic.)Maybe that's why Tevye sang the word "Tradition" twice. To account for both ways of learning about our tradition.(Many halachic decisors thus endorse this new tchelet.

What's even more exciting is that the uniform that the kohanim use in the Temple requires the techeles. In our day to day, we can fulfill a mitzvah without it, but this new scientific discovery clears away another hurdle in building the Third Temple.

When this pandemic is over, I hope to go somewhere with a large Judaica shop and buy my own "*Murex Trunculus dyed*" tzitzit. Even if the only benefit is that it keeps our focus heavenward, it's worth it. We need all the help we can get to keep our focus on our common human transcendent soul, our tzalem Elokim in these troubled times.

Shabbat Shalom.

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Rav Kook Torah Shlach: Repairing the Sin of the Spies

One of the greatest tragedies in the long history of the Jewish people occurred when the spies sent by Moses returned with a frightening report about the Land of Israel. Their dire warnings of fierce giants and a "*land that consumes its inhabitants*" convinced the people that they would be better off returning to Egypt.

Unlike other incidents in which the Israelites rebelled against God, on this occasion, Moses was unable to annul God's decree. The entire generation died in the desert, never reaching the Promised Land. The best Moses was able to do was delay the punishment for forty years.

Rav Kook wrote that even today we still suffer the consequences of this catastrophic error. The root cause for the exiles and humiliations of the Jewish people, throughout the generations, is due to our failure to correct the sin of the spies.

How can we rectify the sin of the spies?

To repair this national failure, a teshuvat hamishkal is needed, a penance commensurate with the sin which will "balance the scales." The spies defamed the Land of Israel, as it says, "They despised the desirable land")Psalms 106:24(. We must do the opposite and show our unwavering love for the Land.]emphasis added[

"We must[declare to the entire world]the Land's[magnificence and beauty, its holiness and grandeur. If only we could express)with what may appear to us to be greatly exaggerated(even a ten-thousandth of the desirability of the beloved Land, the splendorous light of its Torah, and the superior light of its wisdom and prophecy!

The quality of wonderful holiness that Torah scholars seeking holiness may find in the Land of Israel does not exist at all outside the Land. I myself can attest to this unique quality, to a degree commensurate with my meager worth.")Igrot HaRe'iyah, vol. I, pp. 112-113(

For Rav Kook, this recommendation on how to address the sin of the spies was not just a nice homily. Stories abound of his burning love for the Land of Israel and his indefatigable attempts to encourage fellow Jews to move to Eretz Yisrael.

Kissing the Rocks of Acre

The Talmud in *Ketubot* 112a records that Rabbi Abba would demonstrate his great love for the Land of Israel by kissing the rocks of Acre as he returned to Israel. What was so special about these rocks?

Rav Kook explained that if Rabbi Abba had bent down and kissed the soil of Eretz Yisrael, we would understand that his love for the Land was based on the special mitzvot that are fulfilled with its fruit — tithes, first fruits, the Sabbatical year, and so on. The soil, which produces fruit, signifies the importance and holiness of the Land through the mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz.

But Rabbi Abba's love for the Land was not dependent on any external factors — not even the Land's special mitzvot (see Avot 5:16; *Orot*, p. 9). Rabbi Abba cherished the intrinsic holiness of Eretz Yisrael. He recognized that the special qualities of the Land of Israel, such as its receptivity to prophecy and enlightenment, go far beyond those mitzvot connected to agriculture. Therefore, he made a point of kissing its barren rocks and stones.

'God Willing'

During a 1924 fundraising mission in America, Rav Kook tried to convince a wealthy Jew to immigrate to Eretz Yisrael. The man gave various reasons why he could not yet leave America, but concluded, "*God willing, I too will soon make Aliyah to Israel.*"

Rav Kook responded: "*God is certainly willing. After all, settling Eretz Yisrael is one of His commandments. But you must also be willing...*"

Without Calculations

Once, a Jewish tourist visited Rav Kook in Jerusalem, seeking advice as to the possibility of living in Eretz Yisrael. During the discussion, the visitor calculated the pros and cons of moving to Israel; and in the end, he decided that it was not worthwhile.

Rav Kook told the man:

"Before the Israelites entered the Land in the time of Moses, they first needed to kill Sichon, the king of Heshbon. This teaches us that one should come to the Land of Israel bli heshbon — without making calculations."

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Malachim Kivnei Adam*, pp. 221, 222, 237.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHLACH_65.htm

Shelach: Confidence (5774, 5781)

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

It was perhaps the single greatest collective failure of leadership in the Torah. Ten of the spies whom Moses had sent to spy out the land came back with a report calculated to demoralise 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 are not able to 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." Num. 13:27-33

This was nonsense, and they should have known it. They had left Egypt, the greatest empire of the ancient world, after a series of plagues that brought that great country to its knees. They had crossed the seemingly impenetrable barrier of the Red Sea. They had fought and defeated the Amalekites, a ferocious warrior nation. They had even sung, along with their fellow Israelites, a song at the sea that contained the words:

*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.* Ex. 15:14-15

They should have known that the people of the land were afraid of them, not the other way round. And so it was, as Rahab told the spies sent by Joshua forty years later:

"I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two Kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in the Heavens above and on the earth beneath." Joshua 2:9-11

Only Joshua and Caleb among the twelve showed leadership. They told the people that the conquest of the land was eminently achievable because God was with them. The people did not listen. But the two leaders received their reward. They alone of their generation lived to enter the land. More than that: their defiant statement of faith and their refusal to be afraid shines as brightly now as it did thirty-three centuries ago. They are eternal heroes of faith.

One of the fundamental tasks of any leader, from President to parent, is to give people a sense of confidence: in themselves, in the group of which they are a part, and in the mission itself. A leader must have faith in the people they lead, and inspire that faith in them. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter of the Harvard Business School writes in her book *Confidence*, "*Leadership is not about the leader, it is about how he or she builds the confidence of everyone else.*"¹ Confidence, by the way, is Latin for "*having faith together.*"

The truth is that in no small measure a law of self-fulfilling prophecy applies in the human arena. Those who say, "*We cannot do it*" are probably right, as are those who say, "*We can.*" If you lack confidence you will lose. If you have it – solid, justified confidence based on preparation and past performance – you will win. Not always, but often enough to triumph over setbacks and failures. That, as mentioned in our study of parshat Beshallach, is what the story of Moses' hands is about, during the battle against the Amalekites. When the Israelites look up, they win. When they look down they start to lose.

That is why the negative definition of Jewish identity that has so often prevailed in modern times)Jews are the people who are hated, Israel is the nation that is isolated, to be Jewish is to refuse to grant Hitler a posthumous victory(is so misconceived, and why one in two Jews who have been brought up on this doctrine choose to marry out and discontinue the Jewish journey.²

Harvard economic historian David Landes, in his *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, explores the question of why some countries fail to grow economically while others succeed spectacularly. After more than 500 pages of close analysis, he reaches this conclusion:

In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and that is the way of achievement, correction,

*improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right.]3[David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London, Little, Brown, 1998, 524.*

I prefer the word “*hope*” to “*optimism*.” Optimism is the belief that things will get better; hope is the belief that together we can make things better. No Jew, knowing Jewish history, can be an optimist, but no Jew worthy of the name abandons hope. The most pessimistic of the Prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, were still voices of hope. By their defeatism, the spies failed as leaders and as Jews. To be a Jew is to be an agent of hope.

The most remarkable by far of all the commentators on the episode of the spies was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. He raised the obvious question. The Torah emphasises that the spies were all leaders, princes, heads of tribes. They knew that God was with them, and that with His help there was nothing they could not do. They knew that God would not have promised them a land they could not conquer. Why then did they come back with a negative report?

His answer turns the conventional understanding of the spies upside-down. They were, he said, not afraid of defeat. They were afraid of victory. What they said to the people was one thing, but what led them to say it was another entirely.]emphasis added[

What was their situation now, in the wilderness? They lived in close and continuous proximity to God. They drank water from a rock. They ate manna from heaven. They were surrounded by the Clouds of Glory. Miracles accompanied them along the way.

What would be their situation in the land? They would have to fight wars, plough the land, plant seed, gather harvests, create and sustain an army, an economy and a welfare system. They would have to do what every other nation does: live in the real world of empirical space. What would become of their relationship with God? Yes, He would still be present in the rain that made crops grow, in the blessings of field and town, and in the Temple in Jerusalem that they would visit three times a year, but not visibly, intimately, miraculously, as He was in the desert. This is what the spies feared: not failure but success.

This, said the Rebbe, was a noble sin but still a sin. **God wants us to live in the real world of nations, economies and armies.** God wants us, as He put it, to create “*a dwelling place in the lower world*.” He wants us to bring the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, into everyday life. It is easy to find God in total seclusion and escape from responsibility. It is hard to find God in the office, in business, in farms and fields and factories and finance. But it is that hard challenge to which we are summoned: to create a space for God in the midst of this physical world that He created and seven times pronounced good. That is what ten of the spies failed to understand, and it was a spiritual failure that condemned an entire generation to forty years of futile wandering.]emphasis added[

The Rebbe’s words ring true today even more loudly than they did when he first spoke them. They are a profound statement of the Jewish task. They are also a fine exposition of a concept that entered psychology only relatively recently – fear of success.]4[We are all familiar with the idea of fear of failure. It is what keeps many of us from taking risks, preferring instead to stay within our comfort zone.

No less real, though, is fear of success. We want to succeed: so we tell ourselves and others. But often unconsciously we fear what success may bring: new responsibilities, expectations on the part of others that we may find hard to fulfil, and so on. So we fail to become what we might have become had someone given us faith in ourselves.

The antidote to fear, both of failure and success, lies in the passage with which the parsha ends: the command of tzitzit)Num. 15:38-41(.]emphasis added[We are commanded to place fringes on our garments, among them a thread of blue. Blue is the colour of the sky and of heaven. Blue is the colour we see when we look up)at least in Israel; in Britain, more often than not we see clouds(. When we learn to look up, we overcome our fears. Leaders give people confidence by teaching them to look up. **We are not grasshoppers unless we think we are.**

FOOTNOTES:

]1[Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Confidence*, Random House, 2005, 325.

]2[National Jewish Population Survey 1990: *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center, October 1, 2013.

]3[David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, London, Little, Brown, 1998, 524.

]4[Sometimes called the “Jonah complex” after the Prophet. See Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1977, 35-40.

Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[How are tzitzit the antidote to the fears discussed in this study?

]2[Can you see the appeal of the lifestyle that the ten spies feared leaving behind?

]3[How can we bring the Shechinah into our everyday, practical lifestyle?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shelach-lecha/confidence/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

Did Jews Pour Wine on the Altar?

By Mordechai Rubin *

One lesser-known element of the Temple offerings was the libation of wine, known as nesachim. These libations, poured onto the altar, accompanied many animal offerings.¹ Here we will examine some of the details and explanations of this mitzvah.

Which Sacrifices Require Libations?

Libations were required with all burnt offerings (olah) of cattle or sheep. This included private offerings brought voluntarily, such as a person fulfilling a vow or giving a gift offering. Other specific offerings that fell into this category included the burnt offering of a woman after childbirth (olat yoledet), that of a Nazirite completing their term, and a leper at the end of their purification process (olat metzora).²

Similarly, peace offerings (shelamim), such as private offerings given out of gratitude or celebration and the shelamim of a Nazirite also required libations.

Additionally, a range of communal offerings, such as the daily Tamid sacrifices and the additional Musaf offerings for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and festivals, also included nesachim. These public offerings were specified in the Torah to be accompanied by flour, oil, and wine in fixed amounts.³

But not all offerings were accompanied by libations. Sin offerings (chatat) and guilt offerings (asham) — whether brought by individuals or the community — did not require libations.⁴ The Sages explained that this was so as not to glorify the sin through an enhanced offering.⁵ The sole exception was in the case of the leper (metzora): his chatat and asham offerings did include nesachim, because they marked his restoration to society, not just atonement for sin.⁶

Other types of sacrifices that did not require wine libations included the firstborn animal (*bechor*), the animal tithe (*ma'aser behemah*), and the Korban Pesach (*Paschal lamb*). These were obligatory offerings, and the Torah only requires libations with voluntary offerings. The Torah itself makes this distinction by introducing the libation laws with the words, “When a man offers a burnt offering or a sacrifice … to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering …”,⁷ excluding mandatory offerings from this requirement.⁸

Likewise, bird offerings, which were usually brought by those of lesser means, were not accompanied by wine libations. The Torah specifies that the libation laws apply to offerings brought “*from the herd or from the flock*,” which excludes birds.⁹

At What Point In Time Were These Required?

While all agree that the communal offerings that require *nesachim* were in effect during Israel’s time in the desert, there is some discussion as to when the obligation began for individual offerings. According to Rabbi Yishmael, the mitzvah of *nesachim* began only after the people entered Israel. Nachmanides comments that the instructions for libations were given as a sign of encouragement after the sin of the Spies: although that generation would die in the wilderness, their children would eventually enter the Land and fulfill this mitzvah. Until then, libations were not required for private offerings.¹⁰

On the other hand, Rabbi Akiva maintained that *nesachim* were already brought in the desert even for private offerings, and the phrase “*when you come into the land* …” serves a different purpose: to indicate that once in the Land, *nesachim* would be required even on private altars, which had not been the case previously. According to this view, libations were part of the Temple service from the very beginning.¹¹

What Was the Significance of the Libation?

The reasoning for this mitzvah is the subject of discussion among the Sages. The Talmud¹² explores two approaches.

One view sees the wine libation as corresponding to the burning of the sacrificial parts on the altar. Just as the altar “*consumes*” the flesh of the offering through fire, it “*drinks*” the wine poured upon it. According to this approach, the libation is part of the altar’s service itself.

A second explanation focuses on the emotional and spiritual state of the person bringing the offering. After the sacrificial blood is sprinkled and the sin is atoned for, the offerer experiences joy and inner peace. The pouring of wine — a symbol of happiness and celebration — expresses that joy. Thus, the wine is a gesture of gratitude and rejoicing, given not for personal pleasure but as a tribute to the Divine presence symbolized by the altar.¹³

How Was the Wine Poured?

All agree that the pouring of the wine libation was conducted at the southwest corner of the outer altar. The exact location and method of the pouring, however, are subject to significant halachic discussion.

Some authorities hold that the wine was poured directly onto the altar, into special, perforated silver bowls placed at the southwest corner. This view regards the libation as an act of offering similar to burning on the altar — like the first explanation cited above — therefore requiring that the wine come into contact with the surface of the altar.¹⁴

In contrast, Maimonides appears to maintain that the libations were poured on the *yesod* — the base of the altar — rather than the top.¹⁵ Only during Sukkot were the wine and water libations poured at the top, side by side (see below). During the rest of the year, the wine was poured lower down, with less ritual emphasis.¹⁶ This dovetails with the idea that, throughout the year, libations served primarily as expressions of joy and completion, not as offerings that required the same level of sacrificial contact with the altar, in line with the second explanation above.¹⁷

All agree that the wine eventually flowed into the shitin, the underground cavities beneath the altar. It was not poured over the fire, and once it reached the shitin, the mitzvah was considered complete.

There is also some discussion about how the Kohen poured the wine. Some say that the pouring had to be done from a height, with the Kohen raising his hand and pouring so that the wine would fall with force, spreading as it fell.¹⁸ This interpretation connects with the root meaning of the word “*nisuch*,” implying a flowing, spreading pour.¹⁹ Others, however, maintain that there was no requirement to pour from a height and that the Kohen could simply pour the wine in the usual manner.²⁰

The Water Libation

During Sukkot, water was poured alongside the wine. Each morning of the festival, a Kohen would draw water from the Shiloach spring in a golden flask and pour it onto the altar alongside the wine libation. This ceremony is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, but is preserved orally, as a law given to Moses at Sinai.²¹

The water libation was accompanied by intense joy, culminating in the nightly celebration known as *Simchat Beit HaShoeivah*, literally “*the Rejoicing of the House of the Water Drawing*.” The Mishnah testifies: “*Whoever did not see the Simchat Beit HaShoeivah never saw joy in his life.*” This celebration involved music, dancing, and the lighting of great torches in the Temple courtyard.²² The Talmud describes the ecstatic joy of the occasion, linking it to a deeper spiritual idea: the drawing of divine inspiration:

Why was it called the *Beit HaShoeivah*)House of the Drawing(? Because from there they would draw *ruach ha-kodesh*)Divine inspiration(... Yonah ben Amitai was one of the pilgrims who came up to Jerusalem, and he entered the celebration of the *Simchat Beit HaShoeivah*, and the Divine spirit rested upon him."²³

What the Water Libation Represents

Highlighting the unique role of the water libation, the Rebbe draws a lesson in our Divine service from the exuberant joy that accompanied its pouring. Although wine is traditionally associated with happiness and features prominently in the Torah’s offerings, it was the humble, tasteless water — symbolizing simplicity and total surrender — that stirred the greatest celebration.

Wine represents serving G d through understanding and emotional connection, while water represents accepting G d’s will without requiring understanding. Although intellectual service is satisfying, it is limited. True, boundless joy comes when we serve G d with total devotion, driven by a soul-deep “*thirst*” that transcends the mind.

Sukkot follows Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we reaffirm G d’s kingship and awaken a more profound desire to connect. The unbounded joy of Sukkot and *Simchat Beit HaShoeivah* reflects the depth of that connection.

Both the wine and water libations were ideally brought during the day. However, if the wine was offered at night, it was invalid. In contrast, the water libation, though also meant for daytime, remained valid after the fact if brought at night. Even in times of spiritual “*night*,” when understanding fades, the simple existential commitment symbolized by water endures.

Both approaches — water and wine — are essential. A commitment to G d that transcends understanding is essential, but not complete on its own. For our relationship with G d to be whole, it must be fully internalized, reaching every part of us, including our intellect.²⁴

FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 15:1-5.
2. Mishneh Torah, *Maaseh Hakorbanot* 2:2.

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. *Talmud Sotah* 15a.
6. Ibid.
7. Numbers 15:3.
8. Mishneh Torah, *Maaseh Hakorbanot* 2:3.
9. Sifrei on Bamidbar 15, Mishneh Torah, *Maaseh Hakorbanot* 2:2.
10. Nachmanides Numbers 15:
11. Talmud Kiddushin 37b see Rashi there.
12. Menachot 20a.
13. See Rashi and Rashba, ibid.
14. See Sukkah 48a-b and Rashi, Ravad, Mishneh Torah, *Maaseh Hakorbanot* 2:1.
15. Mishneh Torah, *Maaseh Hakorbanot* 2:1. See *Kesef Misheh* ibid.
16. Shu"t Tzafnat Pa'aneach, *MiKetvei Torah*, siman 35.
17. Reshimot Shiurim Sukkah 48b, beDivrei haRambam Temidin uMusafin Perek 10 Halachah 6; Emek Berachah, Nisuch HaMayim, Ot 2.
18. Mishneh Torah, *Maaseh Hakorbanot* 2:1.
19. *HaKetav VeHaKabbalah*, Shemot 29:40.
20. See *Kesef Mishnah*, *Maaseh Hakorbanot* 2:1.
21. Rambam, *Hilchot Temidin UMusafin* 10:6.
22. *Mishnah Sukkah* 5:1-4.
23. *Yerushalmi Sukkah* 5:1.
24. *Likkutei Sichot*, Vol. 2 p 425.

* A content editor and staff writer at Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6927413/jewish/Did-Jews-Pour-Wine-on-the-Altar.htm

Shelach: Dough of Faith

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky

G-d taught the people the requirement to separate a portion of their dough and give it to the priests. This was followed by the laws governing offerings to atone for idolatry.

If you should err and not fulfill all the commandments that G-d spoke to Moses.)Num. 15:22(

The commandment to set aside part of our bread for the priest is followed by a discussion of idolatry. The reason for this is as follows:

The reality of our physical world is that we have to work hard to satisfy our needs. Because of this, it is easy to fall into the trap of feeling that our material success is dependent on the brutal laws of nature: the more and better we work, the more we earn. It is easy to feel that G-d is not involved – and this is a subtle form of idol worship. In truth, the forces of nature are only tools in the hands of the master Craftsman; they have no more influence on the world than a craftsman's tools have on his work.

In order to avoid this misconception, we are told to set aside some of the very first of our dough as a portion for G-d. This reaffirms our faith that it is indeed G-d who has granted us all that we have and that He is truly the source of our sustenance.

– From *Daily Wisdom #3*

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Beha'alotecha from our *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Volume 31, Issue 34

Shabbat Parashat Shlach

5785 B" H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

What Made Joshua and Caleb Different?

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,

By Elaine Millen and Marilyn Stein
On the Occasion of the Yahrzeits of their
Parents,
Rose Gottlieb, z"l, (21 Sivan)
and Sam Gottlieb, z"l, (29 Sivan)

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

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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. [1] Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Ballantine Books, 2016.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

And You Shall Love Israel Your Land

"And they shall seek out [vayaturu] the Land of Canaan which I am giving to the children of Israel." (Numbers 13:2)

Of all the sins the children of Israel commit in the Bible, the most serious sin of all takes place in the portion of Shlach. The scouts' severe report is the direct cause of the death of the desert generation.

However, what is difficult to understand is that the suggestion to establish such an ill-fated reconnaissance team came directly from the Almighty Himself. We have considered the necessity of involving the nation in the decision to conquer the land; now we shall attempt to understand what God wanted the scouts to actually report.

Rabbi Elchanan Samet, in his excellent study of the weekly Torah portions, suggests an insight which at the same time provides a textual underpinning for a magnificent homiletic interpretation given by Rabbi Joseph

B. Soloveitchik. The secret to understanding lies in the verb form used in the charge given by the Almighty. "Send for yourselves men who will seek out [vayaturu] the land," the verb tur appearing no less than twelve times in this very sequence, the very number of the members of the delegation itself. In fact, when Moses himself retells the story in his farewell address (Deut. 1:22, 24), he has the Israelites all coming to him and saying, "Let us send men before us that they may check out [vayachperu] the land...and spy [vayeraglu] it out," using two verb forms very different from the vayaturu used by God in our portion.

A careful search reveals that in other biblical contexts the verb form tur is used similarly to the way it is used in our biblical portion, as in, "the Lord God who walks before you, He will do battle for you...to seek out [latur] for you a place in which you may settle your encampment" (Deut. 1:23). Even the prophet Ezekiel (20:6) declares that "on that day I shall raise my hand for them to bring them out of the Land of Egypt to the land which I have sought out [tarti] for them. A land flowing with milk and honey, a most precious land for them among all the other lands."

The power of the specific verb form tur used by God is even more clearly expressed in the very conclusion of this Torah reading, where we encounter that same verb form in a totally different but most revealing context.

Almost inexplicably, this Torah portion, which mainly deals with the scouts, concludes with the commandment to wear ritual fringes on the corners of our four-cornered garments: "and [the blue and white threads] shall be for you for a fringe so that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them; and so that you not seek out or lust [taturu] after your heart and after your eyes which lead you to commit acts of harlotry [zonim] after them" (Numbers 15:39). And when punishing the Israelites, God once again makes reference to the sin of the scouts as having been an act of harlotry (znut), "and your children shall be shepherds in the desert for forty years, thereby bearing [the sin] of your harlotry [znutekhem]" (Numbers 14:33).

The picture is becoming very clear. The Almighty was not at all interested in a reconnaissance mission to scout out the land or even in an intelligence delegation to assess the military practicability of engaging in an act of conquest. Perhaps that was what the Israelites had in mind when they asked Moses to send men before them to check out the land, which probably meant to see by which roads it would be best to enter and which cities ought to be attacked first (Deut. 1:22-23). The Almighty had a very different design in mind. God wanted to impress them with the uniqueness, the chosenness of the land which He Himself

Likutei Divrei Torah

had picked for them, the land that would be their ultimate resting place, the land which was good and not bad, which produced luscious fruits and full-bodied animals, the land whose produce developed strong and capable men; God wanted them to conquer the land with great anticipation and desire (Numbers 13:1-2, Nahmanides ad loc.).

Rabbi Soloveitchik goes one step further. In the Bible, the Torah of Israel and the Land of Israel are both called morasha, which means heritage (Exodus 6:8; Deut. 33:4), but which our sages linked to me'orasa, which means betrothed and beloved. God understands that the conquest of the Torah of Israel as well as of the Land of Israel by the People of Israel will require strong feelings of love for each of these grand enterprises. And just as the rabbis of the Talmud command us not to marry a woman unless we first see her and know that we love her (Kiddushin 41a), so did God ask Moses to send a group who would give the kind of visual description of the Land of Israel to the People of Israel which would inspire them to love the land and even lust after the land. God understood that such an emotional attachment was absolutely crucial if the Israelites were to overcome all of the obstacles involved in conquering the land, settling it, and forging within it a holy nation and kingdom of priests.

Alas, the people – especially the scouts – did not understand the divine command. Their sin was in misunderstanding the purpose of their journey; they took it to be a scouting enterprise rather than an inspirational foretaste of what waited in store for them after their conquest, a reconnaissance mission rather than an observer's picture of a beautiful and luscious patrimony worthy of their love and sacrifice.

Our generation – so similar to the Israelites who went from the darkness of Egypt to the light of freedom and stood at the entrance to the Promised Land – must do whatever is necessary to recapture and strengthen the love of Israel if we are to succeed in properly settling it.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Two Types of Laziness

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 Yonasan 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?

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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'yata 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 Canaanim who dwelt on the mountain descended and beat them back to Charmah. (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!"

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

When should I wear a garment in order that I, not others, should notice it?

The answer comes at the end of Parshat Shelach Lecha. In the third paragraph of the Shema, we were given the mitzvah for men to wear Tzitzit.

Why are tzitzit called by that name?

Many simply explain that tzitzit means 'fringes' and the tzitzit are fringes, they are to be seen.

Rashi however, adds the possibility that the word tzitzit, comes from the term 'meytzis', which means to peer at something intently.

Therefore, he suggests that the purpose of the tzitzit is so that the wearer should see the cords and that inspire him to follow the ways of Hashem.

But the mitzvah of tzitzit is not just for the wearer to see, it's also for others.

The Torah tells us 'L'dorotam', this is a precept, that tzitzit must be worn throughout all generations, not just Temple times, not just the land of Israel, wherever you are, at all times.

But Rav Dessler, in Michtav Me'Eliyahu adds 'L'dorotam' can also indicate that we're performing this for the sake of all the generations to come, so that hopefully, children will notice the example that we are setting.

Therefore, the purpose of tzitzit is to remind us at all times of the fact that our children are watching, they are noticing whether we're aware of it or not.

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Therefore, we should always set the right example for them.

Tzitzit therefore teaches us the importance of them being seen and the hope is that, through seeing, there will be lots of believing.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Learning the Land and Learning Faith

Zion Rosner

In the Book of Bemidbar, the portion of Shelach Lecha describes one of the most dramatic events in the history of the Israelites in the desert. Moshe selects 12 distinguished men from each tribe of Israel – wise, righteous, and courageous – for the purpose of scouting the land of Canaan. This mission was undertaken due to the Israelites' apprehension about entering the Promised Land, and Moshe hopes that the spies would reassure the people about the land, thereby reinforcing their faith.

The Mission: "Scout the land" - Moshe sends the spies to explore the land and gives them specific instructions: Examine the land: "And see the land, what it is." They were to assess the quality of the land, whether it was good or bad.

Evaluate the inhabitants: "Whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many." They were to assess the strength and number of the inhabitants.

Inspect the cities: "What kind of cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps or in strongholds." They were to determine whether the cities were unwalled or fortified.

Assess the crops: "Whether the land is rich or poor." They were to see if the land was fertile and had trees that bore fruit.

Bring back fruit: "And be of good courage, and bring some of the fruit of the land," especially during the season of the first ripe grapes.

The Purpose of The Mission - According to the Ramban, Moshe had two main reasons for sending the spies:

Preparation for war: As part of the preparations for the conquest of the land, similar to any nation invading a foreign land.

Boosting morale: Infusing the people with joy by showing them the goodness of the land and encouraging them before entering it.

The Ramban notes: "It is possible that Moshe, knowing that the land was rich and good, told them to take note of this so they could report it to the people, who would then rejoice and gain strength to ascend there with joy... so they could see with their own eyes the abundance of the land."

The Spies' Report - When the spies returned from their mission, they reported: "We came to the land where you sent us, and indeed it flows

with milk and honey, and these are its fruit." However, they immediately added: "Nevertheless ["efes"], the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw the descendants of the giants there." The use of the word "nevertheless" negates everything said before it, symbolizing the spies' lack of faith in their ability to conquer the land.

Rashi interprets the word "efes" as something insurmountable: "But their wickedness was in the word 'nevertheless,' which indicates something impossible for man to overcome in any way."

The Minority Opinion - Among the twelve spies, two did not concur with the majority: Calev son of Yefuneh and Yehoshua son of Nun. Calev proclaimed: "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." This statement reflects a profound faith in the capabilities of the Israelites as well as in Divine support. In stark contrast, the other spies declared, "We cannot attack those people; they are stronger than we are."

The Outcome and The Lessons to be Taken - The spies' words induced significant despair among the people, prompting them to yearn for a return to Egypt. This severe transgression resulted in the punishment of 40 years of wandering in the desert, ensuring that the entire generation of the wilderness would perish and not enter the Promised Land.

Our portion underscores the pivotal importance of speech and word choice, particularly when addressing a community. Moshe emphasized the goodness of the land and instructed the spies to focus on the quality of the soil, the crops, and the cities. His intention was to use this information to fortify the people's faith and bolster their morale as they prepared to enter the Land of Canaan.

In contrast, the spies chose to highlight the difficulties and limitations they perceived in the land. The use of the word "nevertheless" ["efes"] in their report was significant, effectively negating all the positive details they had shared about the land. This choice revealed a lack of faith in both their own ability to conquer the land as well as in Divine assistance.

Their focus on negative words and challenges transformed their report into one of despair, leading the people to a sense of hopelessness and despondency. The consequence was devastating: the people lost faith and resolved that they could not face the mission at hand, resulting in the severe punishment of 40 years of desert wandering.

The central message of our portion is unequivocal: faith, encouragement, and positivity are essential in guiding a nation toward its goals. When leaders like Moshe emphasize the good and the positive possibilities, they uplift the spirit of the people, providing them with the strength and courage to face challenges. Conversely, the use of negative speech and choosing to highlight the difficulties can break the spirit and lead to despair and failure.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Broad Life, Not Double Life

All the tribes were represented in the cohort of meraglim that were dispatched to survey the Land of Israel, as the pasuk states, "send one participant from each of their ancestral tribes, each one a chieftain ... all of them being men of consequence, leaders of Israel" (Bamidbar 13: 2-3). According to the Malbim (Commentary to Sefer Yehoshua 2:1), not only was the group's composition designed to obtain a cross section of perspectives that would legitimize its findings, but also to serve a more basic and pragmatic purpose. Each tribe excelled in a different profession and was promised a parcel of land specifically tailored to their unique livelihood. As such, only a member of each tribe was qualified and trusted to provide an accurate and compelling assessment of the prospects of transplanting that tribe's specific trade to the new environment of the Land of Israel.

Behind the scenes, something deeper was afoot. The Arizal (Shaar Hagilgulim, Hakdamah 36) asserts that the meraglim were meant to atone for the sale of Yosef, as Yosef had accused his brothers of being meraglim when they came to Mitzrayim, saying, "you are meraglim who have come to see the vulnerabilities of the land" (Breishis 24:9). To achieve this atonement, all of the tribes had to be included in the cadre of meraglim, since they all had been involved in the sale of Yosef. Rav Yitzchak Eizik Chaver, (Bris Yitzchak, Ner Mitzvah) adds that just like the sale of Yosef was instigated by lashon hara, as the Torah attests, "Yosef brought evil tales about them to their father ... and his brothers ... could not speak with him peacefully" (Breishis 37:2-4), so too the failure of the meraglim revolved around lashon hara, as the pasuk says, "They spread an evil report about the land" (Bamidbar 13:32), and as is implied by the juxtaposition of their expedition with the episode of Miriam (Rashi, Bamidbar 13:2).

Perhaps the thematic similarity between the sale of Yosef and the meraglim, such that one is an appropriate rectification for the other, is not limited to the area of lashon hara, but extends further. In Kabbalistic literature, the two wives of Yaakov represent the two spheres

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within which the Jewish people exist and operate. Leah corresponds to the upper supernal realms, which are obscured, while Rachel corresponds to the lower natural world, which is revealed (Zohar Vayeitzi 154a and Torah Ohr, Parshas Vayeitzi). The Arizal (Shaar Hapesukim and Likkutei Torah) claims that Moshe charged the meraglim to conduct themselves with the mindset of Leah, alluded to in the pasuk, "lasur es haaretz" - "to scout the land" (Bamidbar 13:16), which contains the acronym "Leah." However, the meraglim refused, adopting the view of Rachel, as hinted to in the pasuk, "Rechov Levo Chamas" (Bamidbar 13:21), whose initials can be rearranged to spell "Rachel." The meraglim were commanded to focus on the spiritual qualities of the land, but instead were consumed by its material attributes and financial possibilities.

However, many meforshim have understood the sin of the meraglim in precisely the opposite way. Throughout their travels in the wilderness, the Jewish people enjoyed a miraculous existence, indeed, their sustenance literally fell from the sky. Upon entering Eretz Yisrael, this would change dramatically, (see Haamek Davar, Introduction to Bamidbar). They would now be expected to engage fully with the natural order, which was not only daunting but deflating. The Baal Hantanya (Likkutei Torah) as well as the Chiddushei Harim maintain that the meraglim issued a negative report in the hopes of forestalling that transition and spiritual decline. It was an altruistic attempt to hold on to their completely transcendent lifestyle. They preferred to remain firmly ensconced in the lofty cocoon of Leah rather than to descend into the terrestrial concerns of Rachel.

Can this classic interpretation be reconciled with the Arizal's teaching that the sin of the meraglim was a failure to appreciate the spiritual potential of Eretz Yisrael? Rav Yitzchok Meir Morgenstern (Deah Chochmah Lenafshecha 5766) submits that the meraglim were asked to recognize that the sublime world of Leah can be realized and expressed even within the physical work of settling the land, and likewise that the realities of Rachel can become suffused with holiness and exalted by Divine service and command. Their job was to unite these two worlds together, but instead of convergence and consonance all they found was conflict and discord. From their mistaken perspective, laboring to build the Land of Israel remained a strictly financial undertaking, devoid of religious meaning and idealism, and therefore, they rejected it.

In one of his letters, Rav Hutner (Pachad Yitzchak, Igros u'Kesavim, Michtav 94) laments the attitude, held by some, that Judaism prescribes a bifurcated life, part sacred and part secular. He believes this to be

fundamentally erroneous and contends that Judaism demands not a "double life" but a "broad life." A Jew does not toggle between two disparate spaces that need to be simultaneously inhabited and maintained, rather he occupies two rooms within the same home, each enriching the function and experience of the other.

If the meraglim had been optimistic about their mission to bridge these two arenas, and to discover and promote a grounded and integrated spiritual existence, it would have been a fitting remedy for the sale of Yosef. Properly considered, the struggle between Yosef and his brothers was driven by a similar dilemma to the one confronting the meraglim. Rav Soloveitchik (The Rav Speaks) explains that Yosef's brothers were content with the spiritual serenity and purity of their life in the Land of Canaan. They were not eager or willing to prepare for their inevitable sojourn as strangers in a foreign land. To silence Yosef and his pesky prognostications they tried to cast him away into obscurity. But Yosef, fueled by his foreboding and relentless dreams, sensed that Divine Providence would soon thrust them into alien surroundings, and he passionately argued that they would be best served by adapting to the challenges and opportunities that lied ahead, rather than by endeavoring to outrun them. A slightly different variation of essentially the same test arose again in the age of the meraglim. Would they retreat into spiritual isolationism or aspire to implement the ambitious goal of elevating and redeeming the physical world?

Undoubtedly, this is the universal vision of mitzvos, and relevant to every location and circumstance, nonetheless, it finds its fullest manifestation in Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 24a) states, "the Torah scholars in Eretz Yisrael are pleasant to one another in discussions of halakha ... the Torah scholars in Bavel injure each other in discussions of halakha." Rav Kook (Oros Hatorah, Chapter 13) suggests that the halachic discussions of Bavel are characterized as clashes and disputes because halachic observance in the diaspora is by its very nature an effort to apply a spiritual code to an inherently mundane and hostile setting. In Eretz Yisrael, halachic matters are resolved gracefully and peacefully, because there halacha does not seek to impose itself, rather it is native to the land and its people. Therefore, only in Eretz Yisrael is cultivating the land a spiritual activity and not just a logistical necessity.

We yearn for the days when the original objective given to the mergalim will be accomplished. When holiness will define the entirety of our existence and when the full promise of Eretz Yisrael will be fulfilled.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Profundity of Profundities

HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying, "Send (SHELACH) for yourself men who will scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Children of Israel. And you should send (SHELACH) one man each for his father's tribe; each one shall be a chieftain in their midst." So, Moshe sent (SHELACH) them from the desert of Paran by the word of HASHEM. All of them were men of distinction; they were the heads of the children of Israel. (Bamidbar 13:1-3)

What went so terribly wrong with these "men of distinction?" How do we keep from falling into such a trap ourselves? That is the question!

I can think of nothing more humbling, and at the same time and powering as this statement from the sages, "SHLUCHO SHEL ADAM K'MOSO" – The messenger of a person is like him." On a pedestrian level, it informs us that there is something called "power of attorney". However, it also implies that we take the power and proportion of the one who is sending us. So, the question becomes, "Who is sending us? Who do we represent?" When a kid will come into my office with a defiant look, I'll ask him, "Who is the boss here?" He will usually look up at me sheepishly and mumble, "YOU!" I then tell him, "HASHEM is the boss and I have to obey His orders just like you have to obey Him!" When we do what HASHEM wants us to do, there is nothing more humbling and nothing more empowering.

The Sefas Emes quotes the Medrash that says: There is nothing more-dear before The Holy One Blessed is He like a messenger that is sent to do a mitzvah, and he gives his soul that he should be successful in his mission". He then writes in the name of his grandfather, the Ciddushei HaRim, "All of us are messengers that are sent here to do Mitzvos. Our mission is from Hashem in this world to fulfill His Mitzvos. There is no action that does not have within it a Mitzvah. Only before doing anything, a person has to remind himself of his mission...he should gather together all of his desires, and nullify them only to fulfill the lofty desire of HASHEM. With this he will be successful even with material actions. The main thing is that he should desire to manifest the Honor of HASHEM and that he uncovers the hidden light in everything."

Maybe it's a sign that we're getting older or maybe it's a sign that we're getting younger. My wife and I fill up a birdfeeder in front of our house and we are tickled by the beauty and the pageantry and the sheer variety of types and stripes and colors and sizes of the birds that come to visit us. Each one is an elegant

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sample of the artistry and the endless genius of the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Maybe it's a sign we are getting older or maybe it's a sign we are getting younger, or maybe it's a sign we are really timeless.

There is nothing as sublime as time. It can be measured but cannot be held. The Arvei Nachal offers a spatial representation of time. Imagine an opaque window with a one inch by one inch window open to a glowing globe on the inside. The square inch that is exposed is the present and when the ball on the outside rotates, that space is covered, and it becomes the past. The square inch that is about to be exposed is the future. When the outer shell is removed, then everything is revealed in the world of the ever-present HAYA-HOVE'-YIHEYEH. The good news and the bad news is that everything we do is forever. Such is the beauty of Teshuvah!

The ultimate remedy offered is, "Do not follow after your eyes and after your heart". How does that help us remain true to our mission? I remember that kids with glasses were teased with the name, "Four eyes!" The truth is, everybody has four eyes. Two physical earthly eyes that look on the world and are blinded and confused by the reflection of so many material things. Then there are the two spiritual, inner eyes. The impressionistic artist Gagnon, said "I only begin to see when I close my eyes". When you ask a wise person a question, you might notice sometimes, that before he answers, he closes his eyes. We close our eyes when declaring HASHEM's ONENESS! With eyes wide open we are vulnerable and liable to be distracted by the vanity of vanities but when we close our eyes, even temporarily, we are able to perceive the profundity of profundities.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez: A Spirit of Belief

The Kotzker Rebbe gives a penetrating insight into the tragedy of the spies.

The verse says that the spies' reason that they felt that they could not conquer the land was because "we see ourselves as grasshoppers", as too small, but then they add "so we were in their eyes." The Kotzker Rebbe points out that this is the psychological sin – we thought we were so small and were convinced that not only that's how we see ourselves, but that's how everybody sees us.

So much so, says Rashi, the spies claim that our enemies are even stronger than G-d. Their belief went as far as thinking that even Hashem couldn't help us.

This is the challenge today – our enemies saw us as divided and 'small', but we showed on October 7 a different spirit. The spirit of Calev

and Yehoshua, the spirit of belief. The belief in our right to this land, in the eternity of the Jewish people. When we believe in our cause, then no one is too strong for us, as we are here as emissaries of G-d. If He is on our side, then we can accomplish anything.

May we all continue with this spirit of belief in our G-d-given right to this land and in that merit may He return all the hostages, return all those displaced to their homes, protect all our soldiers, and bring healing to those who need.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

How to Be Dishonest Without Telling a Lie

The central theme of our Sidra this morning is the reconnaissance mission of MERAGLIM which Moses sent into Canaan to spy out the Land and see if it can be taken by the Israelites grouped in the desert, at its borders, as G-d had promised. These MERAGLIM were important people, people held in respect by their peers and leaders of their tribes. When they returned from their tour of duty they reported to Moses and to Israel: the Land is rich - it is indeed a Land flowing with milk and honey. They brought back tremendous clusters of grapes to prove its fertility and the richness of its natural resources. However, they said, the Land was inhabited by a race of giants who dwarfed the Israelites and made them look like locusts. They were a mighty people, heavily armed and their cities powerfully fortified. By no stretch of imagination, by no exercise of military optimism is it conceivable, they reported, that this band of newly freed Semite slaves could fight and beat the race of armed Canaanite giants. This is what they had seen, and so had they reported. As a consequence of their report, the anger of G-d was kindled against the entire people, and especially the MERAGLIM. It was then that G-d determined the punishment: 40 years of circuitous and tortuous travel in the great burning desert. Plague was to strike these people, and this entire generation would die out in the desert, not one of them would ever set foot on the Promised Land of Canaan, only their children, who had not been partner to this pessimistic report, only they would enter Canaan.

It is a story which is well-known but which is puzzling. They were punished in a most harsh manner - an entire generation killed off. And we sometimes wonder at the justice of the penalty: did the meraglim not tell the truth? They reported just what they saw. They did not lie, they did not tell one untruth. All was truthful. Why should people be punished for telling the truth? 3. In the answer to that question, supplied by the eminent Rabbi of Kotzk, lies a whole Weltanschauung, a whole view on life. It is true, he says, that the Meraglim did not lie; it is not true, however, that they told the truth. One can refrain from

lying, and still not be telling the truth. EMESS, truth, is more than an accurate recital of facts. Rendering the facts precisely down to the last detail means that one has not lied and that he has achieved accuracy. But EMESS - truth - that is a religious and moral technique, a G-dly essence, and not a scientist's instrument. EMESS, he says, means not only finding and telling the facts as they appear, but finding and telling the facts as they bring out the Will of G-d; it means raising appearances until they become one with the view of G-d; it means finding the hidden G-dliness in any situation. That is EMESS, the Seal of G-d.

And that was the sin of the Meraglim. They reported accurately, but not truthfully. To give the EMESS, they should have reported the fertility of the Palestinian soil and the power of its inhabitants, as they did, but they should have added: these giants are only men. Where there is the Will of G-d no giant can resist it. It is indeed the Land which G-d has promised us, and so let us go up and take it. It is a Land worthy of the Divine Name, let therefore the will of G-d be achieved. Instead of seeing only clusters of grapes and walls of cities and tall men and many weapons, they should have seen the figure of Abraham as G-d promised him this land; they should have heard the Divine Word foretelling its future as the Land of Israel; they should have felt the Divine presence already penetrating it. That would have been EMESS. But they failed EMESS, though they did not lie, and hence the terrible punishment and the death of DOR HA'MIDBAR.

4. Take that criterion of EMESS and you see how it applies to every aspect of our contemporary life. The American Jew who visits Israel today - the modern counterpart of the MERAGLIM - who comes back from the Holy Land and does not fabricate any stories, can do one of two things: he can be just accurate, or he can give EMESS, Truth. The traveler who is merely accurate will come back armed with statistics and anecdotes - he will tell you the level of unemployment, the terrible drinking water, the new construction, the Yemenite habits, the many languages, the Haddassah hospital, the high political tension, the extremely tense religious situation between extremists on both sides, the communal life of the kibbutzim, etc. It is a report you could hear about any small country, newly formed, in a process of rapid and at times uncontrolled development. That is mere accuracy.

TRUTH, however, EMESS, should make these people detect the Will of G-d in the turmoil that is modern Israel. EMESS means to understand that History is a gradual process leading to a definite goal, and that the Designs of the Almighty are accomplished only through mighty wranglings. It means to understand that here is being forged a

Likutei Divrei Torah

rejuvenation of Torah, that out of this tumult and tempest, even out of the positive negativism towards religion adopted by the ruling party, even out of the very cynicism and hypocrisy of the leftist groups who crusade for so-called Freedom of Religion while denying it to new immigrants, even out of all this shall arise the splendor of Torah, the visions of our Prophets realized. EMESS means that the visitor must come back imbued with Torah ideals, understanding that this is not merely an Eastern station overflowed with east European Jews. This the Holy Land, 1955; and the Holiness should be evident on every inch of its soil. To be able to detect and report that is EMESS.

5. We are all in a sense MERAGLIM. Our lives seem to be spent in a desert, in a wilderness of purposelessness, but occasionally, though rarely, it is given to us to make a spiritual expedition, a religious reconnaissance of another kind of world, of the Canaan of our souls, of the delights and heights of a different and higher kind of life and living. Some of us make this trip into greater spirituality during great religious moments - the time of Shofar blowing or Kol Nidre or Neilah might provide some people with a deepened sense of G-dliness, or with a heightened sensitivity to the call of Torah, with all the ecstasy and spiritual delight it signifies. Others might find it in the study of Torah, in the comprehension of one of its great and eternal truths. Others might experience this sudden reconnaissance in a greater and much different world at a time of personal significance - a Bar Mitzvah or wedding or, may Heaven forbid, a tragedy, such as the passing glimpse of Eternity some of us get as we stand beside the coffin of a beloved one. It is what happens when we get back to the mundane routine of daily living and when we then consider this special experience that determines whether we have achieved EMESS. If we pass it off as a psychological release or emotional experience, it might not be inaccurate. But we have then lost EMESS. EMESS means to understand that this glimpse can become a stare, and the stare can become a lifetime of higher and greater experiences. EMESS means to act so that this land we have reconnoitered becomes our own. It means that the inspiration becomes permanent so that greater and deeper awareness of G-d will result.

6. In a similar fashion, I can understand someone talking about Kodimoh and describing it in one of two ways: accurate - or EMESS. It is not inaccurate to say that the foremost Orthodox synagogue in Springfield is housed in an old building, that it has architectural features which are unpleasant: the

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lighting is poor, the seats uncomfortable, the quarters cramped, facilities insufficient, room sparse and crowded. It is accurate to say that not only on High Holidays is it terribly insufficient, but on every Sabbath, when our junior Congregation must move to less convenient quarters and our Sr. Cong dismissed when there is any kind of Simcha. That is all accurate. But from that sort of accuracy one might conclude that there is a lack of vitality in this institution. While EMESS means the reverse - it means adding that Kodimoh has the largest Sabbath attendance of any synagogue within 25 miles of it, that it has daily minyanim every day of the year, that it has its youth returning to it and its people practicing, by and large, more and more of their beliefs. It means that those very facts - cramped quarters, insufficient facilities, overcrowded synagogue, the need for newer, fresher looking externals - all this proves that Kodimoh has so grown that it has outgrown its past building and must do something constructive so that its facilities keep up with its vitality and its message to the community. EMESS means to lead to the only logical conclusion: the conclusion to which David was lead some 2400 years ago when he saw the Ark unhoused properly: BUILD - and build graciously and spaciously, for the success of KODIMOH will reflect and inspire the success of genuine and authentic Judaism every place else in the country. That is EMESS.

7. We say in our morning prayers: LE'OLAM IEHEI ADAM YEKEI SHAMAYIM BESEISER UV AGALUI UMODEH AL HAEMESS - at all times let a man fear G-d, in private and in public, and testify the truth. In our private lives may we learn to be more than accurate - may we learn that to be MODEH AL HAEMESS means to be a YEREI SHAMAYIM, to fear G-d and find His will; and as for fearing G-d in public, in public worship, EMESS directs us to one goal: the expansion of our facilities so that more people will flock to this center of Torah in ever greater devotion.



BS"D

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date: Jun 19, 2025, 10:27 AM

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

The Very, Very Good Land

It is no small coincidence that as we lein Parshas Shlach this week, Eretz Yisroel is enmeshed in such a difficult struggle. Between the terrible trepidation, and the incredible hope for an extraordinary victory, we need to better understand one of the central features of Eretz Yisroel.

Let us paraphrase a question posed in Sefer Akeidas Yitzchak: if Eretz Yisroel is such a wonderful country, and Yisroel should have grabbed it, then they are simply being stupid for rejecting it, rather than sinful. Even if they were scared of battle, and perhaps illogically doubted that Hashem could help them vanquish the K'na'anim, why is it considered that they "rejected Eretz Yisroel"?

Let us turn to an incredible point about Eretz Yisroel that the Netziv makes. He asks: when Kaleb and Yehoshua described Eretz Yisroel as being a wonderful place they used the phrase "for the land is very, very good". Great people, and certainly the Torah, do not use empty flowery language! What is this repetition of "very" all about?

The Netziv answers that any gift which is continuously bestowed upon a person is lacking in two aspects: first, it tends to plateau, with the original excitement waning; and worse still, people become smug and cocky and suffer a sense of entitlement.

Eretz Yisroel, however, is very different. The immanence of Hashem's hashgacha means that there is a very high standard to uphold and corresponding consequences. This means that no sense of "entitlement" takes hold, and that the occasionally very difficult periods constantly highlight the good that happens. This is what's meant by "very, very good" - an extraordinary good, yet one devoid of the deficiencies typically associated with unusual abundance.

The Akeidas Yitzchak makes a similar point. He says that Israel did not reject the land because it was deficient per se; rather because it meant that our lives would be determined by a higher spiritual standard of behavior instead of the ebb and flow of nature. They were in effect rejecting a way of life of "walking with Hashem".

It is hard not to think of these incredible words at this time. If there is anything we crave, it is a non-eventful existence. From the day that we have repopulated Eretz Yisroel we have yearned for just a quiet tranquil uneventful existence. For many the code word for living in Eretz Yisroel was 'normalcy'. A normal natural uneventful life, after all that we have suffered. This has eluded us greatly. Both the incredible miracles and devastating tzoros are anything but 'normal' or 'natural'.

This is not in spite of Eretz Yisroel being the promised land but rather because of it. Sinking into the lethargy of natural existence and overflowing abundance would rob us of our essence: being a nation bound to Hashem and whose very fortune echoes that bond.

May the impact of the terrible travails that we've gone through during the past two years become the guardrail which will allow for pure tov to be bestowed upon us in the future without having any of the challenges associated with pure tov.

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War in Israel: Faith Written in the Heavens

By **Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

22 Sivan 5785 – June 18, 2025

We often think of faith in Hashem as something instinctive – either we have it or we don't. But emunah isn't just a feeling or an inborn trait. It's a choice. Faith is a decision.

We look at a challenge, reflect on what we've seen and experienced, and then we decide: to believe or not to believe. emunah isn't predicated upon complete clarity or certainty. It is merely a decision to trust, even when full understanding isn't possible.

In certain instances, the decision to have faith shapes our course of action. We rely upon emunah to carry us forward, to walk us across the bridge of fear and uncertainty. When we can't summon that faith, we become paralyzed and stuck, unable to move forward or reclaim our vision.

Such was the situation thousands of years ago in the desert, as we stood on the doorstep of Israel, poised to enter Eretz Yisrael and make history. The fairytale of leaving Egypt, of marching through the dry sea, and of eating heavenly "mann" was suddenly threatened by a harsh reality: Eretz Yisrael was inhabited by mighty nations and overshadowed by giants. We could not simply waltz into this land. The land of Hashem would not be easily claimed. Had we summoned emunah, we would have pressed forward and altered the course of history. Instead, we flinched, faltered in our faith, and rerouted our desert journey for 40 long years. Had we mustered faith, we would have been emboldened to choose a different course of action.

There is a second kind of emunah – not the kind that helps us choose between paths, but the kind we need when no other path exists. Sometimes, life doesn't offer us alternatives. Instead, we must draw on our faith and inner strength to face the only road before us.

At the Yam Suf, we were trapped, cornered between the advancing Egyptian army and the raging sea. Though some may have considered returning to Egypt, that was not a real option. We would have faced brutal persecution for our attempted rebellion. The Egyptians would have made an example of us to crush any future hope of escape among other slaves.

Our only chance – though it seemed beyond reason – was to plunge forward into the sea. Empowered by faith, we turned resolutely toward the water and watched as Hashem split the sea, offering us a path through the impossible. Sometimes faith helps us choose a direction. Other times, it strengthens us along the only path available.

Cornered, We Chose Faith

The past two years have demanded the second type of emunah, the kind we summon when there are no choices left. On Oct. 8th, we didn't weigh options or calculate risks. We were staring down an existential threat to our country, forced to confront a grim and painful reality.

Yet through deep faith and national resilience, we awakened inner strength to rise from that trauma. We stood back up and delivered stinging defeats to our enemies on multiple fronts.

Currently, we face a similar moment of faith. As the Iranian regime inched closer to a nuclear weapon – one they openly threatened to use against us – we were left with little choice but to act. As I write these words, our cities are under brutal nightly missile fire, resulting in heavy casualties and deep sorrow. But what choice did we have? The civilian casualties only underscore how catastrophic the situation might have been had Iran gone nuclear.

Once again, this week we are left with no alternatives but to summon faith and confront this daunting challenge with courage, and unshakable resolve.

Faith Without a Battlefield

Despite its similarities to Oct. 8th and the same kind of faith it demanded, this past week has felt different. The massacre of Oct. 7th was followed by a wave of mass mobilization. Our entire nation ran to the front – to defend, to rescue, and to battle terror. An entire country, and much of the Jewish world, rallied to provide support – material, emotional, and spiritual.

In those early days, our faith extended beyond the internal; it was made manifest through our actions, our unity, and our shared sense of purpose. We were engaged in a divine mission and a national calling. Our emunah took tangible shape in the world: it was experienced, witnessed, and lived fully. This week has posed a different kind of emunah-challenge. Most of the current war is being waged by the Air Force and intelligence units.

Tragically, rescue teams have spent the weekend pulling survivors and victims from the wreckage of missiles that targeted urban areas. Though many soldiers have been drafted, their current role – at least for now – is primarily precautionary, guarding against border infiltrations or violence in Palestinian towns.

For most of us, there is little to do but hold on to faith, running in and out of shelters at all hours of the day and night. In some ways, this makes our faith even more powerful. We are largely helpless to affect the outcome. We are left with only tefillah and faith. It feels like a Yam Suf moment – binary and absolute – with nothing to do but to pray that Hashem continues to shield our skies from the hands of evil.

Oceans and Heavens

At the Yam Suf, we looked downward – toward the raging waves crashing against the cliffs – praying that Hashem's hand would guide us through the waters beneath our feet. Our faith was focused on the sea below. This week, our eyes have turned upward. We are glued to the heavens, listening to the roar of Air Force sorties and the sharp cracks of missile interceptions overhead. It all feels uncannily prophetic and *déjà vu*. Hashem struck Egypt from above during the plague of barad. He addressed us with a booming voice from the heavens at Sinai. He halted the sun for Yehoshua as we prevailed against our adversaries.

For Jews, moments of crisis often turn the heavens into the stage of divine intervention. Though we have endured painful losses and taken heavy blows, the tools Hashem has placed in our hands have shielded us from far greater devastation. As the battle moves from Azza's sands to the skies above Tel Aviv, our faith rises – perhaps more fragile, but sharper – focused not on what we can do, but on what we must patiently await.

Taken From Tanach

This week also feels more Biblical. Our war with Hamas is being fought to defend our homeland and secure a safer, more peaceful future for our children. It is a war of necessity, grounded in territorial defense. Though Hamas represented a deeply immoral ideology – one that has, tragically, infiltrated and poisoned broader circles of society – it posed no immediate existential threat to the larger world.

Iran is ruled by madmen cloaked in the garb of religion. There is nothing sacred about men who murder their own citizens and feel no pang of conscience in targeting innocents. Though much of the world still refuses to admit this, we once again find ourselves saving them from their own moral blindness and inability to confront evil. If Iran obtains nuclear weapons, the

threat it poses will extend far beyond our borders – endangering all of humanity.

This week it feels as if we are reliving the mission of our grandfather Avraham, who was called *Ivri* – willing to stand on one side of the river alone, with clarity and conviction. Once again, we stand alone. We hope others will join us, but even if they don't, we remain determined to rid the world of this menace.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/frand-5785-shlach/>

The Difference Between the Spies Sent by Moshe and the Spies Sent by Yehoshua

Parshas Shlach

Rav Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1341 – A Beautiful Talis: Is That Called *Hidur Mitzvah* and Other Talis Issues. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Shelach contains the seminal event in Jewish history of the sending of spies and their subsequent negative report about Eretz Yisrael, and the resulting crying that night. Literally, Jewish history as we know it was set in motion because of this ill-fated mission. One of the famous questions that many commentaries focus on is that the Ribono shel Olam told Moshe Rabbeinu “Send out for yourself men who will spy out the Land of Canaan that I am giving to Bnei Yisrael” (Bamidbar 13:2). Apparently, the Ribono shel Olam not only acquiesced to this mission, He told Moshe to send out the meraglim (spies). Clearly, had the Ribono shel Olam wanted to stop the mission, He could have emphatically told Moshe not to send the meraglim. He didn't do that.

So, what is the meaning of this? How could the Ribono shel Olam make sending the meraglim into amitzvah, and then it turns into such a tragedy? A famous and beautiful Medrash – the first Medrash Rabbah in Parshas Shelach – cites the pasuk in Yehoshua whereby Yehoshua sent out meraglim: “And Yehoshua bin Nun dispatched two men – spies – from Shittim, secretly saying ‘Go, observe the land and Yericho.’” (Yehoshua 2:1) History repeats itself. This is the Haftorah of Parshas Shelach. When Bnei Yisroel were on the threshold of entering Eretz Yisrael, Yehoshua also sent out meraglim. He sent out two rather than twelve meraglim. They stayed in the house of Rachav Hazonah and they returned with their report about Yericho.

It is reasonable to assume that Yehoshua would have been very hesitant about sending out meraglim, based on what happened forty years earlier with the first group of meraglim. Nevertheless, Yehoshua proceeded with this mission. Not only that, but it turned out well. Not only did it turn out well, but the Medrash says about the two meraglim whom Yehoshua sent out, “There is no one dearer before the Almighty than a messenger sent out to perform amitzvah-mission who risks his life to successfully accomplish his mission.” The Medrash cites the two messengers that Yehoshua bin Nun sent as a prime quintessential example of *shluchei mitzvah* who risked their lives to successfully carry out their mitzvah-mission. The Medrash further records a Rabbinic tradition that those two meraglim were Pinchas and Kaleb.

The Medrash continues: The pasuk says that Yehoshua sent out two meraglim “cheresh” (“secretly”) which the Medrash takes to mean that the two spies disguised themselves as pottery salesmen so no one would realize they were meraglim. They would shout “Anyone who needs an earthenware pot (a play on the word ‘cheres’ as the letters ‘shin’ and ‘sin’ can be interchanged), come purchase from us.”

The Gerer Rebbe, in his famous work *Sefas Emes*, writes that the Ribono shel Olam knew that the mission of the original meraglim sent by Moshe was fraught with danger. He saw the pitfalls and He realized what could happen. But the people wanted it and therefore He said, “I will give guidance so that they should be protected and not fall prey to the various temptations that they will face.” What was this guidance and protection provided by the Ribono shel Olam? He made it into amitzvah—Shelach lecha anashim!

The people wanted a spy mission. It could be done in one of two ways: They could do it on their own and the risk would be very high. But, instead, the Ribono shel Olam said “I will make it into amitzvah. When people do something l’shem mitzvah, then the mitzvah protects them. Therefore, the potential danger associated with the sending of the meraglim would be mitigated.

The only problem was that in order to achieve that protection, the mitzvah must be done l’shem mitzvah! You need to do it because the Ribono shel Olam said so. However, these meraglim had their own agenda. They were not doing it because the Ribono shel Olam so commanded. They were doing it for their own purposes. On a basic level, perhaps it was the strategic thing to do. They were not “mevatel their da’as to the Da’as of the Ribono shel Olam” (negate their opinions to the Almighty’s opinion). They did it because this was Military 101. You want to capture a city? You go scout it out and figure out the best place to attack.

Since they didn’t do it for the sake of the mitzvah they did not receive the protection of that mitzvah. Thus, the Ribono shel Olam’s “plan” “did not work.” The Medrash contrasts this failed mission with the successful mission of Yehoshua’s meraglim – that was performed by faithful messengers who were acting l’shem mitzvah and with mesiras nefesh l’shem mitzvah. The result was a successful mission.

The Sefas Emes makes a further observation. The Medrash comments on the word cheresh as teaching that Yehoshua’s meraglim disguised themselves as pottery salesmen (selling klei cheresh). One might ask why they were specifically selling pottery. Why not metal utensils? Why weren’t they shoe salesmen? The Sefas Emes answers beautifully that klei cheresh are unique in that they have no intrinsic value. They are made out of pottery. They break. They don’t look good. They are porous. The whole purpose of an earthenware vessel is its mission. That is why the mefarshim say that klei cheresh only become tameh from the inside. The outside of the earthenware vessel is valueless. Its whole purpose is to perform its function, which is to hold things.

This, according to the Medrash, is the symbolism of Pinchas and Kaleb being pottery salesmen – they nullified themselves. There was no “me”. There was no personal agenda of why they were doing this. “We are doing this only because the Ribono shel Olam sent us. This is our mission.” Therefore, they were successful. There is nothing as dear to the Almighty as shluchei mitzvah who are moser nefesh strictly and only for the sake of Hashem. In such cases, the inherent dangers are warded off by the fulfillment of the mitzvah and its associated zechus (merit).

The Sefas Emes concludes with a beautiful practical lesson: We are all shluchei mitzvah. We are sent down to this earth with a mission. The Ribono shel Olam takes this neshama – this holy soul, which is a chelek Elo-ka mi’ma’al (portion of the L-rd above) and puts it into a body and says ‘Here, go do your mission!’ We come down to this world, which is fraught with all sorts of danger and all sorts of temptations and pitfalls. It is very difficult for a person to maintain his kedushah and to maintain the status of being an erliche Yid (a Jew with integrity). Our challenge is to fulfill our mission, whatever that may be – whether butcher or baker or candlestick maker or lawyer or accountant or doctor or computer programmer or real estate broker or whatever – and to fulfill that mission completely l’shem shamayim. No matter what your mission may be, you will then have the protection of knowing that you are doing what the Ribono shel Olam wants you to do, and you are doing it solely for His sake.

Not everyone is cut out to sit and learn all the time, but everyone is put here with a mission. If part of your mission is that you need to earn a living and you need to support your family and give tzedaka, etc., etc. – and you are doing that because it is what you perceive as your mission from the Ribono shel Olam, then “There is no one dearer before the Almighty than those who are shluchei mitzvah – who faithfully, l’shem shamayim, carry out their mission.”

In this way, the most mundane and quotidian activity in this world can be turned l’shem shamayim. Once you do this, you will gain the protection that the meraglim of Yehoshua merited. On the other hand, when the mission

becomes “your mission” – whether it is to make money or to acquire power or whatever it may be – then the l’shem shamayim aspect will be lost, as was the case with the meraglim of Moshe, and the protection that the shlichus of the mitzvah should afford will be lost as well.

That is unfortunately what happens so often to so much of mankind. They forget the mission and the l’shem mitzvah of that mission and therefore they need to deal with the vagaries and the pitfalls that are inevitable in almost every person’s life.

Glass Half Full/Glass Half Empty

One of the lessons of the meraglim is that there are only two kinds of people in this world: The person who sees the glass half full and the person who sees the glass half empty. The ten meraglim who came back with the negative report were unfortunately people who saw the glass half empty. They brought back an extraordinarily large cluster of grapes, which could be viewed in one of two ways: What a lush land this is! It is going to be easy to farm. It is going to be easy to make a living here. Look at this wonderful place! Or, “The people must be giants because why on earth would the fruit be so big?”

When the Ribono shel Olam made it happen that the locals were busy burying the dead so that they would be preoccupied and not notice the meraglim, that too could be viewed in one of two ways: Look at the favor the Ribono shel Olam did for us!” Or, “Everyone drops dead over here. What kind of land is this?” This is the classic “glass half empty/glass half full” dichotomy.

I saw a famous story in thesefer Me’orei Ohr, describing an incident that occurred post-World War II, in one of the Displaced Persons camps. Rabbi Eliezer Silver, zt”l, who as part of the Vaad Hatzalah went around Europe in his U.S. Army uniform, came to Mauthausen, where there were Jewish Holocaust survivors. He wanted to make aminyan and had nine people. There was one Jewish survivor, who refused to join theminyan. Rabbi Silver tried to convince him to help make the prayer quorum. The fellow told Rabbi Silver “I will never again in my life daven or pick up a siddur.”

He explained his bitterness to the Rabbi: When he was in the concentration camp, there was a Jew who smuggled in a siddur, from which he would daven. He would then “rent” his siddur to the other prisoners of the concentration camp. The “rent” he charged to use his siddur was that those who wanted todaven had to give him their bread rations for the day. This bitter Jew told Rabbi Silver “When I saw a Jew that could stoop so low that he would make others forgo their meager rations in order to use his siddur, I decided that I don’t want to have anything to do with davening or with a siddur or with such a religion for the rest of my life.”

Rav Eliezer Silver said to this Jew: Why do you look at the Jew that rented out the siddur for a ration of bread? Why do you not, instead, look at the Jews who were willing to give up their rations of bread in order todaven? The bitter Jew conceded that Rav Silver was right. He decided to help complete the minyan.

Years later, this story was told over by the famous Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal, at a conference of European rabbis, at which the rabbinical group presented Simon Wiesenthal with an award upon reaching his 91st birthday. When Wiesenthal finished the story, he delivered the punchline: “I was that bitter Jew whom Rabbi Silver convinced to join the minyan.”

This is one of the many lessons of the meraglim: The glass is either half full or half empty. In general, people who have the capacity to look at the glass as half full live happier lives. Other people don’t live as happy lives. This lesson is summed up by the pasuk: “...And you shall see the good of Yerushalayim all the days of your life.” (Tehillim 128:5)

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The story of the Spies, and their negative portrayal of the Land of Israel in this week's Torah reading immediately follows the story that closes last week's reading, Miriam speaking lashon hara against her brother Moses and her subsequent punishment is immediately followed by the episode of the spies who spoke negatively of the land of Israel. The Rabbis (Yalkut Shimoni, Isaiah, remez 459, quoted by Rashi in his commentary to the Torah) comment on the juxtaposition by noting that in their behavior, the spies failed to learn the lesson of Miriam.

The comment is difficult, because it seems to imply there was a message a fortiori; what Miriam did was bad, what the spies did was worse. However, instinct would point in the other direction; Miriam spoke about a human being, with feelings and emotions, while the spies sinned against land. In fact, the Talmud itself adopts this perspective, stating that the story of the spies instructs on the severity of lashon hara, as their punishment was for disparaging the land, and surely to speak badly of humans must therefore be far worse. (Arakhin 15a. See also R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, Heamek Davar, Deut. 24:9; Shemirat HaLashon, Parashat Shlach; R. Moshe Galanti, Zevach Shelamim, Parashat Beha'alotekha, #94; R. Raphael Tzaban, Nefesh Chayah, II, Shlach, 1; R. Avigdor Neventzhal, Sichot LeSefer Bamidbar, #8 and #9; and R. Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, in BeYad HaLashon, pp. 315-316.) It would seem, rather, that the Rabbis are making a different point. Miriam's transgression was indeed, in terms of the victim, worse than that of the spies. The lesson the spies should have learned was not that their disparagement of the land constituted an even more severe violation. The lesson actually had to do with the extreme complexity and challenges involved in addressing negativity through speech and thought. If Miriam, with her personal greatness and noble intentions, could still run afoul of this value, clearly a program of mental reorientation and proactive attitude adjustment is necessary. An instructive comparison may come from the laws of kiddushon Friday night. When this ritual is performed over wine, the practice is to cover the challah breads. The Talmud and commentators offer a number of possible explanations (Talmud Yerushalmi, cited in Tur, O.C. 271, and see Ohr Zarua, Hil. Shabbat II, 22), one of which seems particularly striking. According to the general rule, the blessing is recited on bread first; in this case, the kiddush is being recited on the wine, which is thus the subject of the first blessing. Accordingly, the challah breads are covered so they not "witness" their losing this honor to the wine and thus be "embarrassed".

This attribution of human feelings to pastry is difficult to understand. Are we truly concerned that inanimate objects will experience humiliation? Especially considering what the challah will go through a few minutes later is far worse. It seems, rather, that the concern is to the complexity of human emotion. Determining what will or will not have hurtful consequences to another is a highly involved enterprise, one that does not come easily to the untrained intuition. To assume that undeveloped instinct will rise to the challenge of the moment is dangerous; offense can occur even unintentionally, when the speaker is unpracticed in the nuances of human sensitivity. Thus, even interactions with inanimate objects are viewed as opportunities to hone the awareness necessary to deal with actual people. Being cognizant of a "slight" to challah will, it is hoped, ensure awareness of the risk involved when a human is in such a situation. The value of this exercise could thus explain the extensive analyses and hypothetical discussions devoted to the practice of challah covering (see, for example, Resp Iggerot Moshe; R. David Rosenberg, Responsa Minchat David, I, 2; R. Yisrael David Harfenes, Nishmat Shabbat, II, p. 41). The obligation to remember Miriam, according to Nachmanides possibly a Torah commandment, is to train oneself in sensitivity in advance, so that when a situation presents itself, there is a hope that the challenge will be negotiated successfully.

This, then, is the lesson that the spies failed to learn. Immediately after Miriam's punishment, to go and indulge a biased negativity in evaluating the land of Israel was a complete rejection of the moral message.

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Shelach 5785 – Our God and Our People

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

During these very difficult days, not only do others challenge our sacred and inherent connection to the holy land of Eretz Yisrael, but they also threaten our very existence. In response, we must rise to the challenge by embracing both our mission defined by God to serve as His goy kadosh, His holy nation, and our firm commitment to support and protect each other and tie our own identity and fate to our people.

That duality is not unique to these times as in Judaism there is no gap between shul and state. As Rav Yitzchak Hutner noted, the words Shema Yisrael, "Hear O Israel", are not just an introduction but an essential part of the Jew's declaration of faith: our connection to God and our national identity are inextricably intertwined (Pachad Yitzchak, Chanukah, 13:3). This is a truism that has been repeated in different forms and every generation, from Ruth's statement to Naami, "Your nation is my nation, and your God is my God," to the once-assimilated Herzl's declaration that "Zionism is the return to Judaism even before the return to the land of Israel."

Redemption in the story of the spies likewise came from two angles. Yehoshua and Caleb both resisted their peers and refused to join them in turning the hearts of their people away from the Land of Israel, yet their resistance had two very different sources. Yehoshua drew his strength from a prayer uttered on his behalf and made a part of his identity by his teacher Moshe, who pleaded that "God should save you from the plot of the spies", whereas Caleb made a detour to visit Chevron, where he prayed at the graves of the patriarchs that he not be swayed by his fellow spies (Rashi to Bamidbar 13:16 and 13:22).

Yehoshua was the ultimate disciple of Moshe. Both were more associated with God than with Israel. Moshe – the Ish HaElokim (Man of God) – was raised outside of his family in the house of Pharaoh, and then – after growing up and leaving that house – was removed from his nation as well, to live and raise his family in the land of Midian. Moshe was distanced by God from both his roots and his branches, as his children did not succeed him nor even follow in his ways in any notable manner. He was a man of God more than a man of the people. Yehoshua, his student, joined Moshe in his Divine isolation, waiting for Moshe at the foot of the mountain (Shemot 24:13, 32:17) and never leaving Moshe's tent (Shemot 33:11). And, like Moshe, Yehoshua did not have children who succeeded him (Megillah 14b).

What protected Yehoshua, the man of God, from joining with the spies? God's repeated wish and command that the Jewish people enter the land of Israel. God saved him from the plot of the spies.

Caleb, on the other hand, was a man of the people. Caleb would marry Miriam, who questioned how Moshe could leave his family for the sake of pursuing the word of God (Bamidbar 12:1). Caleb and Miriam would together create the offspring that would ultimately result in the Davidic dynasty (TB Sotah 11b), producing the king charged with the national destiny of the Jewish people, whose heart is the heart of the Jewish community (Rambam Hilchot Melachim 3:6).

What protected Caleb, the man of the people, from joining the spies? His familial and national identity. Caleb visited his forefathers buried in Chevron where he was reminded of his roots and destiny in Eretz Yisrael. That visit and vision precluded him from joining with the spies in rejecting the land that represents both the past and the future of his people.

Redemption comes from these two kinds of heroes and sources of strength that inevitably merge: our commitment to the word of God and our bond with our nation, our identity, and our destiny. During these especially challenging times, we redouble our commitment to the Jewish people and to our mission as Hashem's holy nation. Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad.

Rabbi Moshe Hauer joined the Orthodox Union (OU) as its Executive Vice President on May 1, 2020. In this role he serves as the organization's rabbinic leader, heading its communal-oriented efforts and serving as its professional religious/policy leader and primary spokesman.

now sending missiles with vicious cluster bombs into Israel, killing and injuring dozens of our Israeli fellow Jews, and destroying important buildings (including parts of the Weitzman Institute and hospitals). While taking a break from my preparation last night, I picked up a book that I had acquired recently, **Rabbi Ephraim Oshry's Responsa from the Holocaust**. Rabbi Oshry was a young man when he was caught up in the ghetto of Kovno, Lithuania after the Nazis invaded the country in 1941. The Jews of Kovno came to Rabbi Oshry frequently with Halachic questions that arose when the Jews were confined to the ghetto and concentration camp and did not have access to Kosher food, ritual items, and other support that we take for granted. As the only halachic authority in the ghetto and concentration camp, Rabbi Oshry had to respond to questions according to Halachic precedent in situations that the rishonim probably never anticipated. Thanks to the mercy of Hashem, Rabbi Oshry was one of the few European Rabbis to survive the Nazi horrors. During the war, he wrote his questions and responses on scraps of paper. After the war, he transcribed the material and published the questions and responsa in Hebrew. He later translated, condensed, and published selected items in English in *Responsa from the Holocaust*.

In our parsha, Moshe selects and sends twelve men, leaders of the tribes (other than Levi) to enter the land of Canaan, check whether the land is fertile, the people are strong or weak, and the cities are open or walled. Ten of the men verify that the land is fertile but say that the people are giants and that B'Nai Yisrael would not be able to conquer the land. Only two of the men (Yehoshua and Caleb) give a contrary report, that with Hashem's help, the Jews would be able to conquer the land. Moshe and God are furious. The people ignore the lessons of God's power in defeating Paro and the Egyptian army, destroying the most powerful country of the time (Egypt), bringing water and food for three million people in a desert for forty years – something that God has provided because of His love for B'Nai Yisrael and our Avot. Hashem decrees that the generation of the Exodus will all die out, except for Yehoshua and Caleb, over the next forty years and that only the next generation, those not yet twenty years old, will survive to enter and take over the land that He had promised to our ancestors.

God concludes the parsha by telling Moshe to command to the people that they make tzitzit for the corners of their garments, and include a thread of turquoise blue wool among the fringe strings. When we see the thread, we are to remember Hashem's mitzvot, perform them, and not stray from His mitzvot by following any other influences. The mitzvah of tzitzit is the third paragraph of the Shema, words that we recite in our services twice a day to continue to refresh our memory of Hashem's commandment. Our tradition is that the mitzvah of tzitzit is equal to all the other mitzvot of the Torah, because when we look at them, we are to recall all of Hashem's mitzvot. In the Kovno ghetto, the residents had no way to obtain ready made tzitzit or fibers to make new ones. One man, Meir Abelow, worked in a workshop where Jewish slave laborers used wool. Abelow planned to steal some strands of wool, hide them, and bring them into the ghetto where Jews could spin them for tzitzit. He asked Rabbi Oshry whether the Jews could use the stolen wool to make tzitzit and whether he (Abelow) would be sinning by stealing wool for this purpose. Rabbi Oshry ruled that taking wool from the Germans did not constitute theft and that the yeshiva boys could use the wool to make tzitzit. He also ruled that since there was no other way to obtain four corner garments, they could cut a large tallit in two, to turn it into two small garments. This plan brought great joy to the yeshiva boys, because they now had an opportunity to fulfill the great mitzva of tzitzit.

When we look around at the world, we should focus on God's love of our people and continued protection despite the hatred of our enemies throughout the world. Yes, our enemies seek to kill us and destroy our land and families. However, no other nation or people has survived for 3500 years. It is a miracle that such a small nation has survived for so long. Other, much larger and more powerful nations and religions have disappeared into other nations and religions. Meanwhile, we Jews, despite the efforts of many generations of enemies, continue to thrive and carry on our relationship with our Creator. Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Jun 19, 2025, 2:49 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on Shlach: The Sin of Tzelofchad**

Shlach: 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)

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

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Real World

written by Rabbi Sacks in 2012

The episode of the spies has rightly puzzled commentators throughout the centuries. How could they have got it so wrong? The land, they said, was as Moses had promised. It was indeed “flowing with milk and honey.” But conquering it was impossible. “The people who live there are powerful, and the cities fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of the giant there... We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are... All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the titans there... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and so we seemed in theirs” (Num. 13:28-33).

They were terrified of the inhabitants of the land, and entirely failed to realise that the inhabitants were terrified of them. Rahab, the prostitute in Jericho, tells the spies sent by Joshua a generation later: “I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you ... our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (Joshua 2:10-11).

The truth was the exact opposite of the spies’ report. The inhabitants feared the Israelites more than the Israelites feared the inhabitants. We hear this at the start of the story of Bilaam:

“Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites.” Num. 22:2-3

Earlier the Israelites themselves had sung at the Red Sea:

“The people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall on them.” Ex. 15:15-16

How then did the spies err so egregiously? Did they misinterpret what they saw? Did they lack faith in God? Did they – more likely – lack faith in themselves? Or was it simply, as Maimonides argues in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, that their fear was inevitable given their past history? They had spent most of their lives as slaves. Only recently had they acquired their freedom. They were not yet ready to fight a prolonged series of battles and establish themselves as a free people in their own land. That would take a new generation, born in freedom. Humans change, but not that quickly (See *Guide for the Perplexed* III, 32).

Most of the commentators assume that the spies were guilty of a failure of nerve, or faith, or both. It is hard to read the text otherwise. However, in the Hassidic literature – from the Baal Shem Tov to R. Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger (Sefat Emet) to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson – an entirely different line of interpretation emerged, reading the text against the grain to dramatic effect so that it remains relevant and powerful today. According to their interpretation, the spies were well-intentioned. They were, after all, “princes, chieftains, leaders” (Num. 13:2-3). They did not doubt that Israel could win its battles with the inhabitants of the land. They did not fear failure; they feared success. Their concern was not physical but spiritual. They did not want to leave the wilderness. They did not want to become just another nation among the nations of the earth. They did not want to lose their unique relationship with God in the reverberating silence of the desert, far removed from civilisation and its discontents.

Here they were close to God, closer than any generation before or since. He was a palpable presence in the Sanctuary in their midst, and in the Clouds of Glory that surrounded them. Here His people ate manna from heaven and water from the rock and experienced miracles daily. So long as they stayed in the desert under God’s sheltering canopy, they did not need to plough the earth, plant seeds, gather harvests, defend a country, run an economy, maintain a welfare system, or shoulder any of the other earthly burdens and distractions that take peoples’ minds away from the Divine.

Here, in no-man’s-land, in liminal space, suspended between past and future, they were able to live with a simplicity and directness of encounter they

could not hope to find once they had re-entered the gravitational pull of everyday life in the material world. Paradoxically, since a desert is normally the exact opposite of a garden, the wilderness was the Israelites’ Eden. Here they were as close to God as were the first humans before their loss of innocence.

If that comparison is too discordant, recall that Hosea and Jeremiah both compared the wilderness to a honeymoon. Hosea said in the name of God: “I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her” (Hos. 2:16), implying that in the future God would take the people back there to celebrate a second honeymoon. Jeremiah said in God’s name, “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown” (Jer. 2:2). For both prophets, the wilderness years were the time of the first love between God and the Israelites. That is what the spies did not want to leave. Clearly this interpretation is not the plain sense of the narrative, but we should not dismiss it on that account. It is, as it were, a psychoanalytical reading, an account of the unconscious mindset of the spies. They did not want to let go of the intimacy and innocence of childhood and enter the adult world. Sometimes it is hard for parents to let go of their children; at others it is the other way round. But there must be a measure of separation if children are to become responsible adults. Ultimately the spies feared freedom and its responsibilities.

But that is what Torah is about. Judaism is not a religion of monastic retreat from the world. It is supremely a religion of engagement with the world. The Torah is a template for the construction of a society with all its gritty details: laws of warfare and welfare, harvests and livestock, loans and employer-employee relationships, the code of a nation in its land, part of the real world of politics and economics, yet somehow pointing to a better world where justice and compassion, love of the neighbour and stranger, are not remote ideals but part of the texture of everyday life. God chose Israel to make His presence visible in the world, and that means that Israel must live in the world.

To be sure, the Jewish people were not without their desert-dwellers and ascetics. The Qumran sect known to us from the Dead Sea Scrolls was such a group. The Talmud speaks of R. Shimon bar Yochai in similar terms. Having lived for thirteen years in a cave, he could not bear to see people engaged in such earthly pursuits as ploughing a field. Maimonides speaks of people who live as hermits in the desert to escape the corruptions of society (*Laws of ethical character*, 6: 1; *Eight Chapters*, ch. 4). But these were the exceptions, not the rule. This is not the destiny of Israel, to live outside time and space in ashrams or monasteries as the world’s recluses. Far from being the supreme height of faith, such a fear of freedom and its responsibilities is – according to both the Gerer and Lubavitcher Rebbe – the sin of the spies.

There is a voice within the tradition, most famously identified with R. Shimon bar Yochai, that regards engagement with the world as fundamentally incompatible with the heights of spirituality. But the mainstream held otherwise. “Torah study without an occupation will in the end fail and lead to sin” (Avot 2:2). “One who makes his mind up to study Torah and not to work but to live on charity, profanes the name of God, brings the Torah into contempt, extinguishes the light of religion, brings evil upon himself, and deprives himself of life hereafter” (Maimonides, *Laws of Torah Study* 3:10).

The spies did not want to contaminate Judaism by bringing it into contact with the real world. They sought the eternal childhood of God’s protection and the endless honeymoon of His all-embracing love. There is something noble about this desire, but also something profoundly irresponsible that demoralised the people and provoked God’s anger. For the Jewish project – the Torah as the constitution of the Jewish nation under the sovereignty of God – is about building a society in the land of Israel that so honours human dignity and freedom that it will one day lead the world to say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deut. 4:6).

The Jewish task is not to fear the real world but to enter and transform it. That is what the spies did not understand. Do we – Jews of faith – understand it even now?

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]

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 LECH L'CHA

Almost 'out of the blue', at the beginning of Parshat Lech L'cha, God appears unto Avraham, commanding him to travel to the 'promised land', while blessing him that he will become a great nation. However, contrary to what we would expect, the Torah never tells us WHY he was chosen; nor does it tell us why HE was chosen!

In contrast to Parshat Noach, where the Torah informs us at the outset both why NOACH was chosen [i.e. "for he was a righteous man..." (see 6:9)]; as well as WHY he was chosen [i.e. for the purpose of re-creation (see 6:5-8); in Parshat Lech L'cha, the Torah never informs us concerning WHY God chose Avraham Avinu.

Did Avraham Avinu simply win a 'Divine lottery'?

In this week's shiur, we discuss the Torah's presentation of God's choice of Avraham Avinu, in an attempt to understand the literary method that the Torah employs to explain why Avraham was chosen, and its thematic significance.

INTRODUCTION

Our series of shiurim on Chumash is based on the assumption that each book of the Bible carries a unique theme; and to identify that theme, one must study the progression of its primary topics.

In our shiur on Parshat Noach, we discussed the progression of topics in the first eleven chapters of Sefer Breishit, showing how each successive story discussed a story relating to 'sin & punishment' (i.e. God's disappointment with the behavior of each successive generation, and how He punished them).

This included the story of man's sin in Gan Eden, Cain's murder of Hevel, the corruption of the generation of the Flood, and finally the building of the Tower of Bavel.

That pattern of stories relating to 'sin & punishment' abruptly changes at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lcha, as the focus of Sefer Breishit now changes to God's choice of Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of His special nation. This change of focus in Sefer Breishit from 'universalistic' to 'particularistic' must relate in some manner to the reason for God's need for choosing a special nation.

As the MIGDAL BAVEL incident (see 11:1-9) was the last story recorded in Sefer Breishit prior to God's choice of Avraham Avinu, and hence forms the segue between these two sections - our shiur begins with a careful study of that narrative in search of a thematic connection (and/or a textual parallel) between this story and God's choice of Avraham Avinu.

THE SIN OF "DOR HA'PLAGAH"

In our introduction, we assumed that the building of the Tower constituted a sin. However, at first glance, that assumption is not so clear, for it is difficult to find a specific sin in the Torah's description of their actions. In contrast to the Torah's introduction of the generation of the Flood, which explicitly brands the population as wicked and corrupt (6:5,10-13), the opening psukim of the Migdal Bavel narrative leave hardly a clue to any specific sin:

"Everyone on earth had the same language and the same words. And as they traveled from the east, they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another: Come, LET US make bricks and burn them hard. Brick became their stone, and bitumen their mortar. And they said, Come LET US build US a city and a tower with its top in the sky, AND WE WILL MAKE A NAME FOR OURSELVES, lest WE shall be scattered all over the world." (11:1-4)

Not only don't we find a transgression, one may even be tempted to applaud their accomplishments. After all:

- * Is not achieving unity a positive goal? (11:1)
- * Does not the use of human ingenuity to develop man-made building materials, such as bricks to replace stone, indicate the positive advancement of society? (11:3)
- [The very first 'industrial revolution!']
- * What could possibly be wrong with building a city or tower?
- Is urbanization a crime? (11:4)
- * Is there anything wrong about traveling towards the east or setting up a city within a valley? (see 11:2)

Nevertheless, God punishes them by mixing their languages, causing them to abandon their joint project (11:5-7).

So what did they do that angered God?

Chazal focus their criticism of this generation on their antagonistic attitude towards God (see Rashi 11:1). However, the final and critical phrase in the Torah's description of their deeds points to an additional reason:

"v'naase LANU SHEM - WE shall make a NAME for OURSELVES" (see 11:4 / See also Sanhedrin 109a]

The use of the first person plural - not only in this pasuk, but also in the ALL of the first four psukim (11:1-4) - reflects the egocentric nature and attitude of this generation. [Note also the repeated use of the Hebrew word "hava" (let US).]

Rather than devoting their endeavors to the glorification of the NAME OF GOD, this generation excludes God from their goals and aspirations, emphasizing instead man's dominion and prowess.

Although this generation is undoubtedly more refined and cultured than the corrupt, depraved generation of the Flood, they unite for the unholy purpose of venerating the 'name of man', rather than that of the Almighty.

Apparently, God had higher expectations for mankind, hoping they would harness their God-given talents and potential towards loftier pursuits. Instead, they established an anthropocentric society, devoting their energies towards MAKING A NAME for THEMSELVES.

God could not allow this project to continue. But in contrast to the corrupt generation of the Flood, the builders of the Tower did not deserve destruction, rather they required 're-direction'. Towards this goal, God will now choose Avraham Avinu to establish a nation whose purpose will be to REDIRECT mankind - to channel those very same qualities of unity and creativity towards a more altruistic end.

The aftermath of the Tower of Bavel incident provides the thematic setting for God's startling challenge to Avraham Avinu:

"And I will make you a GREAT NATION.... and through you ALL the families of the earth will be blessed." (12:1-3)

Avraham Avinu is CHOSEN FOR A PURPOSE: to direct mankind back in the proper direction. Towards this goal, He is also promised a special land, not as a REWARD, but rather as a VEHICLE to fulfill that purpose. God sets aside a special location, and then designates a special nation to represent Him, and to become a model nation that will inspire nations and spark their spiritual development.

Even though Avraham at this point is only an individual, God promises him that he is destined to become the forefather of this nation - whose development will involve a complex process, which will take some four hundred years (see 15:13-20).]

To become this nation, Avraham's offspring must multiply (ZERA) and then establish their nation in a special land (ARETZ). These two prerequisites not only appear in God's opening statement to Avraham upon his arrival in Eretz Canaan (see 12:7), but they are also repeated each time God speaks to the AVOT in regard to their future (see 13:14-15, 15:18, 17:8, 26:3, 28:13, 35:12, etc.).

The seeds of this nation are 'planted' in Sefer Breishit, as detailed by the story of the Avot.

BET-EL & SHEM HASHEM

Although this goal can only be fully attained once this nation is established, it is significant that Avraham's own life will now foreshadow that ultimate goal.

For example, if we trace Avraham's first journey through Eretz Canaan as described in the Torah, we find that the site of Bet-El earns a unique place within Avraham's itinerary.

After he arrives in Canaan and builds a MIZBAYACH in Shchem, Avraham continues to Bet-El, the climax of his "aliyah":

"From there he moved up the mountain range to BET-EL... and he built a MIZBAYACH there and called out b'SHEM HaSHEM - in God's NAME! (12:8).

Then, in the next chapter, Avraham returns to Eretz Canaan after his stay in Egypt and comes specifically to this very same MIZBAYACH in Bet-El. There, he once again calls out b'SHEM HaSHEM (13:1-4)!

Wherein lies the significance of Avraham's MIZBAYACH in Bet-El and his calling out in God's Name?

Avraham's calling out in God's NAME in Bet-El signifies a contrasting parallel to the Migdal Bavel fiasco. There, mankind's focus on their own prominence is reflected in their statement of: "v'naaseh LANU SHEM." Now Avraham must correct that cardinal mistake; he calls out in GOD'S NAME - "va'yikra b'SHEM HASHEM!" It is for this very purpose that Avraham was chosen.

Ramban expresses this understanding in his commentary to this pasuk (12:8):

"... and Avraham would call out there in front of the Mizbayach and make known God's existence to all mankind..." (see Rabman on Breishit 12:8)

A 'STRATEGIC' LOCATION

This thematic background may help us understand why God chose specifically the land of Israel to become the 'homeland' of this nation. Recall (from your study of world history) how Egypt and Mesopotamia emerged as the two great cradles of ancient civilization. One could suggest that the land of Israel, located in between these two centers of civilization (and along the main highway that connects them), provides a 'strategic' location for the accomplishment of their national goal.

This idea may be reflected in events that transpire in chapter 12. Note how Avraham is first commanded to leave his own homeland in **Mesopotamia** and travel to Eretz Canaan (see 12:1). At the highlight of that "aliyah", he builds his "mizbayach" in Bet-el and 'calls out in God's Name' (12:7-8). Then, the next story in Chumash informs us how he traveled to **Egypt** and encounters an incident of corruption (see 12:10-20). Upon his return from that center of civilization, once again Avraham goes to Bet-el and builds a mizbayach and calls out in His Name (see 13:1-4). Finally, note as well how Avraham calls out, once again, in God's Name - after he establishes a covenant of mutual trust with Avimelech (see 21:33). [See also Ramban on 12:8 in its entirety (and the TSC shiur on Parshat Va'yetze).]

A BIBLICAL THEME

This concept, that Am Yisrael is chosen to bring God's Name to mankind, emerges as a central theme not only in Sefer Breishit, but throughout Tanach, as well.

In Sefer Devarim, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to establish a national religious center "ba'makom asher yivchar Hashem l'shakeyn SHMO sham" - in the place which God will choose for His NAME to dwell therein (Devarim 12:5,11). As we explained in our shiurim on Sefer Devarim, this phrase, repeated numerous times in the sefer, describes the BET HA'MIKDASH - which is to become the institution through which God's prominence will be recognized by all mankind.

Some four hundred years later, when the MIKDASH is finally built, this same theme is reflected in Shlomo's prayer at its dedication ceremony:

"If a foreigner comes from a distant land for the SAKE OF YOUR NAME, for they shall hear about YOUR GREAT NAME... when he comes to pray at this House... grant him what he asks. Thus ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH

will KNOW YOUR NAME and revere You, as do Bnei Yisrael, and they will recognize that YOUR NAME is attached to this House which I have built." (Melachim I 8:43 /see also Shmuel II 7:22-27)

In fact, Malkat Sheva [the Queen of Sheeba], reaches this very conclusion upon her visit to the Bet Ha'Mikdash, as described in Melachim 10:1-9!

IN MESSIANIC TIMES

The famous messianic prophecy of Yeshayahu (chapter 2) not only reflects this same theme, but also creates an intriguing parallel to the Migdal Bavel narrative:

"In the days to come, the MOUNTAIN of BET HA'SHEM (the Temple Mount) will stand high above the mountains... and ALL THE NATIONS shall gaze on it with joy. Then MANY PEOPLES shall go and say: Come let us go up to the House of God, that He may instruct us in His ways and we may walk in His paths - for TORAH shall come forth from Tzion, and the word of God from Yerushalayim..." (2:1-4)

Note the contrasting parallel between this 'hope' and the events at Migdal Bavel. In both events all mankind unites for a joint purpose. However, in Yeshayahu they gather to a MOUNTAIN top (man looking up) rather than in a VALLEY (man looking down); and to the CITY of Yerushalayim and its TOWER - the Bet HaMikdash, rather than their own city and tower. Mankind has now united to hear the word of God, as transmitted and taught by His people.

In diametric opposition to Migdal Bavel, the Mikdash becomes the symbol of the goals of a theocentric society - the ultimate goal of mankind.

The following table reviews this contrasting parallel:

MIGDAL BAVEL	BET HA'MIKDASH
-----	-----
Unity for man	Unity for God
Valley	Mountain
a city	the city of Jerusalem
a tower	the Temple
Man's prominence	God's prominence ("shem Hashem")

Another parallel to the Migdal Bavel narrative appears in the prophecies of Zefania, in his depiction of the messianic era:

"For then I will make the peoples pure of speech - SAFA BRURA - so that they will all call out b'SHEM HASHEM, and worship Him with one accord." (3:9)

Once again, the prophet depicts the unification of mankind for the purpose of calling out in God's Name. An additional parallel to the Migdal Bavel incident is suggested by the use of the word "safa" (=language).

REWARD OR PURPOSE

In light of our discussion, we can now reexamine our original question. We have shown that Avraham Avinu was chosen to fulfill a SPECIFIC MISSION - to become the forefather of a nation that will lead all others to a theocentric existence and refocus mankind's energies in the proper direction.

Thus, Avraham Avinu's distinction came not as a REWARD for any specific deed, but rather for a SPECIFIC PURPOSE. Undoubtedly, as reflected in numerous Midrashim, Avraham must have been a man of extraordinary character and stature who possessed the necessary potential to fulfill this goal. However, the Torah prefers to omit any explicit reference to these qualities, focusing not on his past accomplishments but rather on the mission that lies ahead, thus stressing the primacy of Avraham's designated task.

This same principle applies in all generations. God's choice of Am Yisrael is not a REWARD, but the means by which they can and must fulfill the mission with which He has entrusted them. As this mission is eternal, so too is God's choice of the Jewish Nation.

This Biblical theme stresses our need to focus not on the exclusive PRIVILEGES of being God's special Nation, but rather on its unique RESPONSIBILITIES.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. One could suggest that the events at Migdal Bavel represent the natural course of the history of nations. People with a common goal join together for a common purpose and build a society. Sooner or later, splinter groups with other ideals and goals form, often challenging the authority of the first group. Over the course of time, these smaller groups may eventually break off and start their own nation.

When people cannot agree upon a common goal, they are often unable to communicate with each other, even if they do speak the same language. [Israel's "knesset" is classic example.]

One could suggest that when God decides to stop this building project, he does so by sundering the people's unity, by causing them to fight over their goals. Their inability to communicate with each other, to understand each other's language, stems from the breakdown of the unity of mission that had brought them together in the first place.

Based on this suggestion, offer an alternate interpretation of the term "safa" (language) in the Migdal Bavel narrative.

See Ibn Ezra (11:1 - "dvarim achadim") and - if you have time - the Abarbanel on this sugya. Relate their comments to the above discussion.

B. Note that in the entire Migdal Bavel narrative, Hashem's name is exclusively *shem "havaya"*. Relate this to last week's shiur.

C. This connection between Migdal Bavel and the "bechira" of Avraham Avinu is supported by the Midrash's comment (on Breishit 26:5) that Avraham was 48 years old when he recognized God for the first time. By calculating the genealogies in chapters 5 and 11, it can be established that Avraham Avinu reached age 48 on the same year that Peleg died, which, according to Chazal, corresponds to the precise year of Migdal Bavel!

PARSHAT LECH L'CHA -Part Two

How many times must God repeat the SAME promise to Avraham Avinu? In Parshat Lech L'cha alone, God tells Avraham FOUR times that his offspring ("zera") will become a nation in a special land ("aretz")! Would not have one divine promise been sufficient?

In the following shiur, we attempt to explain the reason for each of these promises and their relation to the events that transpire in the interim.

INTRODUCTION

To clarify our opening question, the following table charts the progression of events in Parshat Lech L'cha by providing a short title for each of its seven 'parshiot', while noting in brackets where that 'parshia' includes a "hitgalut" [revelation] to Avraham in regard to the future of his offspring.

PARSHIA	TOPIC
12:1-9	Avraham's "aliyah" to Eretz Canaan [*12:1-3,7]
12:10-13:18	Lot leaving Avraham [*13:14-17]
14:1-24	Avraham's victory in the war between the kings
15:1-20	Brit Bein ha'Btarim [*15:13-19]
16:1-16	The birth of Yishmael
17:1-14	Brit Milah [*17:7-8]
17:15-27	The promise of the birth of Yitzchak [*17:19]

As you review this chart, read those psukim (quoted in the brackets) - noting how often God promises Avraham Avinu that his "zera" (offspring) will inherit the "aretz" (land). In our shiur, we attempt to explain how and why each "hitgalut" is unique, and how it relates to the events that transpire in Parshat Lech L'cha.

THE FIRST HITGALUT - BECOMING GOD'S NATION

The opening "hitgalut" is the simplest to understand, for in this initial encounter, God must first explain to Avraham the primary purpose for why he has been chosen:

"I will make **you** a GREAT NATION... and through you all the Nations of the world will be blessed..." (see 12:1-3)

As we explained in earlier shiurim, God initiates this special relationship with Avraham Avinu to become the 'forefather' of a 'model nation' that will direct mankind toward a more Theo-centric existence.

This backdrop explains God's next "hitgalut" to Avraham (in that very same 'parshia') upon his arrival in that land:

"To your **ZERA** [offspring] I shall give this **ARETZ** [land]" (see 12:7)

To develop from an 'individual' into a 'nation', it will be necessary for:

Avraham's family will need to multiply -
hence the blessing of "ZERA";

A territory is necessary to establish this nation -
hence the promise of "ARETZ".

Pay careful attention to these two key words: "zera" & "aretz", for they will be repeated quite often in Sefer Breishit, especially when God speaks to the forefathers in regard to the future of their offspring.

Theoretically speaking, these two promises could have sufficed. After all, once Avraham had arrived in the land, he simply needs to give birth to many children, settle the land, and establish this special nation. And if Chumash was a 'fairy tale', that may have been a most likely scenario. However, in Chumash, this "bechira" [choosing] process - to become God's special nation - will unfold instead in a rather complex manner. To appreciate that process, we must now consider the thematic significance of each additional "hitgalut" to Avraham Avinu.

THE FIRST 'SPLIT'

The next 'parshia' (12:9-13:18) describes Avraham's journey to Egypt and upon his return - his quarrel with Lot. Let's examine the next "hitgalut" which takes place immediately after Lot left Avraham:

"And God spoke to Avram after Lot had left him: Lift up your eyes from this place and see... for this entire ARETZ that you see I am giving to you and your ZERA forever..." (see 13:14-18)

This promise, although a bit more 'poetic' than the first, appears to be more or less a repeat of God's original promise of "zera v'aretz". To understand its purpose, we must consider what transpired in those events.

Review 12:10 thru 13:18, noting how this unit discusses two totally different stories, even though they are both included in the same 'parshia':

- 1) Avraham's journey to Egypt and his subsequent return (12:10-13:4)
- 2) The quarrel between Lot and Avraham (13:5-18)

Indeed, there is loose connection between these two stories, as it was their wealth (which they accumulated during their journey to Egypt /see 12:16-20) that sparked their quarrel (see 13:5-9). Nevertheless, it would have been more logical for each of these stories to form their own 'parshia', as reflected in the chapter division.

However, the fact that the Torah records both of these stories in the same 'parshia' - suggests that a deeper thematic connection may exist between these two stories.

Let's explore that possibility.

LIKE NEPHEW LIKE SON

Note once again the opening phrase (in 13:14) which introduces God's second promise:

"And God spoke to Avram **after Lot had left him...**"

This short introduction certainly points to a direct connection between Lot's departure and the need for this additional promise.

One could suggest that God's promise comes to 'cheer up' Avraham Avinu after this tragic separation from his nephew Lot, whom he treated as his own son. Let's explain why.

Recall that at this time, Avraham has no children of his own, while his nephew Lot has no father. For this reason, it seems as though Avraham had practically 'adopted' Lot, treating him like his own son. In fact, from the moment we meet Avraham in Parshat Noach, Lot faithfully follows Avraham everywhere. [See 11:27-31, 12:4-5, and 13:1-2,5!]

[Recall as well that Haran (Avraham's brother) left three children: Lot, Milka, and Yiskah / see 11:27-29. Nachor (Avraham's other brother) took care of Milka - by marrying her, while Avraham took care of Lot, by treating him like a son. This also explains why Chazal identify Sarah as Yiskah (see 20:12 & Rashi on 11:29).]

As he had no children of his own, Avraham may have understood that God's promise of "zera" would be fulfilled through Lot! [See Radak 13:14!] Furthermore, even if God would one-day bless him with his own son, Avraham could still have hoped to include Lot as an integral member of his 'chosen' family.

Therefore, Lot's decision to leave (see 13:9-13) could be considered as a personal tragedy for Avraham, and hence the necessity for God to reassure him that His promise of "zera" will still be fulfilled.

With this in mind, let's consider a deeper connection between these two stories in this 'parshia', relating to a more fundamental theme of Sefer Breishit.

LEAVING AVRAHAM OR LEAVING GOD?

In Sefer Breishit, Lot is the first example of a family member who is 'rejected from Avraham's 'chosen' family. Many similar stories (such as the rejection of Yishmael & Esav) will follow.

As this "dechiya" [rejection] process will become a pattern within the "behcira" [choosing] process, we should expect that the Torah's description of these events (in the first section of this 'parshia') will at least allude to WHY Lot is rejected from the 'chosen family'.

Even though both Avraham and Lot travel together to and from Egypt, the impact of that visit on each is profoundly different. Avraham, as reflected in the incident with Pharaoh and Sarah, saw corruption in Egypt. He returns to Eretz Canaan inspired with the resolve to preach against such corrupt behavior - to teach morality. Therefore, Avraham returns immediately to Bet-el, where he once again calls out in God's Name. [See Ramban 12:8 and Rambam Hilchot Avodah Zara 1:2-3!]

In contrast, Lot was impressed by the 'good life' in Egypt; not only by its wealth, but also by its climate - and especially its mighty river. Let's explain how we reach this conclusion.

In an attempt to stop the quarrel between their herdsmen, Avraham had suggested a 'split' with Lot, i.e. one of them would travel to the right, the other to the left (see 13:7-9). Even though the words 'right' and 'left' are often understood as 'east' and 'west', Targum Unkelos explains that Avraham offered Lot to go either NORTH (left / see Breishit 14:15) or SOUTH (right, "ymin" as in Yemen/ see Devarim 3:27). Considering that they were standing in Bet-el (see 12:4), Avraham offered Lot to choose between the hills of YEHUDA (to the south / i.e. to the right) or SHOMRON (to the north, i.e. to the left), i.e. not a complete separation - only a far enough distance to avoid quarrels.

Lot did not accept Avraham's offer. Instead, Lot opted to leave the mountain range of Eretz Canaan altogether, preferring the Jordan Valley

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw the entire JORDAN valley, for it had plenty of water... **like the LAND OF EGYPT...**" (see 13:10).

Lot's logic was quite reasonable. The Jordan Valley had a river, and hence a constant supply of water - in contrast to the mountain range whose water supply was dependent on the rainfall

However, Lot's choice carried spiritual ramifications as well. As Parshat Ekev explains:

"For the land which you are coming to inherit [i.e. Eretz Canaan] is NOT like Eretz Mitzraim [which has the Nile River as a constant water supply]... instead it is a land of hills and valleys - which needs RAIN for water. [Therefore] it is a land which God looks after..." (Devarim 11:10-12)

Symbolically, Lot's choice reflects his preference for a different life-style. Avraham accepts the challenge of Eretz Canaan - a life dependent on MATAR (rain) and hence - dependent on God (see Devarim 11:13-16!). Lot prefers the 'easy-life' in Sdom. This understanding is reflected in the Midrash:

"va'yisa Lot m'KEDEM" - Midrash Agada - "hi'si'ah atzmo m'KADMONO shel olam - Lot lifted himself AWAY from God, saying, I can no longer remain with Avraham - nor with his God." (quoted by Rashi on 13:11)

[Sdom is really to the east, therefore the pasuk should say "kedem" and not "m'kedem". The Midrash picks up on this to show its deeper meaning. See also the use of "m'kedem" to show a direction away from God, as in 3:24 (leaving Gan Eden), 4:16 and 11:2.]

Lot's total divorce from Avraham is indeed tragic for he has lost not only a 'son' but also a disciple. Therefore, God must now not only console Avraham, but also reassure him that despite Lot's departure (13:14/ "acharei hi'pared Lot") His promise of "zera v'retz" remains.

Indeed, Avraham will yet have a child - a son who will follow in his footsteps as well.

BRIT BEIN HA'BATARIM - THE FIRST COVENANT

The next time God speaks to Avraham is in chapter 15 - better known as "brit bein ha'batarim". There again, God promises "zera v'retz" (see 15:18), however in this promise, for the first time, we find the framework of a "brit" - a covenant. To appreciate the significance of this covenant and its 'dialogue', we must take note of the events that precede it in chapter 14.

The battle of the four kings against the five kings in chapter 14 constitutes Avraham's first military victory in Land. Yet, it is this military victory that leads us directly into the topic of "brit bein ha'batarim". Note how chapter 15 opens as a direct continuation of that victory:

"achar ha'dvarim ha'eyleh - After THESE events, God spoke to Avram in a vision saying: Do not fearful... I will shield you, your reward is very great..." (see 15:1-2)

Now there are numerous opinions among the commentators explaining why Avraham was fearful (which are not mutually exclusive). However, there is one point that Avraham raises over and over again in his ensuing conversation that definitely relates to his military conquest, as well as his lack of a son:

"...Since you have given me no offspring - v'hinei ben beiti YORASH oti - behold my house servant [i.e. Eliezer] he will be my heir..." (see 15:3)

Avraham becomes upset as he realizes that without a son, everything that he has just acquired in this battle will be taken over by his servant Eliezer.

Considering that to become a nation, his offspring would sooner or later have to secure military conquest of the land (what

we call 'sovereignty'). Avraham's military victory at this time could have achieved this goal. But realizing that he has no children of his own at this time, Avraham gave everything away (see 14:16-24). Hence, this military victory only heightened Avraham's awareness that God's promises remained unfulfilled. For a very good reason, Avraham is now worried that maybe he is no longer worthy of God's original promise. (see Rashi 15:1)

To support this interpretation, let's note the Torah's use of the verb "yorash" [which is usually understood simply as to 'inherit'] in the above pasuk, and in the psukim that follow:

"And God answered: That one [Eliezer] will not YO'RASH you, rather your very own son (yet to be born) - he will YO'RASH you... & then He said to him: I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this land I'RISHTAH... Then Avraham asked - b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH..." (15:4-8)

There is no doubt that "yerusha" is a key word in this conversation, but what does it mean?

Throughout Chumash, "YERUSHA" usually implies some sort of conquest (usually military, as in securing sovereignty over land). For example, in Parshat Masei God commandment for Bnei Yisrael to conquer the land is worded as follows:

"v'HORSHTEM et ha'ARETZ... - You shall conquer the land and live in it, for I have given you the land - L'RESHET otah... (see Bamidbar 33:50-53, see also Breishit 22:17!)

[Note as well the word "morasha" in this context in Shmot 6:5-8. Note also the special context of "morasha" in Devarim 33:4 - implying that Torah also requires a certain type of 'conquest' / see Maharam.]

This background can help us understand the ensuing conversation between God and Avraham.

First of all, God calms Avraham, promising him once again that the time will come and indeed he will have "zera" - as numerous as the stars in the heavens - that they will one day YORESH (conquer) the land (see 15:4-5). And indeed, Avraham is assured by this promise (see 15:6 "v'he'emin b'Hashem").

Then, God initiates yet another conversation with the powerful statement of:

"I am the God who took you out of Ur Kaskim, to give you this land L'RISHTA - to inherit by conquest!" (see 15:7)

[Note similarity to Shmot 20:2 (first line of the Dibrot).]

In reaction, Avraham asks a rather puzzling question: "b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH!" (see 15:8), which includes once again the word "yerusha"!

What is the meaning of this question?

It would not make sense that Avraham is asking for divine proof of God's promise of "zera"? First of all, the previous pasuk just stated that Avraham believed in God's promise (see 15:6). Furthermore, God does not answer this question with a proof! So what is Avraham's question?

To answer this, we must 'cheat' a little by looking at God's answer.

Recall once again Avraham's question is: "b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH" in response to God's promise that He has taken him out of Ur Kasdim in order that he YORASH the land (see 15:7-8).

God's response to this question begins by instructing Avraham to perform a certain ceremony (see 15:9-12), however the actual answer to Avraham's question doesn't begin until 15:13. To understand why, carefully how God's statement of "y'DOAH TAYDAH..." in 15:13 - forms a direct response to Avraham's question of "b'MAH AYDAH..." in 15:8!

[The ceremony in 15:9-12 forms the preparation for the covenant that will be defined in 15:18.]

NOT IN YOUR LIFETIME!

God's answer to Avraham's question continues from 15:13 thru 15:16. Note how it describes WHEN and HOW the YERUSHA of the Land will ultimately take place:

"Surely you should KNOW that your offspring will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be afflicted and enslaved; **four hundred years**. But that nation that will enslave will [ultimately] be punished - afterward they [your offspring] will leave [that land] with great wealth. But you [Avraham] will die in peace... [i.e. before this difficult process begins]; **only the fourth generation will return here** [to inherit/ conquer this land] - for the sin of Emorites will not be complete until that time." (see 15:13-16)

To Avraham's total surprise, God's promise of "yerusha" (see 15:7) - sovereignty over the land, and the establishment of a nation - won't take place in his own lifetime, or in his son's lifetime! Instead, before his offspring will attain YERUSHA of the land, they must first undergo some 'basic training' in someone else's land - a process that will include slavery and affliction in 'a foreign land'. Only after some four hundred years will they attain this YERUSHA. [This 'news' comes as such a 'shock' to Avraham Avinu that Avraham must be first 'sedated' - see 15:12 & 15:17!]

In answer to Avraham's question of "b'mah eydah" - God informs Avraham that in essence, he is only on a 'pilot trip' to Israel. It may be symbolic that he himself just conquered the land, and that he himself had already made God's Name known by calling out in His Name - for these events foreshadow what his offspring will do (as a nation) in the future ("maase Avot, siman l'banim"). However, the ultimate fulfillment of God's original promise that Avraham will establish great sovereign nation will only be fulfilled after many generations of important preparation.

Hence, Avraham's question of "b'mah ay'dah ki i'RASHENAH" is a request to know WHEN (and possibly HOW) this YERUSHA will ultimately take place. [Recall that the Hebrew word "ki" can also mean 'when'.]

A PROOF FROM VA'EYRA

To prove that this is God's answer to Avraham's question, we simply need to read the famous psukim in Parshat Va'eyra (see Shmot 6:2-8), when God informs Moshe that the time has come to fulfill this covenant:

"And I have heard the cries of bondage of Bnei Yisrael... and I have remembered my COVENANT [i.e. "brit bein ha'btarim"], therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael I am God, and I will take you out of your suffering in Egypt... [the 'four cups' psukim] and I will bring you to the land THAT I lifted up My hand to give to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and I will then give it to you as a **MORASHA** [= "yerusha"]!" (see Shmot 6:5-8)

Only after the Exodus, will God give the land to Bnei Yisrael as a MORASHA, as He promised to Avraham Avinu at brit bein ha'btarim.

The implications of this promise are so far reaching that they require an official covenant between God and Avraham, as described in final psukim of this 'parshia', i.e. in 15:18-20.

This explains not only the thematic connection between chapters 14 and 15, but also the necessity of this additional promise of "zera v'aretz" in the form of a covenant. Brit bein ha'btraim includes not only the promise of becoming a nation, but also explains the long historical process of how Avraham's offspring will one day become that nation.

LAND - FOR A PURPOSE

This order of events that unfolds in Brit bein ha'btarim, explaining HOW Bnei Yisrael will become a nation, is quite significant for it highlights the special nature of our relationship with the land.

The histories of all other nations of the world begin in a very different manner. Usually a nation begins when a group of people living in a common land sharing common resources and needs join together for the sake of common interest and form a nation. In other words, FIRST we have people living on a common land,

and then those people become a nation. In contrast, Am Yisrael becomes a nation in a very different manner. We don't begin with a common land, rather we begin with a common goal (or destiny), i.e. to become God's model nation. In fact, the Torah emphasizes that we will become a nation in "land that is not ours" [see 15:13]. Technically speaking, our initial bonding is caused by a common plight and suffering in a FOREIGN land. Only AFTER we become a nation, and only after we receive the Torah at Har Sinai (the laws that teach us how we are to achieve our goal), only then do we conquer the Land that God has designated for us.

In other words, we are not a nation because we have a common land, rather we are a nation because we share a common goal and destiny. The land serves as a vehicle to help our nation achieve that goal. [See first Rashi on Chumash, and read it carefully, noting how he explains a very similar theme.]

THE BIRTH OF YISHMAEL

The next 'parshia' in Parshat Lech L'cha describes the events that lead to the birth of Yishmael (see 16:1-16). God promises that he too will become a mighty nation, but a rather wild one (see 16:12). For some divine reason, God's intention is that Avraham's only chosen will be born to Sarah, but only after her lifelong struggle with barrenness.

However, before Avram and Sarai can give birth to this special child, God must change their names to Avraham and SarAH and enter into yet another covenant - better known as "brit milah".

BRIT MILAH

The next 'parshia', describing the covenant of BRIT MILAH (see 17:1-11), contains the fourth and final promise of "zera v'retza" in Parshat Lech L'cha. As this brit includes the very FIRST MITZVA that Avraham must keep and pass on to his children, its details are very important. In fact they are so important that their thematic significance has already been discussed in three earlier shiurim.

1) The significance of "brit milah" on the 'eighth day' was discussed at length in our shiur for Shmini Atzeret (sent out a few weeks ago/ see TSC archive for Parshat Tazria).

2) The thematic connection between "brit milah" and "brit bein ha'btarim" was discussed in our shiur for Chag ha'MATZOT and on Parshat Bo and on MAGID.

3) The meaning the borders of the Land of Israel as detailed in "brit milah" (and "brit bein ha'btarim") was discussed in our shiur on Parshat Masei (see archive).

Therefore, we will not discuss "brit milah" in detail in this week's shiur. Instead, we simply note how this "brit" serves as the introduction to the birth of Yitzchak, and the prerequisite for his conception.

The final 'parshia' in Parshat Lech L'cha (see 17:15-27) details how Avraham fulfills this commandment. Yet, at the same time, God informs him that the "bechira" process will continue ONLY thru Yitzchak, who will soon be born (see 17:15-21); and NOT with Yishmael, even though he also fulfilled the mitzva of "brit milah" (see 17:20-24).

[Be sure to note the textual parallel between 17:7-8,19 and God's covenant with Noach in 6:18 and 9:8-17; "v'akmal".]

We have shown how God's original choice of Avraham Avinu was not in REWARD for his merits, but rather IN ORDER that he fulfill God's mission - to become His nation. As this mission is eternal, so too is God's choice of the Jewish Nation. As we concluded in our first shiur on Parshat Lech L'cha, we find once again a Biblical theme that stresses our need to focus more so on our RESPONSIBILITY to act as God's special nation, and less so on those PRIVILEGES that it includes.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note Yeshayahu 42:5-6 and its context. Relate this pasuk to our shiurim thus far on Sefer Breishit. [Note that this is the opening pasuk of the Haftara for Parshat Breishit (& not by chance!).]

Compare with Devarim 4:5-8. Explain what Yeshayahu refers to when he mentions "brit am" and "or goyim".